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EU–WIDE EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY INITIATIVE EQUAL 2000–2006

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Bernard Brunhes International

In co-operation with ICAS Institute and Economix Research & Consulting

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission.

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Abbreviations

AS	Asylum seeker
CIP	Community Initiative Programme
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DP	Development Partnership
DPA	Development Partnership Agreement
ECDB	EQUAL Common Database
ECTIM	EQUAL Transnational Cooperation Internet Module
EES	European Employment Strategy
ESF	European Social Fund
ETG	European Thematic Group
GL	Guideline
HG	Horizontal Group
HRD	Human Resources Development
JAP	Joint Assessment Paper
JIM	Joint Inclusion Memorandum
LM	Labour Market
LLL	Life Long Learning
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
MS	Member States
NAP	National Action Plan
NMS	« New » Member States
NSS	National Support Structure
NTN	National Thematic Network
OMS	« Old » Member States
PCM	Project Cycle Management
PES	Public Employment Service
R1	Round 1
R2	Round 2
TA	Technical Assistance
TCA	Transnational Co-operation Agreement
TLP	Twinning Light Project
TN	Transnational
TNP	Transnational Co-operation Partnership
TOR	Terms of reference

Abbreviations for Member States

AT	Austria	CY	Cyprus
BEfrg	French and German speaking Belgium	CZ	Czech Republic
BEnl	Flemish Belgium	EE	Estonia
DK	Denmark	HU	Hungary
DE	Germany	LV	Latvia
ES	Spain	LT	Lithuania
FI	Finland	MT	Malta
FR	France	PL	Poland
GR	Greece	SK	Slovak Republic
IE	Ireland	SI	Slovenia
IT	Italy		
LU	Luxembourg		
NL	Netherlands		
PT	Portugal		
SE	Sweden		
UKgb	United Kingdom (Great Britain)		
UKni	Northern Ireland		

Thematic priorities

Employability	Facilitating access and return to the labour market for those who have difficulty in being integrated or re-integrated into a labour market which must be open to all	1A
	Combating racism and xenophobia in relation to the labour market	1B
Entrepreneurship	Opening up the business creation process to all by providing the tools required for setting up in business and for the identification and exploitation of new possibilities for creating employment in urban and rural areas	2C
	Strengthening the social economy (the third sector), in particular the services of interest to the community, with a focus to improving the quality of jobs	2D
Adaptability	Promoting lifelong learning and inclusive work practices which encourage the recruitment and retention of those suffering discrimination and inequality in connection with the labour market	3E
	Supporting the adaptability of firms and employees to structural economic change and the use of information technology and other new technologies	3F
Equal Opportunities for women and men	Reconciling family and professional life, as well as the re-integration of men and women who have left the labour market, by developing more flexible and effective forms of work organisation and support services	4G
	Reducing gender gaps and supporting job desegregation	4H
Asylum Seekers	Member States must plan at least a minimum level of action aimed at asylum seekers, in line with the dimensions of the problem in the Member State.	5I

Index of contents

VOLUME 1

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	XI
OBJECTIVES, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY	XI
OVERARCHING CONCLUSIONS.....	XIII
<i>Overall assessment of the rationales at play in EQUAL. Initial and potential impacts.</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Added value with regard to existing labour market policies and practice at the national and EU level.....</i>	<i>xiv</i>
<i>Good and innovative practice with mainstreaming potential in ESF, the EES and the Social Inclusion process</i>	<i>xiv</i>
KEY FINDINGS ON THE EVALUATION TASKS	XV
<i>Appropriateness of strategies</i>	<i>xv</i>
<i>Management and Implementation Systems.....</i>	<i>xvi</i>
<i>Effectiveness and added value of the Partnership and Empowerment principles</i>	<i>xviii</i>
<i>Effectiveness and added value of the innovation principle.....</i>	<i>xix</i>
<i>Effectiveness and added value of the transnationality principle</i>	<i>xx</i>
<i>Effectiveness and added value of the horizontal approach to equal opportunities.....</i>	<i>xxii</i>
<i>Effectiveness of networking, dissemination and mainstreaming at the national level.....</i>	<i>xxiii</i>
<i>Effectiveness of dissemination, networking and mainstreaming at the European level.....</i>	<i>xxv</i>
RECOMMENDATIONS	XXIX
<i>Implementation-oriented recommendations in the New Member States for R2, applied to EQUAL implementation in the period 2006-2008.....</i>	<i>xxix</i>
<i>Evaluation-oriented recommendations applied to EQUAL implementation in the 2006-2008 period</i>	<i>xxx</i>
<i>Recommendations for mainstreaming of EQUAL lessons in future programmes.....</i>	<i>xxxi</i>
1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY.....	1
1.1. OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE OF THIS REPORT	1
1.1.1. <i>The EQUAL Community Initiative</i>	<i>1</i>
1.1.2. <i>The EU-wide evaluation.....</i>	<i>2</i>
1.2. METHODOLOGY	6
1.2.1. <i>Methodological overview</i>	<i>6</i>
1.2.2. <i>The national evaluation reports</i>	<i>9</i>
1.3. STATE OF PLAY	19
2. APPROPRIATENESS OF STRATEGIES	23
2.1. EVALUATION QUESTIONS	23
2.2. CIP RELEVANCE AND CONSISTENCY	24
2.2.1. <i>Clarity and focus of CIP priorities</i>	<i>24</i>
2.2.2. <i>Overall relevance</i>	<i>25</i>
2.2.3. <i>Consistency with national labour market policies</i>	<i>26</i>
2.2.4. <i>Consistency between DP objectives and CIP priorities</i>	<i>29</i>
2.2.5. <i>Responsiveness to local needs.....</i>	<i>29</i>
2.3. CHANGES BETWEEN R1 AND R2 AT CIP LEVEL	30
2.3.1. <i>CIP priorities.....</i>	<i>30</i>
2.3.2. <i>Target groups</i>	<i>31</i>
2.3.3. <i>Evolution of DP distribution between R1 and R2.....</i>	<i>32</i>
2.4. CONCLUSIONS	36
3. MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION SYSTEMS.....	38
3.1. EVALUATION QUESTIONS.....	38
3.2. THE CONTEXT OF PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION IN THE (OLD) MEMBER STATES.....	38
3.2.1. <i>National framework for employment policies.....</i>	<i>39</i>
3.2.2. <i>Organising a regional level of programme management</i>	<i>40</i>
3.2.3. <i>The stakeholders in programme management</i>	<i>41</i>
3.2.4. <i>Place and role of National Support Structures.....</i>	<i>42</i>

3.3.	IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME IN R1	45
3.3.1.	<i>The preparation phase (Action 1)</i>	45
3.3.2.	<i>The Implementation phase (Action 2)</i>	46
3.3.3.	<i>The phase of transfer to policy and practice (Action 3)</i>	47
3.4.	CHANGES IN PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION IN R2	48
3.4.1.	<i>A new design and phasing of Actions</i>	48
3.4.2.	<i>Improvements in NSS role and capacity</i>	49
3.4.3.	<i>Improvements in the launch, application and selection stages</i>	50
3.4.4.	<i>Improvements in monitoring</i>	52
3.5.	CONCLUSIONS.....	54
4.	EFFECTIVENESS AND ADDED VALUE OF THE PARTNERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES.....	57
4.1.	INITIAL GUIDELINES AND EVALUATION QUESTIONS	57
4.2.	IMPLEMENTATION, FACILITATING FACTORS AND OBSTACLES	58
4.2.1.	<i>Partnership composition and inclusiveness</i>	58
4.2.2.	<i>The evolution of the concept of partnership</i>	64
4.2.3.	<i>Decision-making</i>	65
4.2.4.	<i>Quality of project management</i>	69
4.2.5.	<i>MA/NSS guidance</i>	71
4.3.	ADDED-VALUE	73
4.3.1.	<i>Contribution to the reduction of labour market related inequalities and discrimination</i>	73
4.3.2.	<i>Contribution to innovation</i>	74
4.3.3.	<i>Contribution to mainstreaming</i>	75
4.4.	CONCLUSIONS.....	76
5.	EFFECTIVENESS AND ADDED VALUE OF THE INNOVATION PRINCIPLE.....	78
5.1.	INITIAL FRAMEWORK AND EVALUATION QUESTIONS	78
5.2.	RESULTS AND ADDED VALUE OF THE PRINCIPLE	80
5.2.1	<i>Incidence and intensity of innovation</i>	80
5.2.2	<i>Scope of innovation</i>	86
5.2.3	<i>Quality of innovation</i>	88
5.2.4.	<i>Results and elements of added value of the innovations produced</i>	94
5.3.	IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES: THE DYNAMICS OF EXPERIMENTATION, FACILITATING FACTORS AND OBSTACLES	101
5.4.	CONCLUSIONS.....	103
6.	EFFECTIVENESS AND ADDED VALUE OF THE TRANSNATIONALITY PRINCIPLE	105
6.1.	INITIAL OBJECTIVES AND GUIDELINES.....	105
6.1.1	<i>Initial frame of reference</i>	105
6.1.2.	<i>Evaluation questions and methodology</i>	107
6.2.	IMPLEMENTATION, FACILITATING FACTORS AND OBSTACLES	109
6.2.1.	<i>Preparing the transnational partnership</i>	109
6.2.2.	<i>Implementing TN partnerships: work organisation, TN activities and dissemination</i>	113
6.2.3	<i>Guidance</i>	122
6.2.4	<i>Implementation dynamics: changing expectations and motivation for TN over time</i>	123
6.2.5	<i>Difficulties of implementation</i>	126
6.3.	IMPACT AND ADDED-VALUE OF THE PRINCIPLE	129
6.3.1	<i>Impact on DPs</i>	129
6.3.3.	<i>Added value of transnationality</i>	133
6.4.	CONCLUSIONS.....	133
7.	EFFECTIVENESS AND ADDED VALUE OF THE HORIZONTAL APPROACH TO EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES.....	136
7.1.	INITIAL OBJECTIVES AND GUIDELINES AT THE EU LEVEL	136
7.2.	IMPLEMENTATION	138
7.2.1	<i>Choices made at CIP level</i>	138
7.2.2	<i>MA/NSS guidance</i>	140
7.2.3	<i>Implementation at DP level</i>	140
7.3.	ADDED VALUE OF THE HORIZONTAL APPROACH TO EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES	145

7.3.1	<i>Equal Opportunities for all</i>	145
7.3.2	<i>Equal Opportunities between men and women</i>	146
7.4.	CONCLUSIONS.....	147
8.	EFFECTIVENESS OF NETWORKING, DISSEMINATION AND MAINSTREAMING AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL.....	147
8.1.	INITIAL FRAMEWORK AND EVALUATION QUESTIONS.....	147
8.2.	EVALUATION QUESTIONS IN NATIONAL EVALUATION REPORTS.....	149
8.3.	IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MAINTREAMING PRINCIPLE.....	149
8.3.1.	<i>Mainstreaming models of implementation at the national level</i>	150
8.3.2.	<i>Mainstreaming at DP level</i>	162
8.3.3.	<i>Obstacles to implementation</i>	165
8.3.4.	<i>Facilitating factors</i>	168
8.3.5.	<i>Changes in R 2</i>	170
8.4.	CONCLUSIONS.....	171
9.	EFFECTIVENESS OF NETWORKING, DISSEMINATION AND MAINSTREAMING AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL.....	174
9.1.	EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY.....	174
9.2.	EUROPEAN THEMATIC NETWORKING AND MAINSTREAMING.....	175
9.2.1.	<i>Organisational structure of thematic networking until mid-2005</i>	175
9.2.2.	<i>Implementation, results and lessons of European mainstreaming events</i>	176
9.2.3.	<i>Conclusions</i>	183
9.2.4.	<i>New framework and instruments for mainstreaming</i>	183
9.2.5.	<i>Other instruments</i>	189
9.2.5.	<i>European level good practice and its relevance for the Employment Strategy and the Inclusion Process</i>	193
9.3.	FACILITATION OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE KEY PRINCIPLES AND MAINSTREAMING.....	198
9.3.1.	<i>European and cross-national facilitation of the implementation of the EQUAL principles and of the EQUAL programmes</i>	198
9.3.2.	<i>Mainstreaming of the EQUAL principles</i>	204
9.4.	CONCLUSIONS.....	214
10.	IMPACTS OF EQUAL AT MEMBER STATE LEVEL.....	217
10.1.	EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGIES.....	217
10.1.1	<i>Evaluation framework at the EU level</i>	217
10.1.2	<i>The evaluation of impacts at the national level: methodologies adopted by the national evaluators</i>	218
10.2.	POLICY, INSTITUTIONAL, ORGANISATIONAL AND OTHER IMPACTS – AN OVERVIEW.....	222
10.3.	AREAS OF POLICY, INSTITUTIONAL AND ORGANISATIONAL IMPACTS.....	223
10.3.1	<i>Impacts in the area of labour market integration</i>	223
10.3.2	<i>Impacts of the integrated approaches to tackling labour market discrimination and discrimination at work</i>	224
10.3.3	<i>Impacts in the care sector</i>	226
10.3.4	<i>Impacts in the social economy</i>	227
10.3.5	<i>Impacts of innovations in the support to business creation</i>	227
10.3.6	<i>Impact of new learning facilities, arrangements and contents</i>	227
10.3.7	<i>Impact of ‘work/life balance’ initiatives</i>	228
10.3.8	<i>Impacts of initiatives for the integration of asylum seekers</i>	228
10.3.9	<i>Impacts of initiatives concerning specific forms of discrimination</i>	229
10.4.	CONCLUSIONS.....	230

VOLUME 2

11.	APPROPRIATENESS OF STRATEGIES IN THE NMS	232
11.1.	RELEVANCE AND CONSISTENCY OF CIP PRIORITIES	232
11.1.1.	<i>Thematic priority focus</i>	232
11.1.2.	<i>A target group approach to labour market inequalities</i>	235
11.1.3.	<i>Content of thematic priorities</i>	236
11.2.	CONSISTENCY BETWEEN DP AND CIP PRIORITIES	237
11.3.	THE PLACE OF LOCAL NEEDS IN THE CIPS AND AT DP LEVEL	239
11.4.	THE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS	241
11.4.1.	<i>Partnership size</i>	241
11.4.2.	<i>Lead partner organisations</i>	242
11.4.3.	<i>Partnership composition</i>	244
11.5.	IMPLEMENTATION OF THE KEY PRINCIPLES	248
12.	MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION SYSTEMS IN THE NMS	251
12.1.	MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING AT THE PROGRAMME LEVEL	251
12.1.1.	<i>Programme management</i>	251
12.1.2.	<i>Composition of the Monitoring Committees</i>	252
12.1.3.	<i>Place and Role of National Support Structures</i>	253
12.1.4.	<i>The launch and preparation phases</i>	255
12.2.	MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING AT DP LEVEL	267
12.2.1.	<i>DP management</i>	267
12.2.2.	<i>Funding issues at the DP level</i>	268
12.2.3.	<i>Self assessment</i>	269
12.3.	CONCLUSIONS	269
13.	THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TRANSNATIONALITY IN THE NMS	271
13.1.	EVALUATION QUESTIONS	271
13.1.1.	<i>Methodology</i>	271
13.1.2.	<i>The Frame of Reference for transnationality</i>	273
13.2.	THE SETTING-UP OF TRANSNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS	273
13.2.1.	<i>Searching for partners</i>	273
13.2.2.	<i>Origin of transnational partners</i>	278
13.2.3.	<i>Preparing Transnational Cooperation Agreements: Process and results</i>	280
13.2.4.	<i>The validation of TCAs</i>	284
13.3.	IMPLEMENTATION CONDITIONS: THE ROLE OF NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN GUIDANCE	285
13.3.1.	<i>The organisation of guidance for TN cooperation at MS level</i>	285
13.3.2.	<i>Cooperation between Member States</i>	288
13.3.3.	<i>The role of European-level facilitation</i>	288
14.4.	THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TN ACTIVITIES: CASE STUDY EVIDENCE	288
13.5.	EXPECTED ADDED-VALUE	290
13.6.	CONCLUSIONS	292

VOLUME 3

14. CONCLUSIONS	294
14.1. OVERALL CONCLUSIONS	294
14.1.1. Overall assessment of the rationales at play in EQUAL. Initial and potential impacts.	294
14.1.2. Added value with regard to existing labour market policies and practice at the national and EU level	297
14.1.3. Good and innovative practice with mainstreaming potential in ESF, the EES and the Social Inclusion process	299
14.2. CONCLUSIONS BY EVALUATION ‘TASK’	303
14.2.1. Appropriateness of strategies	303
14.2.2. Management and implementation systems at CIP level	304
14.2.3. Effectiveness of the key principles	306
14.2.4. Effectiveness of networking, dissemination and mainstreaming at national level and across the EU	312
14.3. OVERALL RESULTS BY THEME AND AREA OF INTERVENTION	316
14.4. POTENTIAL AND INITIAL IMPACT OF EQUAL ON THE EUROPEAN EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY, THE SOCIAL INCLUSION PROCESS AND OTHER COMMUNITY PROGRAMMES	320
15. RECOMMENDATIONS	324
15.1. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EQUAL IN THE NEW MEMBER STATES IN R2	324
15.2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EVALUATION OF INNOVATION, MAINSTREAMING AND IMPACTS IN EQUAL R2	325
15.2.1. Evaluation of innovation	326
15.2.2. Evaluation of mainstreaming	327
15.2.3. Evaluation of impacts at Member State level	328
15.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MAINSTREAMING OF EQUAL LESSONS IN FUTURE PROGRAMMES	330
15.3.1. Recommendations for the orientation of future strategies and programmes	330
15.3.2. Recommendations for the management and evaluation of future programmes	331
15.3.3. Recommendations for the mainstreaming of the EQUAL principles into future programmes	332
15.3.4. Recommendations for the organisation of networking and mainstreaming mechanisms at the European level in the future programmes	334

VOLUME 4

ANNEXES TO CHAPTER 1	III
<i>Annex 1.1 – Documents produced by the EU-wide evaluation</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Annex 1.2 – Overview of methodological instruments used by national evaluators in 2005 (OMS)</i> ..	<i>iv</i>
<i>Annex 1.3 – Overview of methodological instruments used by national evaluators in 2005 (NMS)</i>	<i>viii</i>
ANNEX TO CHAPTER 8	XI
<i>Annex 8.1 – Overview of mechanisms to identify and validate good practice in the Member States</i> ..	<i>xi</i>
ANNEXES TO CHAPTER 9.....	XII
<i>Annex 9.1 – Analysis of the implementation and results of the Madrid Policy Forum: ‘Gender Equality: a key to change’, 9-10 June 2005</i>	<i>xii</i>
<i>Annex 9.2 – Policy Briefs</i>	<i>xx</i>
<i>Annex 9.3 – Success stories</i>	<i>xxi</i>
<i>Annex 9.4 – Contribution of EQUAL good practice to Employment guidelines and Inclusion objectives: an elaboration of the results presented in the ‘policy briefs’ and ‘success stories’ gathered by the European Thematic Groups</i>	<i>xxii</i>
ANNEXES TO CHAPTER 10	XXXVII
<i>Annex 10.1 – Synthetic tables presenting policy users’ responses in the UKgb evaluators’ impact evaluation</i>	<i>xxvii</i>
ANNEXES TO CHAPTER 11	XXXIX
<i>Annex 11.1 – Content of CIP priorities in the NMS</i>	<i>xxxix</i>
ANNEXES TO CHAPTER 12	XLVI
<i>Annex 12.1 – Selection procedure in PL</i>	<i>xlvi</i>
<i>Annex 12.2 – Evaluation grid used in EE</i>	<i>xlvii</i>
<i>Annex 12.3 – Evaluation grid used in SI</i>	<i>xlviii</i>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This is the fourth and final EU-wide evaluation report of the EQUAL Community Initiative covering the activities of EQUAL between 2001 and the beginning of 2006.
2. The aim of EQUAL is to promote new means of combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities in connection with the labour market. To achieve this aim, EQUAL operates in 9 thematic fields. Implementation takes place through geographical or sector-based Development Partnerships (DPs), and is guided by 5 key principles (partnership, empowerment, trans-nationality, innovation and mainstreaming). DPs are also required to follow a horizontal approach for equal opportunities. A first call for proposals was organised in 2001 in the 15 Member States (17 CIPs) as well as in CZ and HU, and led to the funding of 1,352 DPs. With the enlargement, EQUAL opened to the 10 New Member States. A 2nd call for proposals, in 2004, led to the selection of 1,999 DPs across 27 CIPs.
3. The activities of EQUAL at national level will be completed by the end of 2008. This report includes recommendations for the two last years of the Initiative with particular reference to evaluation at national level.

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

4. The 3 overall objectives of the EU-wide evaluation, which started in 2002, were:
 - *To assess the rationale, the potential and initial impact of EQUAL* as a testing ground to develop, validate and disseminate new ways of delivering employment and social inclusion policies;
 - *To identify and assess the added value* of EQUAL to existing labour market policies and practices at national and EU level;
 - *To identify good and innovative practice* in delivering employment policy, developed and tested under EQUAL with the potential to be mainstreamed into ESF programmes and the European Employment Strategy and relevant parts of the Social Inclusion Process.
5. Four EU-wide evaluation reports have been produced since the beginning of the contract:
 - *The 1st Interim report (26/9/2003)* provided a synthesis of the appropriateness of CIP strategies, an overview of management and implementation systems with a focus on the selection procedure in R1 and an analysis of the understanding of the key principles at CIP and DP level.
 - *The Mid-term report (2/3/2004)* provided an update on the appropriateness of strategies and on management systems, a first analysis of the implementation of the key principles, as well as an analysis of European networking and mainstreaming mechanisms, including mechanisms for the identification and validation of good practice.
 - *The 2nd Interim report (29/03/2005)* mainly focused on the implementation of the EQUAL principles and on their contribution to innovation. European level networking and mainstreaming were also addressed with an update assessment of the mechanisms for the identification and validation of good practice.
 - *This Final report* derives the main lessons of the implementation and results of EQUAL so far, with a particular focus on R1 and on the launch and preparation phase of R2 in the New Member States (NMS). The time span covered is 2005 and the beginning of

2006, although the report also integrates previous results, notably those of the 2nd Interim Report.

6. The specific objectives of this report are to integrate and update the EU-wide evaluation findings concerning:
 - The appropriateness of strategies in EQUAL, both at CIP and DP level (including in the NMS);
 - Management and implementation systems at CIP and DP level (including in the NMS)¹;
 - The effectiveness and added value of the key principles and of the horizontal approach to equal opportunities in round 1 (R1);
 - The effectiveness of dissemination, networking and mainstreaming arrangements at the national and EU level in round 1 (R1);
 - The intermediate impacts of EQUAL: policy, institutional and organisational impacts in the Member States².
7. The present report is based on:
 - The review and analysis of the national evaluation reports;
 - Case studies of transnational partnerships (TNPs);
 - Interviews with programme actors: the Managing Authorities and National Support Structures of the EQUAL programmes in the 10 NMS;
 - Interviews with potential policy users in the European Commission;
 - Participant observation in various European mainstreaming events;
 - Surveys - An e-mail questionnaire to the 'non-EQUAL' participants in the Madrid policy forum of June 2005 (July-September 2005); an e-mail survey with the MAs and NSS of the 10 NMS (March 2006); an e-mail survey targeted at the ESF Heads of mission (March 2006).
8. Generally the coverage by OMS national evaluation reports of the issues to be addressed by the EU-wide evaluators has been good, although less so for the issues of appropriateness of strategies and programme management, which most evaluators had addressed in their Mid-Term reports and for which they were not necessarily required to provide an update in the 2005 reports. Impacts have been looked at unevenly across Member States, and the picture provided is necessarily preliminary, given the stage of programme implementation. Community added value has hardly been addressed at this stage.
9. The evaluation questions addressed in the NMS have been modelled on the terms of reference suggested by the EU Commission and were more specifically focused on the appropriateness of strategies at programme level and the consistency between DP work programmes and CIP priorities; on management and the implementation systems at CIP and DP levels, and for Transnational Cooperation. However not all the questions asked in the EU terms of reference were addressed in all NMS. In particular questions concerning monitoring systems, self-assessment and transnationality were not systematically dealt with.
10. A wide variety of methodological instruments was used, in 2005, by the national evaluators of the 25 MS, ranging from documentary analyses to interviews at various levels of implementation and quite often surveys. More specifically, the methods used included:
 - *Desk research* (review of documents, analysis of monitoring data, analysis of DP reports and in some cases analysis of statistics on the target groups);
 - *Interviews with programme actors* on implementation issues (i.e. MA, NSS and, where relevant, regional support structures, Monitoring Committee members). In addition,

¹ The effectiveness of management systems in transnational partnerships is addressed in the analysis of the implementation of the principle.

² The initial evaluation questions concerned the impact of EQUAL on the European Employment Strategy, the Social Inclusion Process and other Community programmes and Community added value. These were rephrased in the course of the evaluation. However, elements of response to the initial questions can be found in Chapter 14 (Conclusions).

- NTN moderators and experts were often interviewed as well as external actors (experts, officials of other public administrations) in some MS;
- *Participation in – and organisation of – meetings and seminars with programme actors* (in most OMS and in 3 NMS). In some OMS, workshops with selected experts and/or DP evaluators were also organised.
 - *Case studies of DPs* and interviews at DP level (in most OMS but only in 2 NMS). Case study methodologies and samples vary widely.
 - Most of the evaluators carried out *surveys* of R1 DPs. Surveys could be general and address implementation issues as well as results or could be more focused on specific aspects. R2 DPs were surveyed in several MS.
 - A few evaluators carried out *surveys of beneficiaries*, with varied success given the difficulty to contact beneficiaries, especially once the action has come to an end.
11. The *national evaluation process* in the NMS took more time than planned, with important delays in half of the NMS, due to a very tight schedule. Evaluators often had only a few weeks, during summer. In most cases, the period covered by the evaluation reports extends from June 2004 to June 2005. Thus DPs had only been operational for a few weeks at the time of the evaluation and the information available was sometimes limited. The main difficulties faced by some evaluators may have come from the limited budgets dedicated to the evaluation.

OVERARCHING CONCLUSIONS

Overall assessment of the rationales at play in EQUAL. Initial and potential impacts.

12. EQUAL was set out as a ‘testing ground to develop and disseminate new ways of delivering employment policies in order to combat all sorts of discrimination and inequality experienced by those seeking access to the labour market and those already within it’. A posteriori, this overall rationale can be said to have given rise to 3 main, not mutually exclusive, orientations and rationales for implementation:
- A first approach to EQUAL was to use it as a strategic instrument for reforming existing policies in order to improve their *effectiveness*.
 - A second approach consisted in making existing policies more *inclusive*, e.g. by exploring ways for strengthening the access of specific groups to existing programmes, and therefore by adapting existing policies and programmes.
 - The third approach was to seize EQUAL as an opportunity to strengthen and consolidate recent policy initiatives in line with the European Employment Strategy or to *explore* or improve the organisation and structure of fields of practice which had so far received little policy attention.
13. In the first rationale, which applied particularly to thematic fields where policies are well established, and which has been dominant in some Member States in R1, the implementation capacity has been good, since experienced players could apply, although this may also have resulted in few new players coming on board. Innovation has been focused on the promotion of new mechanisms of governance between partners. Mainstreaming opportunities are good, in principle, since the stakeholders concerned by reformed governance are the very partners of development partnerships. However, evidence of impacts has been limited so far, with a few noticeable exceptions.
14. The second rationale was also applied to thematic fields where policies are well established, but has been dominant in other Member States. In these cases, capacity building took place through partnerships between experienced players and newer, and usually smaller, partners, such as grass-roots NGOs. The innovation reported in these cases has consisted in adapting and tailoring existing solutions in order to cater for new target groups. Mainstreaming faces more obstacles than in the first strategy, since there can be a lack of political will for ensuring mainstream funding for these groups.

15. Finally, the third rationale applies to themes which correspond to a new policy impetus in some Member States, or which had not received much policy attention in others. Here, implementation capacity can be at issue: given the lack of prior experience, there has sometimes been a lack of promoters, and/or applications have been, at times, of poor quality. However, these are themes where much innovation has been reported (new structures and systems). Again, mainstreaming requires political will, but the choice of these thematic priorities at CIP level has usually been indicative of such interest. There are already significant results.

Added value with regard to existing labour market policies and practice at the national and EU level

16. The clearest added value lies in the promotion of/further progress in new, stable, co-operation mechanisms giving rise to integrated and co-ordinated approaches, in lieu of the piecemeal approaches sometimes prevailing. Co-operation between statutory agencies, as well as the opening up of labour market agencies to partnerships with employers and grass-roots NGOs, has sometimes led to sustainable changes in ways of delivering policies. Integrated strategies for combating discrimination addressed factors of discrimination lying in institutional and employer-based strategies, processes, and prejudices in parallel with mentoring for individuals.
17. Secondly, added value has stemmed from the exploration and/or further structuring of relatively new fields of intervention. For example, in combating racial discrimination, added value has lied in the already mentioned integrated strategies, as well as in equipping employers with ‘soft tools’ (self-diagnoses, codes of conduct) in a context in which legal obligations (equality legislation) had already set the basis. Another example of thematic added value lies in the global approach taken to the social economy. Whereas it is often considered merely as a vehicle for the reintegration of vulnerable people in the labour market, EQUAL has promoted it as an economic sector per se, in the sense of an alternative organisation of economic activity. It thus contributes an alternative approach, not just to employment, but also to the economy as a whole.
18. Finally there is an added value of the EQUAL architecture per se, as compared with other labour market integration programmes, in particular through, the idea of the phasing of actions, and especially the introduction of a ‘preparatory phase’ (Action 1); the requirement to form partnerships, with ‘all relevant stakeholders’, from the beginning or over time; the (on-going) learning which has taken place with regard to experimental and project management methods, from initial research and diagnoses, to monitoring and self-assessment; and the various strategies and arrangements which have been set up for the exploitation of results (‘valorisation’) and for ‘vertical mainstreaming’³, even though they are still in their first stages.

Good and innovative practice with mainstreaming potential in ESF, the EES and the Social Inclusion process

19. EQUAL good practice should not be limited to project results and include programme strategies, structure and management. In particular, there has been an original attempt, at the European level, to provide support to implementation, networking and mainstreaming both on the thematic and on the organisational front, around the implementation of the key principles. Clearly the role of the European Commission has not been only one of secretariat or ‘platform’ for Member States to meet – it has also provided direction, not co-ordination in a vacuum. A second achievement of programme management to be capitalised upon has been the importance given to mid-term evaluation reports in the Member States.

³ See for definition paragraph 91

20. With regard to ‘good and innovative practice’ at project level, we have selected practices which were identified as innovative by the national evaluators, and, whenever possible, for which preliminary impacts had also been detected in the Member States. In addition, we have sought practices which seemed illustrative of the wider results achieved in EQUAL and which could be relevant for the Integrated guidelines and the Social Inclusion process. Results and illustrations are provided for each relevant ‘Integrated Guideline’ as well as for the Social Inclusion process and other European strategies and programmes: see below, Paragraphs 117-123).
21. It is still too early to identify areas of take up of good practice at the European level. Mainstreaming at the European level has so far taken place mainly concerning the take up of the EQUAL principles in the programming of ESF programmes for 2007-2013, where considerable support has been provided to the Member States in order to inform their choices for the organisation of the principles. Concerning the mainstreaming at the European level of the thematic lessons of EQUAL (such as the ones we present below in Paragraphs 117-123), the mechanisms for mainstreaming are in place (see below, Paragraphs 102-114 and our recommendations) and their impact will need to be reviewed in the medium term. However it may be regretted that the mechanisms for informing the future review of the European Employment Strategy are lacking and, what is more, no step seems to be taken in that direction.

KEY FINDINGS ON THE EVALUATION TASKS

Appropriateness of strategies

22. CIP priorities have been specified to varying degrees in R1. However the analysis of DP activities has shown, *a posteriori*, a trend towards homogeneity of actions across all themes, and, in some cases, vague targeting of beneficiaries, which may have stemmed in part from a lack of specification at CIP level, and, in the first place, of the EQUAL guidelines, as they tended to promote support to labour market access across all themes.
23. In 9 CIPs, 7 or more thematic fields were selected out of 9. In 4 CIPs, 6 thematic fields were selected. And in the other CIPs, including all New Member States except CZ, one or less thematic field per (former) pillar has been selected. Opting for a focused or more spread programme appears as a strategic decision with important consequences for the effectiveness of the programmes, in particular with regard to mainstreaming, as, when there are less thematic fields, efforts can be focused on the mobilisation of a smaller number of potential users.
24. CIP strategies have generally been assessed as appropriate by the national evaluators, including, in R2, in the New Member States. The consistency and the complementarity of the EQUAL priorities with the national employment and social inclusion policy have been improved in R2, in the old Member States, and the external coherence of EQUAL has been reinforced.
25. The CIPs are generally regarded as being still valid in their main orientations. The main reason for the continued relevance is that EQUAL seeks to address structural inequalities, which were independent from the economic cycle. However, national evaluators pointed out to insufficiencies in R1 in some Member States concerning (a) specific groups who were not being targeted adequately by EQUAL (b) a lack of specification of the thematic fields. Adjustments were thus advocated for Round 2 (R2). Moreover, there has been a general lack of initiatives addressing the quality of employment conditions, whereas inequalities in employment, for example for migrants, are, in some Member States, a more serious issue than access to the labour market.
26. Although national evaluators generally found, in R1, a good level of consistency between CIP priorities and DP objectives, some of them also alerted to an excessive focus on

support to labour market access, and, consistently, to a lack of targeting of workers. In the NMS a high level of consistency between CIP and DP priorities had been found even though assessments are, in most cases, rather general. The distribution of the selected DPs is similar to the distribution of the planned budget in most NMS.

27. In R1, geographical DPs prevailed and DP strategies were found to be highly responsive to local contexts. However this does not mean that geographical disparities were addressed. In the NMS, the share of geographical DPs is comparatively lower. There is a prevalence of sector-based DPs in 6 out of 10 NMS. In addition, the small size of the programmes has limited the possibility for selecting DPs focusing on remote or disadvantaged areas.
28. On average, the number of DPs selected has increased by 21% between R1 and R2 in the OMS, but has decreased in some MS. The DPs selected in the NMS represents 19% of all DPs in R2.
29. The changes introduced in R2 were oriented towards an improvement of the definition and the focus of the existing priorities. A more balanced distribution of DPs between thematic fields has also been observed. In most MS, the CIPs have thus been revised and adjusted quite thoroughly on the basis of the lessons learnt in R1 and of national policy changes.
30. In several MS, the target groups have been defined in a more precise way. The partial re-orientation of thematic fields towards specific target groups, which was not the approach initially favoured in the EQUAL guidelines, became dominant in some OMS and prevails generally in the NMS. There is some evidence that this may make innovation more focused – and certainly more visible. However, this may also contribute to the prevalence of a ‘supply side’ approach to the detriment of initiatives addressing structural factors of discrimination on the demand side of the labour market.

Management and Implementation Systems

31. Overall management and implementation systems have been improved over time towards greater quality and efficiency.
32. EQUAL has been implemented differently according to the level of decentralisation of employment policy within the Member States. In BE and the UK, regional authorities have produced their own CIP; in FR, and now IT, EQUAL is implemented in a context of territorialisation, and in a number of MS, regional authorities have been involved in monitoring and in the selection process. The close involvement of regional level actors in programme management has favoured the regional relevance of EQUAL. However, it may also give rise to conflicts of interests – when institutions participating in selection committees are also involved in projects (this is valid for other actors as well). The participation of regional actors in selection committees may also account for higher numbers of selected DPs than planned in some cases.
33. On the issue of partnership and multi-stakeholder governance for the design and management of the programme, a number of government departments or public institutions are systematically involved in Monitoring Committees (MC) and have sometimes been involved in drafting the CIPs. However, the role of MCs in the programme should not be exaggerated as they have sometimes met relatively rarely since the beginning of the programme. Social partners have been systematically involved and they are likely to have made a greater contribution in those MS where they are active stakeholders of the employment policy.
34. In R1, all NSS have carried out tasks of information and advice to applicants, guidance to the development partnerships (DPs) once selected, monitoring, and support to the MAs. The main difference between NSSs has lied in their role in the selection process. Opinions (e.g. of national evaluators) are divided as to the relevance of NSS staff’s participation in the selection process. Although NSS staff may have knowledge of applicants which no

other actors taking part in the selection process can have, they are, for that very reason, both judges and parties.

35. The integration of the NSS in the same Ministry or department as the MA has facilitated cooperation between the two, although this cannot be a guarantee of good communication. Some coordination problems between NSS and MA were indeed pointed out by the evaluators which could be explained, notably in the NMS, by staffing problems (understaffing, inexperience people).
36. The objective of the *preparatory phase (Action 1)* was to improve work programmes and to develop partnerships. This phase has proved crucial for setting a good basis for implementation.
37. In R1, in some MS, Action 1 was used for the consolidation of selected partnerships while in other MS it was used as a period to prepare DPs for selection for entry in Action 2. Even though it seemed more rigorous to keep the possibility of de-selecting DPs at the end of Action 1, in practice this caused many difficulties especially with regard to the preparation of transnationality. It seems more reasonable to maintain this possibility, but as an exceptional case, as has been done for example in LT in R2.
38. Different approaches were taken, in R1, to the definition and weight of selection criteria: in some MS, the distribution of DPs according to planned budgets by theme and political criteria played an important role; in others, technical criteria prevailed. As a result of this, the variation of selection rates between MS and themes ranged between 10% and 100%. Both strategies have their relevance: following strictly the planned budget allocation is relevant when new fields are being explored and few applicants are expected – as a selection on the basis of the quality of applications leads to having very few projects in these specific priorities. It may be more relevant in such cases to select the planned number of DPs and to focus efforts on supporting DPs in the implementation of their projects. Conversely when the priorities selected in the CIP are not new, and many applicants are likely to come to the fore, an assessment mainly on the basis of the technical quality of bids seems more adequate.
39. *The implementation phase (Action 2)* has been the phase of implementation of DP work programmes in R1 and covered a period to 2 to 3 years. During this phase, the NSSs provided guidance to DPs, especially on administrative issues, monitored and controlled DP activities, and organised communication activities. Evaluators' assessments of programme guidance have been contrasted. A main source of dissatisfaction for DPs has lied in the very important administrative burden and problems with delays of payments. Evaluators, both in R1 and in R2 (NMS) have advocated the strengthening of technical guidance to DPs.
40. In most MS, budgets for the *implementation of the work programmes* were assessed as realistic and appropriate. However, implementation difficulties, leading to delays, were identified in R1.
41. *The phase of transfer to policy and practice (Action 3)* has been dedicated to the organisation of networking, dissemination of good practice and mainstreaming activities and has taken place through 3 main mechanisms:
 - Individual Action 3 budgets included by DPs in their Development Partnership Agreements (DPA), along with Action 2 budgets: all DPs could thus benefit from an Action 3 budget;
 - Individual or collective Action 3 budgets accessible through a call for proposals: not all DPs could obtain such funding;
 - Action 3 budgets made accessible as an option to all DPs that submit an application.
42. Several changes were introduced in programme implementation in R2 which are likely to improve the quality of implementation and of outputs. The capacity of programme actors to learn from national evaluation reports and take up their recommendations has usually been high. Amongst the most significant changes, we have noted:

- The increased flexibility of each Action, of their phasing and of the allocation of budgets to each Action;
 - The clarification of NSS roles;
 - More qualitative guidance and monitoring;
 - Improvements in the launch phase (2nd call) leading to higher numbers of applications and applications of a greater quality;
 - Adjustments in the selection process, with, for example, more weight given to innovation and mainstreaming in the selection criteria.
43. In the NMS, the usefulness of the preparatory phase was highlighted and NSS guidance during the preparatory phase has sometimes been very substantial (training sessions, seminars, guides).
44. The selection process was also assessed positively in the NMS, although evaluators sometimes pointed to the low quality of applications, which led to severe selection rates in some NMS.
45. At DP level in NMS, management and monitoring are, at the moment, very much constrained by financial issues, including heavy administrative procedures, payment delays, complex verification of eligibility and low advance payments. In CZ, DPs created a *Council of Final Beneficiaries* in order to collectively claim for payments and to find solutions to avoid payment delays in the future.

Effectiveness and added value of the Partnership and Empowerment principles

46. The implementation of the partnership and empowerment principle, understood as a mechanism for bringing together various relevant actors for tackling an issue and for working together towards shared goals, has probably been one of the main successes of EQUAL. It has been a necessary (though not sufficient) condition to facilitate access, both to ‘target groups’ and, though to a lesser extent, to the decision-making community.
47. *The design of partnerships appears as crucial.* Successful partnerships involve *all strategic partners*⁴ (which facilitate sustainability), seek the early participation of the relevant co-funding agencies, and promote *the concrete and active participation of partners*, including representative of target groups.
48. *Partnership composition* based on the comprehensive representation of all relevant stakeholders is important for external credibility and for mainstreaming. Partnership composition on the basis of the skills and expertise of each partner is likely to facilitate joint work to a greater extent.
49. *The difficulty to attract enterprises* in DPs has often been explained by the fact that enterprises are deterred by the administrative requirements, but also that participation throughout the DP lifecycle is difficult for companies to sustain. Thus, acquiring the ‘right skills’ and involving the key stakeholders at the right time constitute a success factors for the implementation of the partnership.
50. *The issue of the optimal size of the DPs* remains debated. Some MAs now recommend restricted partnerships, regarded as more reactive, more manageable and hence more efficient. Others recommend wide partnerships, as this increases the potential for mainstreaming and sustainability. In any case, whilst the average size of R1 DPs had been 10.4 partners, R2 DPs have an average of 7.5 partners (all MS). In the NMS the average size is 6 partners.
51. *Successful partnerships have achieved a balance between ‘stability’ and ‘fluidity’ over time:* fluidity, i.e. the flexible mobilisation of partners at different phases in the DP

⁴ Strategic partners are members that are not actively involved in the DPs’ work, but which have are supposed to play a role for mainstreaming.

lifecycle, is necessary to adjust capacity and activities in a reactive way, whilst the stability of a core group of partners is important to maintain direction and have credibility in the mainstreaming stage.

52. Various *decision-making mechanisms* have been used at DP level: centralised decision-making seems to have been more effective (provided adequate consultation and capacity building mechanisms took place) than fully participative mechanisms, which can be slower and heavier. However, *day-to-day decision-making bodies have been the working groups in charge of the projects of the Development Partnerships*, much more than partner assemblies or steering/monitoring committees.
53. *Capacity building* has taken place, notably for small organisations, which testifies to the effectiveness of empowerment. Some evaluators found that large DPs had acted as *fora for capacity building and 'social learning'*. However, capacity building has been hampered by financial difficulties in small organisations, and has been found to be less feasible in small partnerships.
54. *The quality of project management*, in particular adequate starting diagnoses and on-going monitoring and evaluation, has progressed over time across the MS, but self-assessment and monitoring still need strengthening, as R1 DPs still found it difficult at this stage to explain what they had achieved.
55. *NSS methodological guidance* (through tools, training, guides, and visits) has contributed actively to enhancing the quality of the projects and of project management. Proper staffing and proper training of NSS staff is thus essential and should be given due consideration.
56. Overall, the implementation of the partnership principle in EQUAL has made a significant contribution to the added value of the Initiative: *It has contributed to progress towards the reduction of inequalities and discrimination; It has contributed to innovation*, especially as ways of working together have sometimes been profoundly changed, and transfer of knowledge and experience took place between partners. *It has contributed to transfer and mainstreaming*, especially as partners became able to speak a common voice in key policy areas and therefore to influence policy.

Effectiveness and added value of the innovation principle

57. Innovation is the *raison d'être* of EQUAL. The initiative has been designed as a 'testing ground to develop and disseminate new ways of delivering employment policies'.
58. DPs sometimes struggled, at the beginning of R1, to understand how they could comply with the principle. Over time, however, *awareness of innovation as experimentation*, in other words, as a concept which can steer project management and procedures, has increased. An experimentation dynamics has been documented in some MS, in which the monitoring of project results led to abandoning some projects and setting up new ones.
59. Evaluators often found that *innovation had mainly been incremental* (bringing about improvements of former practices), which is partly linked to the fact that EQUAL was often used to open up existing programmes to new target groups. In view of this, the distinction made in the EQUAL guidelines between process, goal and context innovation did not appear as very operational or useful for an analytical understanding of innovation, since process innovation (new methods) often went together with goal innovation (new target group) and context innovation (to change the context of provision for these target groups).
60. Despite the prevalence of incremental innovation, *innovation has been more 'radical' in some themes*: in a few MS, EQUAL was used as a strategic instrument to explore or further structure fields of intervention where policy was not developed and/or there was not much practical experience. The more or less new character of thematic fields naturally depended on the MS, but 4 of them were particularly mentioned as relatively new areas of policy/practice developments: the fight against racism and xenophobia (1B); the social economy (2D); reconciling family and professional life (4G); and support to asylum seekers

- (5I). Conversely, some areas of intervention, such as training in general, seem to have been less prone to innovation.
61. A few evaluators carried out a systematic analysis of the *quality of the innovation* produced, with very different methods and criteria. However, there were some common findings. In particular, as could be expected, only a share of operations or DPs can be considered as having produced innovation with clear added value, relevance, sustainability and/or mainstreaming possibilities. This, to a certain extent, can be considered as intrinsic to any experimental programme. However, this may also be due to what could be called a ‘trivialisation effect’, derived from the ‘obligation to innovate’ extended to the whole programme.
 62. The *main areas of innovations* put forward by the national evaluators include:
 - Comprehensive, integrated strategies, targeting the demand side and the supply side of the labour market at the same time; seeking to rely on new ‘multipliers’ for combating discrimination – amongst elected policy makers, social workers, in the media etc.; and targeting discrimination in various contexts in parallel (the education system, the workplace, social services, public opinion in general).
 - Both in support schemes for labour market reintegration and business creation, more attention has been paid to the preliminary phases of support and to follow-up (once in employment or once established as entrepreneur or self-employed).
 - A range of EQUAL initiatives have sought to professionalize, equip and structure sectors such as the social economy and the care sector.
 - Finally much innovation has been taking place in relation to the enhanced capacity of institutions, support centres and methodologies to cater for highly marginalised groups or groups suffering from multiple discrimination.
 63. Concerning the *factors which have favoured the emergence of innovation*,
 - A few evaluators argue that DPs with a target-group orientation, with partners chosen for their complementary knowledge of the target group(s) are more prone to innovation, than, for example, wide territorial partnerships targeting a range of different target groups, as they are more focused. However more analysis would be required to generalise this finding.
 - Many evaluators have highlighted the positive contribution of the partnership principle to the development of innovation. However some of them found that the partnership principle should be considered a favouring but by no means a sufficient factor.
 64. *Limits to innovation* have been identified when DPs were insufficiently prepared to experimentation methods, in particular with regard to starting diagnoses, monitoring and self-assessment. But structural limits in the EQUAL Initiative have also been pointed out: thus the short timeframe for project implementation, as well as the lack of further funding perspectives, have been an important explanatory factor of the type of innovations developed, i.e. improvement of existing practices rather than testing new practices, especially in DPs dealing with very vulnerable groups.

Effectiveness and added value of the transnationality principle

65. The main *expected outcome of transnationality* was to add value to DP actions. In addition TN cooperation was also to contribute to European and national policy developments. One major conclusion is that TN learning has been capitalised upon by DPs but that added value has been uneven.
66. *The European Common DataBase (ECDB) has been an effective and relevant resource for partner search.* However the use of the ECDB constitutes only the first step for identifying the ‘right partner’: direct communication and in-depth talks were felt to be necessary and helped decide whether a potential partner was ‘suitable’ or not.

67. *Others channels* were also used for finding potential partners, including relying on previous contacts or hiring an external consultant. This latter channel has been effective to build TN partnerships provided sufficient debate with DP partners on the various dimensions of the draft Transnational Co-operation Agreement (TCA) was ensured. The organisation of seminars and conferences between MAs and NSSs at the European level has also been helpful for support in partner search.
68. DPs were encouraged to form TN partnerships with DPs working in the same theme. In R1 there were slightly more plurithematic than monothematic TNPs. This was in part due to the fact that the types of actions promoted under each thematic priority at times differed strongly from one MS to the other.
69. DPs were encouraged to form TN partnerships all throughout the EU. However, in most MS, links have been much stronger with 2 or 3 other MS. In R2 some OMS are 'over-represented' in partnerships with NMS DPs. NMS DPs have also been interested in partners from other NMS, due to similarities in language and common historical background.
70. On the basis of our fieldwork, we found that the *success factors* in the formation of a TNP included: (a) choosing partners working on common issues and/or with similar target groups, and with comparable TN budgets; (b) ensuring that there is a congruency or complementarity of interests and objectives; (c) drafting a precise work plan and involving all partners in this exercise; (d) taking into account that the construction of transnationality requires time.
71. DPs have experienced TCA preparation as a rather complex process in R1, due to the inherent difficulties of reaching agreements with often unknown foreign partners, but also due to some specific aspects of the framework for transnationality in EQUAL R1 (differences in time schedules between MS, in the thematic content of programme priorities, in budget sizes etc.). R2 TCAs were drafted more rapidly thanks to the previous experience of R1 DPs. Nevertheless, quality remained uneven.
72. During R1, the process of *validation of the TCAs* by Managing Authorities was rather difficult and long: despite the common criteria agreed for the validation of TCAs, MAs/NSSs were not always in agreement about the minimum effort required and what each section should contain. The validation process was less lengthy in R2, thanks to a shared concern for not delaying validation and not hindering TN cooperation work. Thus guidance during the implementation phase of TNPs in R2 will need strengthening, as TCA validation has sometimes been lenient.
73. Whatever the mechanisms chosen for *decision-making at TNP level*, they tend to ensure, at least formally, the participation of all transnational partners on an equal basis and their voice in the steering of the TN partnership. The most frequent models include a rotating secretariat supplemented by co-ordination meetings or a lead partner with a steering group. In both models, decisions are usually made by consensus.
74. We have found 3 main models of *work organisation* in TNPs: (a) Working groups led by each partner in their area of competencies, and involving all partners: in principle, this model favours maximum co-operation but has hardly been feasible economically. (b) Working groups led by each partner in their area of competencies, in which other partners participate if they are interested. This organisation proved to be quite efficient. (c) Division of labour between partners: each partner is responsible for a specific product or activity. One risk of this organisation is that it only provides for limited exchange of experience. However, when common objectives are clear, this way of working can be very effective, especially if the 'products' developed by each partner are then subjected to constructive feed-back by other partners.
75. There have been *important differences in the budgets* dedicated by DPs to transnationality (between 5% and 15%). Budget differences tend to be particularly important in R2 TNPs involving NMS DPs and this represents an obstacle to the implementation of TN activities,

as partners with low budgets cannot fully participate in TN activities. A solution has been to organise large events in the country with the lowest budget to save travel costs.

76. Three main formal models of *self-evaluation* have been identified: (a) An external evaluator is contracted for the evaluation of the whole TN partnership; (b) The evaluation of the TNP is organised internally; (c) The TN partners assess transnationality through their self-evaluation at DP level. The combination of a TN partnership level and of a DP level of evaluation is particularly rich and consistent with the orientation of transnationality in EQUAL. However, our case studies of R1 TNPs showed that self-evaluation reports were often delivered at the end of the TN project, which is of course of little use.
77. Many TN partnerships, in R1 and R2, focused their activities on the *structured exchange of information and experience*. This type of activity, when it has had continuity over time, has been highly successful, as it led to a widening of the scope of activity of each partner, to increased professional skills, and to the transfer and adoption of methods. Exchange of staff has also generally been a source of high satisfaction, both for the visitors and for the hosts. Structured visits have been an opportunity to see concretely other professional practices, and to reflect back upon one's own. As the TN project is developed on the basis of national projects, joint development has been less frequent and more difficult.
78. Although high starting commitment to transnational co-operation is desirable, we have shown that *motivation for transnationality* can increase over time when concrete benefits are derived from transnational work.
79. All NSS have provided, as a minimum: (a) *Basic collective guidance*: This includes guides on transnationality, translation or adaptation of the EC Guides; budgetary guidance; organisation of seminars with DPs. (b) *Individualised support to DP*: This kind of guidance was mostly provided in the preparation phase. But lack of human resources in the NSSs has been a serious issue in several MS and especially in the NMS.
80. The *guidance and co-ordination provided at the European level* has been regarded as useful in both rounds. The guides and handbooks on TN were generally received positively by DPs, MAs and NSSs. The ECDB was regarded as a helpful tool for partner search, although the quality and reliability of the information has been criticised in both rounds. The cooperation between MS intensified in R2 as it had been found to be insufficient in R1. A network of transnationality co-ordinators was set up and a series of seminars and conferences took place, which were assessed very positively by programme actors.
81. Overall the *added value* of transnationality has mainly derived from the learning processes it gave rise to. Direct contribution to innovation in domestic projects has not been frequently documented, but there is more evidence that transnationality impacted on the quality of DP activities. The structured exchange of experience as well as study visits and staff/beneficiary exchanges have generated learning and benchmarking. The development of 'European products' through joint development has not been frequent. However the more general benefits of transnational work for fostering a sense of European belonging should not, in our view, be undervalued.

Effectiveness and added value of the horizontal approach to equal opportunities

82. 'Equal Opportunities for all' is meant, in EQUAL, as equal access of all discriminated groups to each thematic field. In addition the EQUAL guidelines specified that 'within this horizontal approach, the promotion of equality between women and men will be integral to thematic fields in all four pillars as well as being targeted through specific actions in the fourth pillar.'
83. Only a few MS have conceived their programmes as addressing explicitly 'Equal Opportunities for all'.

84. Two MS both promoted ‘gender equality’ and ‘diversity mainstreaming’⁵. The overlapping between both concepts created some difficulties for DPs.
85. DPs have tended to focus on specific discriminated or disadvantaged groups although this depended on the themes. For instance, theme 1A (facilitating access and return to the labour market) is more likely to include a wide variety of target groups as compared to other themes. As said above, some MS have reinforced the target group approach in R2. National evaluators have generally tended to see this as a positive development.
86. In a majority of MS, the notion of ‘Equal Opportunities’ has been interpreted as ‘gender equality’. This does of course not mean that combating other forms of discrimination and inequalities have not been the focus of the Programme, but rather that this was not achieved as a transversal principle.
87. The implementation at DP level of the horizontal approach to *Equal Opportunities between men and women* has been disappointing. DPs found it difficult to define clear objectives and deficiencies were identified in the monitoring and evaluation of the equal opportunities approach (as said above, monitoring has been a more general weakness in the implementation of the programme). Nevertheless some evaluators assessed the implementation of the horizontal approach as globally positive (e.g. ES) or show that progress has been made (e.g. DE, FR). Improved guidance of MAs/NSSs has certainly contributed to an important degree to this progress.
88. In many MS, *more weight and attention has been given in R2* to equal opportunities between men and women, through the reinforcement of the horizontal approach towards equal opportunities between men and women, and/or through additional funding in the two equal opportunities themes. A number of MS have also reinforced guidance on gender mainstreaming.
89. Little is said in the evaluation reports about the *added value of the horizontal approach to ‘Equal Opportunities for all’*. This is linked in our view to the difficulties that emerged to measure the effects of the implementation of this principle as well as in the clear preference of a target group approach in many MS. It is also linked to the lack of identification of the object of the evaluation and of what can be understood as efficient results.
90. *Concerning the added value of the horizontal approach to ‘Equal Opportunities between men and women’*, the dual approach – horizontal and thematic – taken in EQUAL has resulted in probably more efforts and attention than if it had only been a transversal principle. However, in several cases, evaluators found that gender equality received little attention except in the two equal opportunities themes. Even in these themes, projects have tended to be more ‘women focused’ than ‘gender focused’. Overall, compliance with this approach has tended to be disconnected from the other aspects of implementation of the projects, and the added value has remained limited. However, gender awareness, capacity building, and the knowledge on the causes of discrimination have been improved.

Effectiveness of networking, dissemination and mainstreaming at the national level

91. *Three main models have been developed for the organisation of mainstreaming at the national level*. In Model 1, horizontal mainstreaming⁶ and vertical mainstreaming⁷ are both under the responsibility of NTN are at the core of the mainstreaming strategy. In Model 2, horizontal mainstreaming is under the responsibility of NTN and vertical mainstreaming is the responsibility of the Monitoring Committee or of an ad-hoc Committee. Model 3 can be

⁵ The concept of ‘diversity’ refers to the view that sex, age, ethnical and social background, sexual orientation and functional disorder are all factors that can represent a barrier for employment and career prospects.

⁶ *horizontal mainstreaming* is ‘the transfer of lessons learnt to similar organisations’

⁷ *vertical mainstreaming* is ‘the transfer of lessons learnt and integration of all or part of results into policy and practice at the institutional, political, regulatory or administrative level’

seen as a combination of the last two. The choice to adopt Model 1, 2 or 3 may have been related with the time at which a mainstreaming strategy was launched at the national level. MS which went for an early launch and implementation of their mainstreaming strategy were better placed to adopt Model 1 or 3.

92. Whilst mechanisms facilitating the ‘push’ dimension⁸ of mainstreaming have been set up in all MS, those promoting the ‘pull’ dimension⁹ are less developed. In some MS, the pull dimension is addressed by a dedicated Mainstreaming Group in charge of collecting thematic requests from policy makers and establishing the thematic priorities for mainstreaming both on that basis and on the basis of DP work. Other MS have chosen to give their Monitoring Committee a responsibility for mainstreaming. Finally, in a few cases, MAs have taken a proactive role.
93. *National thematic networks* constitute the main networking vehicle at the national level. All R1 MS have set up such NTN, although at different times since the beginning of the programme. Three networking strategies have been identified: (a) *to involve all DPs in national networking*, (b) *to select DPs for their participation in thematic networking*, and (c) *a DP participation to NTNs on a voluntary basis*.
94. The composition of NTNs is highly dependent on the role they are allocated. In particular, the *participation of non-EQUAL policy makers and multipliers* (e.g. the social partners) depends on whether NTNs are in charge of vertical mainstreaming or not. NTNs have been hesitant to involve policy makers external to EQUAL whilst there were not any concrete results to show.
95. Different *NTN management and co-ordination mechanisms* have also been adopted. In some cases they are chaired by high level policy/decision makers (i.e. former government ministers and key employers and trade union representatives); in other cases they are co-ordinated by DPs selected either through a call for tender; they are also sometimes directly coordinated by the MA, by the NSS and/or by appointed experts and facilitators.
96. Some *weaknesses* have been identified in the way in which NTNs operate, and in particular in the distribution of roles between NTNs and other programme actors. Whilst NTNs have played an important role to ensure the transfer of know-how and exchange between participants, they have faced more difficulties for the mobilisation of policy actors. On the other hand, vertical mainstreaming is quite a new way of envisaging policy making and it is unsurprising that knowledge and practical know-how are still lacking.
97. *Horizontal mainstreaming* has been more effective than vertical mainstreaming at DP as well as at programme level. Internal transfers between DP actors, as well as between some DP members and TN partners have been really effective, whereas mainstreaming towards the policy community has been more limited.
98. Although NTNs have been supportive of DP mainstreaming strategies in a few MS, there has been a *lack of programme support* to DPs in the implementation of Action 3 (transfer to policy and practice). As a result, Action 3 has been more focused on dissemination actions than on mainstreaming operations. In most cases, mainstreaming was interpreted as the communication of results achieved. Lack of funding has also been an obstacle to the mainstreaming of results by DPs.
99. More generally, mainstreaming, and particularly ‘vertical’ (i.e. policy) mainstreaming, is a complex task. In many MS, MAs and NSS recommended DPs the early identification of policy links and even the involvement of policy makers as partners quite early in the programme. In our view, it is certainly important to identify these key partners and to raise

⁸ *The push dimension* refers to a mechanism by which DPs ‘seek to increase the visibility of their results with a view to transferring the latter to the other actors’

⁹ *The pull dimension* is ‘a mechanism in which policy, decision makers or other key actors identify priorities within the experimental activities and follow their progress with a view to using the results’

their awareness on the programme early. However it is also important to involve them at the right time and for the right tasks, not too early and not too often, given their limited availability.

100. The creation of an ad-hoc group in charge of mainstreaming including key policy actors very early on at programme level, on the one hand, and adequate support to NTN (adequate resources, clear objectives and methods), on the other hand, have been identified as factors likely to facilitate ‘vertical mainstreaming’.
101. *Overall the contribution of the mainstreaming principle to the added value of the programme has so far been limited:* as pointed out by some national evaluators, ‘most EQUAL achievements remain in the EQUAL Community’, ‘networking and mainstreaming have worked well inside EQUAL but had little impact outside’. However, following the Commission’s second communication on EQUAL, the experience in R1, and the exchanges and guidance which have taken place at the European level, more attention is being given to the implementation of mainstreaming in R2.

Effectiveness of dissemination, networking and mainstreaming at the EU level

102. An intense networking activity has taken place at the EU and cross-national level in the last years. This networking has been concerned both with identifying, sharing and disseminating lessons derived from the DP initiatives in the 9 thematic fields and with facilitating the implementation of the EQUAL principles during EQUAL as well as their transfer to the 2007-2013 ESF programmes.
103. Until mid-2005, European thematic work has mainly been organised in the framework of European Thematic Groups (ETGs). These groups first played an important role as platform of exchange and ‘voice’ for DPs and TCPs at the European level, whilst in 2004, the priority became ‘to validate the good practice from R1 in co-operation with the MS, and to synthesise these into policy messages’. The new structure for European Thematic work adopted in the meeting of MA of June 2005 is meant to address all of these successively adopted objectives – exchange, ‘voice’, validation of good practice and policy transfer.
104. Our assessment of *European networking and mainstreaming events in 2005* has been focused on the Warsaw conference (February 2005, ‘Free Movement of Good Ideas’, 400 participants), the Paris Agora (June 2005, ‘Experience is Capital’, more than 600 participants), and on the Madrid Policy Forum (June 2005, ‘Gender Equality: a key to change’, 270 participants), and more particularly on the latter. Both the Warsaw Conference and the Paris Agora can be considered more as dissemination and networking fora than as platforms for mainstreaming. However, it cannot be doubted that the Paris Agora took place in a stream of events and policy communications (outside EQUAL), both in FR and in Europe, which have contributed to raising the issue of ‘age management’ at the top of the employment policy agenda.
105. *The Madrid Policy Forum has demonstrated the interest of organising more focused thematic events, bringing together practitioners and policy-makers.* The design of the conference and its methodology made it possible for participants to derive concrete lessons and in some cases concrete inputs for their policy agenda and/or professional practice, even though this could only be a first step. In particular, the advocate/user methodology (presentation of DP practices by a DP ‘advocate’ to a potential ‘user’ who asks questions) has been useful and has been usually well assessed. The policy briefs were also found very useful, as they present syntheses of practices by various DPs instead of focusing on single examples. However, participants found a lack of independent analyses of the transferability potential of the good practice which was presented to them. They also called for more continuity, a report on the event, the organisation of further, even more focused events, on issues addressed in the Forum.

106. From mid-2005 onwards, the *new approach* is that of European Commission grants to Member States for the organisation of various types of events. By March 2006, a total of 30 expressions of interest had been put forward by Member States, and validated. This falls within the Commission's objectives. 12 'old' and 4 'new' Member States expressed interest. New Member States have thus so far been less numerous in putting forward their proposals, which seems logical given their more recent entry in the programme. Most events are thematic in outlook.
107. The *predominance of exchange events* amongst the events planned is to be noted, as their aim is rather vague (sharing of good practice) at this stage of the programme. However, *policy fora*, more focused on mainstreaming, also form an important share of the events planned. What seems most relevant for making a policy impact is the combination of various types of events in a given theme or on a given issue, with a planned progression: this is for example the case for the re-integration of ex offenders and for 'entrepreneurship for all' (business creation). Planning progress in mainstreaming through related events also means inviting at least partly the same participants to these events, as shown by our analysis of the Madrid forum. It would be hardly thinkable to mobilise MAs for inviting each time new participants for little less than 30 events programmed over 18 months.
108. *Collaboration with other units and DGs of the European Commission* is another mainstreaming instrument. However, with European Commission Units in charge of other programmes and financial instruments, collaboration has mainly tended towards the co-ordination between programmes. With the Policy Units, more direct contribution by EQUAL has been identified in the case of focused units (e.g. disability, demography) than in the case of general policies such as the Employment Strategy. The efforts recently made by the EQUAL unit for a more systematic cross-unit communication have been greatly appreciated.
109. The construction of a *European repository of transferable good practices* has also been planned by the EQUAL Unit in agreement with the Managing Authorities. The database will include good practice of the national databases.
110. One of the functions of the ETGs had been the *collection and validation of good practice* in view of their further dissemination and mainstreaming. This was attempted through the production of 29 policy briefs and 30 'success stories' of individual DPs. Despite the considerable difficulties associated with identifying, gathering, and validating good practice, the intensity of collective work in the working groups of the European Thematic Groups (until the end of 2004) and expert input succeeded in making the production of these documents possible. However the new focus on success stories (away from the policy briefs) serves more a dissemination purpose than a pro-active mainstreaming strategy.
111. Despite the fact that some of the cases presented as success stories were also identified by national evaluators as innovative practices, it should also be pointed out that there is a gap between the overall impression stemming from reading the policy briefs and success stories, on the one hand, and the results and impacts identified so far by national evaluators, on the other hand, these being more limited. This shows the need for an update of the policy briefs for the gathering of concrete evidence of results.
112. *European and cross-national facilitation of the implementation of the EQUAL principles has also been provided.* Our assessment has focused on their usefulness for the NMS, as they were the prime targeted beneficiaries. The relevance of EU-level support mechanisms and tools including guides were stressed with extreme clarity by the NMS Managing Authorities, and this is an important lesson for future programming.
- *Bi-lateral co-operation:* Advice sought from other MA and NSS has been crucial at all stages – and could probably only be provided by national programme actors which had passed through the same processes and asked the same questions.

- *The mechanisms – events, products – set up at EU-level for support to the implementation of the key principles of EQUAL* have been assessed as highly relevant and useful. This has been especially important for the facilitation of transnationality.
113. The decision not to pursue EQUAL in the next ESF programming phase was accompanied by a decision to provide space for the ‘mainstreaming’ of the key principles of the Community Initiative. On the basis of an ad-hoc meeting of the ESF Committee in June 2005, 4 working groups of MS were set up, with a view to drafting reflection notes on the best ways to integrate the principles in planning the new ESF programmes. Four reflection notes were produced, and served as background documents for seminars mainly targeting ESF negotiators at the national level. These working documents and the seminars have generally been well assessed by ESF Heads of mission. Following presentations to the ESF Committee, the final versions of the reflection notes have been distributed widely and will also be used by the Commission for assessing the 2007-2013 programme proposals.
114. Nevertheless, our survey of ESF Heads of Mission in March-April 2006 showed that *the legacy of EQUAL has been interpreted and capitalised upon in very different ways in the different Member States* and that architecture of the ESF programmes is likely to be very diverse. The partnership principle and the gender equality principle are the ones where options are less varied, but the implementation of innovation and, above all, of transnationality is foreseen in highly diverging ways. This is of course a special cause for concern in the case of transnationality where decisions made by MS have effects not only for their own programmes but for those of others. See our recommendations below.

Potential and initial impacts of EQUAL at the EU level and across Member States

115. Overall it is still difficult at this stage to form a fair view of the impacts achieved by EQUAL in the different Member States. Many DPs were still at the beginning or in the midst of their Action 3 (transfer and mainstreaming) projects at the time of evaluation fieldwork. Institutional impacts have by far been the most documented. Impact on policies are said by most evaluators to be limited, however quite significant examples have been provided. There is a notable lack of reporting on impacts on organisations (other than partner organisations). Impacts can be said to still be very much local in scope.
116. Drawing on the work of the European Thematic Groups, on our review of national evaluation reports as well as on our own fieldwork, we have nevertheless identified innovations and their potential or initial impacts in areas of relevance for the European Employment Strategy, the Social Inclusion process and other Community strategies and programmes. We have related these achievements (innovations and impacts) to those of the Integrated Guidelines where we thought they made a contribution, as well as to the relevant Social Inclusion objective and other European strategies and programmes.
117. *Potential and initial impacts on Integrated Guideline 15* (Promote a more entrepreneurial culture and create a supportive environment for SMEs):
- Reinforced support mechanisms and access to finance in existing business support centres and creation of new integrated support centres: ‘non traditional’ entrepreneurs, especially women (e.g. in remote rural areas) have been drawn in the business creation process. In some Member States (ES, UKgb) there is evidence that some of these initiatives have secured or are in the process of securing mainstream funding. However, the ‘opening up of the business creation to all’, which was supposed to be an important added value of EQUAL with regard to the Guideline has not been well documented so far with regard to access of marginalised and vulnerable people, and questions have been raised as to the relevance of such an objective.
 - Creation of second level networks, i.e. networks between business support centres or between social enterprises, which have contributed to the professionalisation of their members.

- Recognition of the social economy as an economic sector rather than only as a vehicle for the labour market reintegration of vulnerable people: new support structures, such as offices of social entrepreneurship and social franchising systems, have been developed. The status of ‘social co-operatives’ (an Italian institution) has been taken up in GR and SE. Governance arrangements were improved, particularly with regard to the place of social enterprises in public procurement. Many of these developments have good sustainability prospects – indeed some of them are already institutionalised.
118. *Potential and initial impacts on Employment Guideline 18* (Promote a lifecycle approach to work) as well as for *the European Strategy for Equality Between Men And Women*:
- Integrated strategies and mechanisms for gender equality and occupational desegregation: there is some evidence of cross-national impacts. For example the NL campaign on gender roles (‘Wie doet wat?’), which has been presented in various international fora, has already attracted the attention of other MS and the BE nl ministry of Equal Opportunities is due to launch a similar campaign in 2007. Impacts of such integrated strategies on employers, however, have so far not been well documented.
 - Resource centres on women’s training and employment in scientific and technical professions: EQUAL has given rise to the creation and institutionalisation of such centres in GR and the UKgb.
 - Creation of new integrated and quality approaches to care: EQUAL has contributed a number of initiatives achieving the virtuous circle recommended at the EU level in terms of support services in the care sector – i.e. providing more flexible care allowing for the labour market participation of women and at the same time creating employment for women in particular. However, some (not all) EQUAL initiatives in this field have made a difference in that they have also qualified the staff recruited (for example, to the level of care assistants) and sought to improve the quality of employment in the sector (e.g. new collective agreement in AT). Many of these initiatives have now secured mainstream funding.
119. *Potential and initial impacts on Employment Guideline 19* (Ensure inclusive labour markets, enhance work attractiveness, and make work pay for job-seekers, including disadvantaged people and inactive) as well as for the *European Refugee Fund* and *future anti-discrimination actions*:
- Take up of new methodologies and new roles in existing centres of support to asylum seekers – paying particular attention to outreach activities, the stability of staff, and language and skills upgrading methodologies. In many cases these initiatives are sustainable as the reception centres concerned participated in the development partnerships (significant examples have been documented in Scotland and IE).
 - Integrated strategies and new resources targeting employers for the integration and retention of migrant workers and members of ethnic minorities (Corporate Social Responsibility campaigns, codes of conduct, self-diagnoses, creation of roles of ‘intercultural mediator’): evidence of significant and sustained results at employer level has so far mainly been provided in the media /creative sector (GR, UKgb).
120. *Potential and initial impacts on Employment Guideline 20* (Improve matching of labour market needs):
- Multi-agency approaches to improve the interface between the (long-term) unemployed or other benefit recipients and the institutions and agencies in charge of delivering employment policy and benefits (significant sustainable examples of such institutional co-operation mechanisms have been provided in IE).
 - Diversification of gateways to employment, for example through the creation of new temping arrangements for specific groups (low qualified people in BE frg, people with disabilities in AT), through the promotion of self-employment (for people with disabilities in AT), or the promotion of telework (for people with disabilities in DE).
 - Creation and sustainability of networks involving labour market integration agencies, non profit organisations and employers in sectors facing recruitment difficulties (e.g.

construction) for the upskilling and recruitment of long-term unemployed people. Examples have been provided in FI and the UKgb.

121. *Potential and initial impacts on Employment Guideline 21* (Promote flexibility combined with employment security and reduce labour market segmentation, having due regard to the role of social partners):

- New forms of work organisation allowing for a better ‘work/life balance’: there is some evidence of such schemes and of their effects with public or semi-public employers, although evidence is still lacking on the impact of such schemes in the private sector. What is remarkable about some of the schemes highlighted by the national evaluators (e.g. in FR) is that work-family balance is not used as a device to introduce more employer-led flexibility (part-time contracts which increasingly contribute to forming a stratum of working poor, especially amongst women) but can be arranged and combined with full-time employment.
- Initiatives for anticipating and accompanying industrial change both through local regeneration partnerships, economic actions, and upskilling and qualifying mature workers: the shipbuilding industry, for example, has benefited in 3 MS (FR, GR, IT).

122. *Potential and initial impacts on Employment Guidelines 23* (Expand and improve investment in human capital) *and 24* (Adapt education and training systems in response to new competence requirements) as well as for the programmes of DG Education and Culture:

- Dissemination of new methodologies for encouraging low skilled workers’ participation in training: impacts have been scattered but some of them are significant (take up of the job rotation methodology in IE for upskilling both the unemployed and low skilled workers, workplace learning agreements in the retail sector in the UKgb with the participation of unionists as ‘brokers’ of learning).
- Use of ICT to increase access to learning for people considered as ‘disengaged learners’ or facing physical barriers to traditional learning: there is evidence of an institutional sustainability of such schemes, through their accreditation.

123. *Initiatives informing the Social Inclusion process*:

EQUAL has promoted local multi-stakeholder partnerships to tackle not only employment issues but also the underpinning attitudes and behaviours of employers leading to the discrimination of employees or jobseekers. New co-operative mechanisms for tackling social exclusion have also been set up. This has probably been one of the major areas of achievement of EQUAL.

In particular we have noted:

- The creation and sustainability of new networks for tackling worklessness in a more holistic and client centred way, and the design of multilevel and multifaceted strategies to counter discrimination (especially racial and gender discrimination), involving actors located in different institutional and organisational settings.
- Multi-agency work for an improved interface and ‘empowerment’ of people suffering from social disadvantage and discrimination. Sustainable initiatives have been documented in the area of support to drug users, the labour market re-integration of prisoners and ex offenders etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Implementation-oriented recommendations in the New Member States for R2, applied to EQUAL implementation in the period 2006-2008

124. In order to improve the *management of EQUAL* at national level, we recommend for New Member States :

- To clarify programme management roles, enhance the co-ordination between the MA & NSSs and organise joint training of NSS/ MA staff to reduce the share of inexperienced people, staff turn-over and increase the quality of the cooperation NSS/ MA;
- To simplify administrative procedures and processes and to make them more transparent and understandable by all;
- To enhance qualitative guidance and support to DPs.

125. We also recommend for the European Commission *more EU-level facilitation and cross-MS support to NMS Managing Authorities* for the last years of implementation of EQUAL, in the following areas:

- Monitoring and evaluation of the added value of transnationality;
- Organisation of the call for proposal for Action 3 (transfer to policy and practice);
- Best practice of 'old' MS for mainstreaming (especially vertical mainstreaming) and for thematic networking;
- Bilateral co-operation with other MS in thematic networks;
- Capitalising the results of EQUAL for the new programmes;
- Capacity building on evaluation, including self-evaluation; and
- Methodologies and indicators for project monitoring.

Evaluation-oriented recommendations applied to EQUAL implementation in the 2006-2008 period

126. At national level, three areas are especially recommended for evaluation in MS :

127. The *evaluation of innovation* should:

- Include an assessment of the incidence of innovation: Are there new developments with regard to the state of the art in given areas of policy development, sectors or territories?
- Include an assessment of the conditions of emergence of innovation.
- Include an assessment of the quality of innovation: potential relevance; effectiveness; added value as compared with existing policies and practices; feasibility/sustainability; and mainstreaming potential/capacity.
- Be carried out both at programme level and by theme.
- Be based on the analysis of DP sources (applications, DP work programmes, monitoring reports, case study interviews with co-ordinator, partners, and beneficiaries) as well as on interviews with experts of the fields concerned.

128. The *evaluation of mainstreaming* should:

- Include an assessment of the interpretation of the concept of mainstreaming by programme actors and by DPs;
- Include an assessment of the mechanisms set up to make the concept operational;
- Include an assessment of the relevance, comprehensiveness, feasibility and sustainability of the mainstreaming strategy at the programme level;
- Include an assessment of the organisation of the mainstreaming strategy at DP and Programme management level;
- Include an assessment of the programme level mechanisms to assess and validate DP good practice;
- Include an assessment of the results of vertical and horizontal mainstreaming.
- Be carried out both at programme level and by theme.
- Be based on interviews with programme actors and DPs as well as on interviews with policy makers, multipliers and key potential users of EQUAL results.

129. The *evaluation of impacts* at MS level should:

- Include an assessment of policy impacts: impacts on employment, inclusion and anti-discrimination policies and impacts on policy making;
- Include an assessment of institutional impacts: impacts on labour market intermediation; on the education and training system; support to business creation; impacts on the regulatory work arrangements;

- Include an assessment of organisational impacts: impacts on employers – public, private for profit or private non profit.
- Be carried out both at programme level and by theme.
- Be based on a review of DP and NTN material, interviews of actual and potential users of EQUAL results and with experts of the field.
- Beneficiary data should be used to assess the actual outreach of the programme (by theme).
- Cross-national impact evaluation studies could be interesting on specific issues.

130. The *evaluation process in the NMS* could be strengthened by:

- Paying more attention to the extent to which the programme communication strategy, the selection process have contributed to shape the implementation of the programme; to facilitating factors, obstacles and problems in programme management; to the distribution of roles between programme actors; and to the performance of the NSSs.
- Giving more emphasis to qualitative evaluation methods (e.g. case studies including interviews with all partners, with external stakeholders/potential users of DP lessons, and including focus groups with beneficiaries).
- Adjusting timeframes and budgets to the evaluation objectives, scope and methods, as too limited budgets and timeframes are not conducive to quality results.

Recommendations for mainstreaming of EQUAL lessons in future programmes

131. In terms of *orientations for future programmes*, we recommend:

- To identify those policy areas most likely to benefit from innovative projects and to recognise potential barriers to policy mainstreaming at an early stage;
- To consider setting up dedicated programmes and/or measures directly targeting employers and employed workers, especially the most vulnerable, and to be proactive in seeking to attract suitable promoters with a good knowledge of and good links to employers;
- To consider setting up dedicated programmes for tackling in-work inequalities, especially in terms of employment and work conditions;
- To encourage initiatives improving work/life balance in the workplace, with due regard to the quality of employment contracts and wages.

132. In terms of future *programme management*, we recommend:

- To carefully design the launch of the programmes in order to attract suitable applicants - suitable meaning with the right mix of skills over time and/or with a clear capacity building strategy (especially if relatively new areas of intervention are selected);
- In the calls for innovative projects, to consider the following selection criteria: potential relevance, added value, feasibility and mainstreaming potential;
- To consider imposing requirements concerning starting diagnoses, monitoring systems and self-assessment procedures, especially for innovative projects, and to review compliance at selection stage;
- To consider organising an ‘Action 1’ (preparatory phase) in the future programmes and to organise guidance and support accordingly;
- To organise support structures and prepare staff so as to ensure administrative and financial support; ongoing support on demand; and systematic proactive actions aiming at professionalisation of project teams;
- To organise distinct programme level monitoring systems for innovative projects and for mainstream projects with more qualitative indicators for innovative projects, and more attention on changes in structure and systems than in assistance to persons. We recommend setting up working groups involving the European Commission, the Managing Authorities, statisticians as well as former promoters of innovative projects (e.g. EQUAL promoters, Article 6 promoters) in order to ensure the relevance, user-friendliness, feasibility, usefulness and reliability of future monitoring systems. Finally training and support should be provided to project promoters and partners in future

programmes, not only on the use of the monitoring software for data entry and update, but also on how to exploit results.

- The European Commission should consider taking over a coordinating role for the different types of transnational cooperation within the Programmes.
- To consider when designing programme sections or sub-programmes on transnationality that transnational projects can be planned by project applicants as own project or simultaneously with national projects.
- To ensure sufficient resources for transnational cooperation.
- To dedicate priorities to equal opportunities between men and women as well as to ensure that Gender Mainstreaming is implemented as a crosscutting horizontal principle in the Programme as a whole.
- To organise programme level monitoring systems that include indicators for Gender Mainstreaming

133. In terms of *evaluation systems*, we recommend to maintain the three levels of evaluation experienced in EQUAL (European, national, project level) and to learn from their strengths and weaknesses:

- Cross-national evaluation should focus on specific subjects and fields of intervention; European evaluators should have the possibility to conduct their own field work in the Member States; exchange on evaluation methodologies and results should be organised at the European level; twinning and multilateral exchange between national authorities should take place on evaluation issues;
- At the national level, the scope of evaluations should include all dimensions and phases of programme management; the formative role of national evaluators should be maintained and reinforced; the evaluation timeframe has to be planned to allow for an evaluation of impacts;
- At project level, it is crucial to require project self-assessment and monitoring and to train project managers and partners accordingly.

134. Concerning the *mainstreaming of the EQUAL principles* in the next generation of European Social Fund and possibly other programmes, we recommend:

- *For the organisation of the partnership and empowerment principles*: to clarify whether partnerships are a means to achieve an objective or whether they are an objective per se as well (creation of new governance mechanisms). If it the former, a good skill mix has to be ensured over time – with possibly different partners at different phases; if it is the latter, a good representation of all stakeholders has to be ensured as well. Make sure that the planned involvement of each partner is based on a credible and feasible assessment of their potential contribution, skills and availability. Promote the idea of differentiated involvement, so as to avoid to deter private sector participation;
- *For the organisation of transnationality*: transnational projects should be planned directly as such or simultaneously with national projects, rather than as an ‘added-on’ once national projects have already been designed. Structured exchanges between local actors should also be made possible. Ensure adequate resources. Organise close co-ordination between all the Member States funding transnational partnerships and co-operation, so that there may be a minimum number of common issues, co-ordinated time schedules for the calls, and common instruments (partner search database);
- *For the organisation of innovation*: plan a ‘laboratory function’ in all programmes, which will allow for a clear distinction to be made between innovative projects and more ‘mainstream’ projects. Clarify the rationales for organising an innovation function in the programmes (making existing policies more effective, making them more inclusive, exploring new policy fields) so as to draw the implications in terms of likely applicants and needs for project guidance. Organise training and guidance on experimental approaches (research, monitoring, evaluation etc.);
- Partnerships working with highly vulnerable people sometimes hesitate to pilot experimental schemes and prefer to innovate ‘on the margins’ in order not to take the risk of having to face an absence of further funding with dramatic consequences for the

beneficiaries. A clear positioning of innovation in the future programmes on policy areas where there is an explicit demand for new developments will help reduce that risk. In addition, Managing Authorities may decide to grant support to experimental projects targeting highly marginalised groups even without clear policy take up perspectives: increased support and direct help by programme actors to accompany such projects in their mainstreaming strategy has then to be foreseen;

- *For the organisation of equal opportunities*: maintain the dual approach taken in EQUAL (dedicated priorities and cross-cutting horizontal principle). Indicators should be developed for monitoring the implementation of gender mainstreaming. We also recommend the organisation of training on gender mainstreaming and the appointment of gender mainstreaming specialists at project level;
- *For the organisation of national mainstreaming*: programme actors should clarify their expectations with regard to the mainstreaming of innovation and define early comprehensive mainstreaming strategies, including ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ mainstreaming and the ‘pull’ and ‘push’ dimensions. We also strongly recommend the organisation of regional networking and mainstreaming mechanisms. Finally we recommend the development of monitoring of mainstreaming activities and results at programme and project levels; and the training of programme actors, so that they can adequately support project promoters.

135. Concerning the *organisation of networking and mainstreaming mechanisms at the European level*, we recommend, for the future European Social Fund programmes in particular:

- *To maintain the double focus* (thematic and organisational) of networking adopted in EQUAL (in addition to the country desks).
- *For thematic networking*: to agree with Member States on a limited number of policy issues for which some or all of them are interested in mutual learning, networking and, possibly, lobbying. To organise networking at various levels (between national authorities, other stakeholders, project promoters, as well as between the members of national thematic networks), with continuity over time and with clear purposes (preferably common production and/or pushing a policy agenda). To back this up with stable European expertise in the fields concerned as well as with dedicated co-ordination and follow-up in the European Commission. The appointed experts should be asked, as in EQUAL, to produce policy analyses and cross-national thematic analyses of project practices and results on the basis of agreed criteria and with sufficient resources for carrying out their own field assessments.
- *For organisational networking*: networking on the implementation of the principles in the Member States will be made more difficult given the lack of common definitions and modes of implementation. It will be all the more important to organise cross-national exchange on the interpretation of the principles and on their concrete translation into selection criteria, so as to compare models of implementation and inform the Mid-term reviews. Facilitation at the European level is required, also with a view to capitalise on the know-how and knowledge acquired in the previous Community Initiatives.
- *A co-ordination role for the European Commission in matters of transnationality is absolutely essential*. This co-ordination role is even more important as more possible ways of exchange and collaboration are intended. Member States need to agree on a minimum set of common issues on which transnational projects can be funded.

136. Concerning innovative practices which could be recommended for taking on board in other programmes, we have explained earlier the limitations, at this stage, for the identification of innovative practices and of their emerging impacts. The policy briefs prepared by the European Thematic Groups had provided a much more comprehensive picture than the one we feel entitled and legitimate to give: *we would therefore strongly recommend the update of the existing policy briefs in order to take better account of the project results now*

available. Nevertheless, and with these limitations in mind, we would recommend the practices presented in points 116-122 above for capitalisation and further support.

1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1. OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

This is the fourth and final EU-wide evaluation report of the EQUAL Community Initiative. It has been prepared by Bernard Brunhes International (Paris), the ICAS Institute (Barcelona) and Economix Research & Consulting (Munich).

1.1.1. The EQUAL Community Initiative

The aim of EQUAL is to promote new means of combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities in connection with the labour market. To achieve this aim, EQUAL operates in 9 thematic fields, defined on the basis of the pillars of the former European Employment Strategy, complemented by actions targeted to asylum seekers. Implementation takes place through geographical or sector-based Development Partnerships, and is guided by 5 key principles (partnership, empowerment, transnationality, innovation, and networking and mainstreaming). Development Partnerships are also required to follow a horizontal approach for equal opportunities.

A first call for proposals was organised in 2001 in the 15 Member States (17 CIPs¹⁰) as well as in the Czech Republic and Hungary, and led to the funding of 1,352 Development Partnerships (DPs). Funding of DPs in R1 was organised in three ‘actions’: the objectives of Action 1 were to consolidate the partnerships, to develop common strategies and joint work programmes at DP level and to organise transnational co-operation; Action 2 was the phase of implementation of DP and Transnational Partnership (TNP) work programmes; and Action 3 aimed at disseminating and mainstreaming good practice. These 3 Actions have been renamed in R2 as: ‘preparation phase’ (former Action 1); ‘implementation phase’ (former Action 2); and ‘transfer to policy and practice’ (former Action 3).

With the enlargement, EQUAL opened to the 10 New Member States (two of which had taken part in the first round). In R2, launched in 2004, a 2nd call for proposals led to the selection of 1999 DPs across 27 CIPs¹¹.

The EU contribution to EQUAL stands at approximately 3.2 billion € for the period 2000-2006, and is complemented by public national co-funding of over 2.2 billion €.

In each CIP, Managing Authorities (MAs), assisted by National Support Structures (NSSs), are responsible for the management of the programme, and in particular for the design of Community Initiative Programme and its monitoring; the organisation of the calls for proposals and the selection of Development Partnerships; guidance and support to DPs; facilitation of national networking between DPs and of mainstreaming into national employment and social inclusion policies and mainstream ESF programmes; and evaluation.

The European Commission (Unit B4 of DG Employment and Social Affairs) supports Member States in the implementation of the programme, provides facilitation for the co-ordination between CIPs, and

¹⁰ Belgium and the United Kingdom count with two EQUAL programmes each (In Belgium: one for Flemish Belgium – hereafter BENl and one for the French and German speaking Community – hereafter BEfrg. In the UK: one for Great Britain – hereafter UKgb and one for Northern Ireland – hereafter UKni).

¹¹ Source: ECDB. April 2006.

for European networking and mainstreaming. The European Commission (Unit I4 – Evaluation) is in charge of the EU-wide evaluation of EQUAL.

1.1.2. The EU-wide evaluation

The **3 overall objectives** of the EU-wide evaluation are:

1. To assess the rationale, the potential and initial impact of EQUAL as a testing ground to develop, validate and disseminate new ways of delivering employment and social inclusion policies for those seeking access to the labour market, those already within it or at work, and taking into account the particular needs of asylum-seekers;
2. To identify and assess the added value of EQUAL to existing labour market policies and practices at national and EU level;
3. To identify good and innovative practice in delivering employment policy, developed and tested under EQUAL with the potential to be mainstreamed into ESF programmes and the European Employment Strategy and relevant parts of the Social Inclusion Process.

The evaluation was structured around **6 initial tasks**:

1. Assessment of the appropriateness of strategies;
2. Evaluation of management and implementation systems at CIP, DP and TNP level;
3. Analysis of the effectiveness of the key principles across the 9 thematic fields;
4. Analysis of the effectiveness of networking, dissemination and mainstreaming at national level and across the EU;
5. Analysis of the impact of EQUAL on the European Employment Strategy, the Social Inclusion Process and other Community programmes;
6. Analysis of the Community added value.

However, the content of these tasks evolved over time in accord with the Evaluation Unit of DG Employment and Social Affairs and with the Steering Group of the EU-wide evaluation. These changes concern:

- *The identification of good and innovative practice*: within task 5, the EU-wide evaluation was initially expected to identify and recommend good practice for EU mainstreaming. However, the European Thematic Groups (ETGs) were allocated the same task. It was therefore agreed that we would provide an assessment of the methodology used, in the ETGs, for gathering, validating and mainstreaming good practice, which was done in the 2nd Interim Report of the EU-wide evaluation. An update of this assessment is available in the present report (see Chapter 9 below). However, on the basis of the material gathered by the ETGs and of the national evaluation reports, we have been able to provide an analysis of innovative practice¹² and emerging impacts which could inform the European Employment Strategy, the Social Inclusion Process and other European strategies and programmes (see Chapter 14, Volume 3).
- In order to address the evaluation questions concerning *Community added value* (task 6), which depended on the availability of a minimum set of findings in common areas

¹² ‘Good practice’, in European thematic work, corresponds to projects, processes and outputs which are, so to speak, emblematic of EQUAL, as they testify to the implementation of the EQUAL principles (partnership, empowerment, transnationality, innovation and mainstreaming) and of the approach to equal opportunities. Their innovative character is thus one aspect amongst others. On the other hand, the national evaluators have (generally) sought to identify and assess ‘innovation’ rather than ‘good practice’ in the sense just explained. Logically, this has also been our approach, since our work is based essentially on the national evaluation reports. This is also more proper of an evaluation exercise than the identification of good practice.

in the Member States, the European Commission asked the EU-wide evaluation team to design and propose a common possible approach to the evaluation of impacts and added value of EQUAL in the Member States. This approach was presented and discussed in two successive partnership meetings with the Managing Authorities and the national evaluators (29 April 2004 and 29 April 2005). It was agreed that the focus would be on intermediate impacts and added value at the policy, institutional and organisational level (see Chapter 10 below).

- A stronger focus has been set on the evaluation of the *implementation, effectiveness and added-value of the key principles* of EQUAL than on the evaluation of thematic implementation. This was discussed with and admitted by the Steering Group at the time of the submission of the 1st Interim Report of the EU-wide evaluation. The reason for this lied in the lack of systematic evaluation by theme in most national evaluation reports, whereas these were our basic source of information. In the 1st Interim Report, we had provided the basis for such an analysis by theme, but subsequently lacked information to sustain this analysis, except in the area of innovation and emerging impacts. In this report, conclusions by theme (and area of intervention) are therefore provided with regard to the implementation of innovation and starting impacts, but not with regard to the implementation of the other principles. It may be surmised that national evaluators have not found it relevant to carry out thematic analyses of the implementation of partnership, empowerment or transnationality.

In order to achieve these objectives and to carry out these tasks, the EU-wide evaluation was to be based on:

- Syntheses of national evaluation reports (with respect to the national implementation of the Initiative);
- Fieldwork carried out by the EU evaluation team (with respect to the implementation of the transnational dimension, including transnational co-operation partnerships, European networking and European mainstreaming).

More details are provided in the section below on methodology.

Four EU-wide evaluation reports have been produced since the beginning of the contract, including the present one¹³:

- The *1st Interim report*, dated 26/9/2003, provided a diagnosis of labour market discriminations and inequalities in the Member States, a synthesis of the appropriateness of CIP strategies for addressing these discriminations and inequalities and in the current policy context, an overview of management and implementation systems – with a particular focus on the selection procedure in R1, and an analysis of the understanding of the key principles at CIP and DP level. These analyses were based on an extensive documentary analysis and on the synthesis of 9 national evaluation reports.
- The *Mid-term report*, dated 2/3/2004, provided an update on the appropriateness of strategies (at CIP and DP level) and on management systems, a first analysis of the implementation of the key principles, as well as an analysis of European networking and mainstreaming mechanisms, including the mechanisms to identify and validate good practice and those to ensure impacts on the European Employment Strategy. These analyses were based on a documentary analysis, on the synthesis of all 17 Mid-term reports, and on interviews at the European level.

¹³ See reference table in Annex 1.1

- The *2nd Interim report*, dated 29/03/2005, mainly focused on the implementation of the EQUAL principles, with a particular emphasis on transnationality, and on their contribution to innovation. European level networking and mainstreaming were also addressed, with an update assessment of the identification and validation of good practice. These analyses were based on an extensive documentary review, the synthesis of 13 national evaluation reports, 34 case studies of transnational partnerships (TNPs), interviews at the national and European levels, a questionnaire to Managing Authorities and participant observation.

THIS REPORT

This report, the final report of the EU-wide evaluation, is meant to derive the main lessons of the implementation and results of EQUAL so far, with a particular focus on R1, and, following the contract extension decided by the Evaluation Unit of the European Commission, on the launch and preparation phase of R2 in the New Member States. Its scope therefore includes the 6 tasks mentioned above, bearing in mind the above explained changes in their content.

The specific **objectives** of this report are to integrate and update the EU-wide evaluation findings, as well as to draw conclusions and recommendations concerning:

- The appropriateness of strategies in EQUAL, both at CIP and DP level (including in the NMS);
- Management and implementation systems at CIP and DP level (including in the NMS)¹⁴;
- The effectiveness and added value of the key principles and of the horizontal approach to equal opportunities in round 1 (R1);
- The effectiveness of dissemination, networking and mainstreaming arrangements at the national and EU level in round 1 (R1);
- The intermediate impacts and added value of EQUAL R1 (policy, institutional and organisational impacts and added value within and across Member States) and their relevance for the European Employment Strategy, the Social Inclusion process and other Community strategies and programmes.

The time span covered by the report is, essentially, 2005 and the beginning of 2006, although the report also integrates previous results, notably those of the 2nd Interim Report.

The report is structured in 4 distinct volumes. The first volume bears on the implementation and results of Round 1(R1) and addresses the main changes in implementation at the beginning of Round 2 (R2). Its scope is thus mainly formed by the 17 initial CIPs. The second volume reviews the orientation and first implementation phase of the EQUAL programmes in the New Member States. The third volume brings together the conclusions and recommendations of the EU-wide evaluation. Annexes are provided in the fourth volume.

¹⁴ The effectiveness of management systems in transnational partnerships is addressed in the analysis of the implementation of the principle.

Volume 1 has 10 chapters:

The rest of this introductory chapter provides an explanation of the methodological sources for the EU-wide evaluation and an overall view of EQUAL, in order to set the context of the evaluation.

Chapter 2 provides an integrated and comparative analysis of the appropriateness of the strategies adopted for EQUAL in the national contexts of the 17 initial CIPs, including lessons concerning their relevance, and the consistency between programme-level and DP-level strategies. The chapter integrates prior analyses carried out for the 1st interim and Mid-Term reports of the EU-wide evaluation. The 2005 analysis of strategies in the 17 initial CIPs was mostly aimed at identifying changes between R1 and R2 and their rationales.

Chapter 3 seeks to derive the lessons of how EQUAL has been implemented at the programme and DP levels in R1, casting light on the management systems set up, on the way in which the different 'Actions' of the Initiative have been implemented, and on evaluation and monitoring systems. Changes in R2 are also highlighted. The sources are the same as for Chapter 2.

Chapters 4-8 provide an integrated analysis of the effectiveness and added value of the key principles of EQUAL during R1 (including equal opportunities, which did not feature amongst the key principles but nevertheless has been a requirement of the Initiative): partnership and empowerment (chapter 4), innovation (chapter 5), transnationality (chapter 6), equal opportunities (chapter 7), and mainstreaming (chapter 8). The report adds to the findings of the previous EU-wide evaluation reports by integrating those of the 2005 reports of the 'old' Member States. In addition, the transnationality chapter brings together the results of prior fieldwork, and new fieldwork carried out in 2005 (face to face or phone interviews with half of the initial sample of case studies of TNPs, as well as 10 additional case studies of R2 TNPs involving partners in the new Member States). The mainstreaming chapter also relies on a documentary analysis.

Chapter 9 sets out an updated analysis of effectiveness of the dissemination, networking and mainstreaming mechanisms set up at the EU level as well as of the good practice identified at EU level. In this chapter we also seek to identify the impacts of these mechanisms in order to derive lessons for mainstreaming in future programmes. Starting from the analysis carried out in the Mid-term and 2nd Interim evaluation reports, the chapter brings together the results of specific evaluation activities carried out in 2005: documentary review, a questionnaire to the Managing Authorities in the new Member States, a questionnaire to the heads of ESF departments in the 25 Member States, participant observation in three conferences and seminars, followed up, in one case, by a survey of participants, and phone interviews with European Commission officials.

Chapter 10 provides an analysis of the policy, institutional and organisational impacts and added value of EQUAL in the Member States, on the basis of the 2005 national evaluation reports. It also reflects on the methodologies used for the evaluation of impacts.

Volume 2 has 3 chapters:

Chapter 11 provides an analysis of the appropriateness of strategies at CIP and DP level in the NMS. It also addresses to some extent the implementation of the partnership and other EQUAL principles.

Chapter 12 examines and compares the management and implementation systems of EQUAL in the NMS, with a particular focus on the preparatory phase.

Chapter 13 looks at the first results of the implementation of transnational cooperation at programme and DP level.

Volume 3 has 2 chapters:

Chapter 14 provides overarching conclusions, conclusions on each of the evaluation tasks, as well as conclusions by theme and/or area of intervention.

Chapter 15 provides recommendations concerning implementation in R2 (with a focus on implementation in the New Member States); recommendations concerning future evaluation activities in EQUAL R2; and recommendations for the orientations, management and evaluation of future programmes, including recommendations for the mainstreaming of the EQUAL principles.

The annexes are available in **Volume 4**.

1.2. METHODOLOGY

1.2.1. Methodological overview

As required in the terms of reference of the EU-wide evaluation, the analysis of the implementation and results of the Community Initiative at Member State level is almost exclusively based on the national evaluation reports, with the complement of documentary analyses. However, all transnational strands of the evaluation (i.e. the evaluation of the principle of transnationality, and of EU networking and mainstreaming) are informed, in addition, by work which we carried out directly. There has been no major change in the methodology of the EU-wide evaluation¹⁵ in the course of the contract. However, for the reasons explained above, the initially planned ‘thematic profiles’ of implementation and results by theme have been replaced by a cross-thematic analysis of the principles, complemented with an analysis of innovation and impacts by area of intervention (rather than strictly by theme). Similarly, the initially planned screening of the good practice gathered by the European Thematic Groups has been replaced with a screening of the methods for identifying, collecting and validating good practice. Finally, the approach to the evaluation of impact and added value has been considerably developed and made more operational.

Our methodology and sources have been the following:

- *Review and analysis of the national evaluation reports:*

This has included the review of 16 national evaluation reports prepared in 2005 in the ‘Old’ Member States CIPs¹⁶ and of 9 national evaluation reports prepared in 2005 in the ‘New’ Member States¹⁷. The analysis also builds on our previous synthesis reports (1st interim, mid-term and 2nd interim) to consolidate, update, amend findings and take them further.

- *Case studies of transnational partnerships (TNPs):*

These included a second wave of case studies of TNPs in the 17 initial CIPs: 15 TNPs out of our initial 34 were revisited after one year. The selection of 15 TN partnerships out of the 34 case studies was based on different constellations of TNPs identified in our second interim report on the basis of the first wave of visits as well as on size¹⁸. Interviews with the representatives of 40 DPs were carried out during May and July 2005. The aim of these case studies was to assess the dynamism of the partnerships over time, in particular in terms of decision making and work arrangements, and results.

¹⁵ As set out in the Methodological note of 15/11/2002.

¹⁶ Due to the time constraints, we were only able to take into account the national evaluation reports provided to us before mid-January 2006 and were thus unable to take into account the report for BEnl.

¹⁷ No evaluation report was delivered in CY.

¹⁸ More explanations on these configurations are provided in Chapter 6 below.

10 new case studies of R2 TNPs involving NMS partners were also carried out between September 2005 and January 2006. Explanations for sampling are provided in Chapter 13 (Volume 2). The purpose of these case studies was to analyse the way in which the TCAs had been set up, the patterns of TN co-operation established by DPs in the 10 NMS, and the extent to which support and technical assistance at the European and national levels had been helpful.

- *Interviews with programme actors:*

A set of interviews was carried out with the Managing Authorities and National Support Structures of the EQUAL programmes in the 10 NMS, between September 2005 and January 2006. The purpose of these interviews was essentially to identify the mechanisms of support and guidance for transnationality.

On the other hand, several exchanges (face to face or by telephone) took place over the whole duration of this evaluation exercise with members of the EQUAL Unit, including the Head of Unit, in order to identify and assess the new networking and mainstreaming mechanisms set up at the European level.

- *Interviews with potential policy users:*

11 telephone interviews took place in March 2006 with European Commission officials not directly involved in EQUAL but identified by the EQUAL Unit as potential or actual users of EQUAL results at the European level. The purpose of these interviews was to gather the interviewees' opinion on the communication established with the initiative and to assess the extent to which and how they actually used EQUAL results.

- *Participant observation:*

The evaluation team took part in various EQUAL European mainstreaming events: the Warsaw conference in February 2005, the Madrid policy forum on gender equality in June 2005, the Paris Agora on age management in June 2005, the ESF seminars on innovation and transnationality (December 2005) and on partnership, empowerment and gender mainstreaming (January 2006), and finally the evaluation conference and seminar in February 2006. These mostly informed the assessment of the mechanisms set up at the European level for networking and mainstreaming EQUAL results.

- *Surveys:*

An e-mail questionnaire was sent to the 'non-EQUAL' participants in the Madrid policy forum (i.e. to actors not directly involved in the management and implementation of the programme). The purpose was to assess the lessons derived from the policy forum and the practical mainstreaming outcomes after a few months (response rate 38%).

An e-mail survey with the Managing Authorities and National Support Structures of the 10 NMS was carried out in March 2006, in order to gather their opinions on the various cross-national and European mechanisms set up for the facilitation of the implementation of the programme. Responses were received from 9 Member States out of 10.

Finally an e-mail survey targeted the ESF heads of mission, with the aim to assess the extent to which and how they were planning, at that stage (March 2006), to organise the implementation of the principles of partnership and empowerment, transnationality, innovation and gender mainstreaming in the future ESF programming phase, and what lessons had been derived from EQUAL in that respect (response rate 52%).

- *Documentary analysis:*

The review of documentation included an in-depth analysis of the NMS CIPs, Joint Assessment Papers and Joint Inclusion Memoranda; the review of EU-level guidance (e.g. the Guides for transnational co-operation and the Mainstreaming Guide); an analysis of EU-level outcomes (papers produced by the ESF working groups on the key EQUAL principles; policy briefs; success stories; thematic background documents); minutes of meetings (especially meetings of the Managing Authorities); and evaluation documents (assessments of EU events carried out by the EQUAL Unit and Managing Authorities).

As can be seen from the table below, which maps out the sources used for each of the strands of the evaluation in conformity with the Terms of Reference, the Evaluation Guidelines and other direct guidance provided by the European Commission, triangulation of data has been carried out where possible.

Table 1.1 – Sources used for the final evaluation

	Appropriateness of strategies	Management & implementation systems	Effectiveness and added value of EQUAL principles except transnationality and including national networking & mainstreaming	Effectiveness and added value of Transnationality	Effectiveness of European dissemination, networking & mainstreaming	Intermediate impacts and added value
Former EU-wide evaluation reports	X	X	X	X	X	
National evaluation reports	X	X	X	X		X
TNP case studies				X		X
Interviews with MAs/NSSs in NMS				X		
E-mail survey to MAs/NSS in the NMS				X	X	X
Survey to ESF heads of mission					X	
Participant observation in European events					X	X
Survey to participants to Madrid policy forum					X	X
Interviews with European Commission officials					X	
Documentary review	X	X	X	X	X	X

Finally, let us recall that, in agreement with the European Commission, we took on a role, wherever possible, of animation of the evaluation at the European level and launched methodological discussions (especially on the assessment of impacts and added value) with the aim to progress towards a more harmonised evaluation approach across the Member States. This animation role was implemented in the context of the “partnership meetings” organised by the European Commission, in which Managing Authorities as well national evaluators participated. However this role has

necessarily been limited, as the terms of reference for national evaluations had already been agreed previously in the Member States.

1.2.2. The national evaluation reports

As said above, the main source of the EU wide evaluation is constituted by the national evaluation reports. For this final report, we have relied on 16 evaluation reports (2005) of the initial CIPs, as well as on 9 evaluation reports (2005) for the New Member States. It is therefore important, before proceeding further, to provide an overview of the scope, evaluation questions and methodologies adopted in these reports. We will deal separately with the reports in the 'old' and in the 'new' Member States as their remit differed.

1.2.2.1. The national evaluation reports in the 'Old' Member States

The national evaluation reports provided to the EU evaluators were those whose final draft was ready before 15. January 2006. In total, 16 reports were thus analysed. No 2nd interim report was available on time for BEnl. However it should be borne in mind that we have also relied on previous reports (especially on Mid-term and, where they existed, 2nd Interim reports).

Scope

The scope suggested by the European Commission for the update Mid-Term or final evaluation reports at the national level was detailed in a note dated 15. April 2004¹⁹. The reports were to address the following issues:

- Actions 1-3 of the 1st Call;
- Assessment of the Mid-term CIP reviews;
- First stage of 2nd Call (Action 1 and first 6 months of Action 2);
- Effectiveness of key principles;
- Effectiveness of networking, dissemination and mainstreaming;
- First impacts of EQUAL on the EES and on the social inclusion process (SIP);
- Community added value.

However, as the terms of reference for the final report of the EU-wide evaluation phrase the scope of the evaluation slightly differently, and as we have analysed the national evaluation reports so as to inform these various strands, we look at the scope of national reports in that light.

Generally the coverage by national evaluation reports of the issues to be addressed by the EU-wide evaluators has been good, although less so for the issues of appropriateness of strategies and programme management, which most evaluators had addressed in their Mid-Term reports and for which they were not necessarily required to provide an update in the 2005 reports. The issue of impacts and added value has been dealt with in very varied ways to very different extents.

More specifically:

- The question of the '*appropriateness of strategies*' (changes in R2) was not an issue in the terms of reference of the AT and DE evaluators. The scope of the AT report has been the 1st round DPs and their impact. The DE report has had a specific focus this year on innovation, though covering other issues as well.

¹⁹ Ref: G5/OR D(2004) 8025, 'Note to EQUAL Heads of Mission'.

- *Programme management* analysis, which was to bear in particular on the changes in the selection process and in the preparation phase in R2, was not a focus in the 2005 AT, LU, and NL reports. As said the scope of the AT report was on R1 DPs. The LU evaluators focused their analysis of programme management on the monitoring system. The NL report does make a reference to the programme structures, but especially with regard to NTN rather than more globally.
- *The implementation and effectiveness of the key principles* is addressed in all reports, though, as said, with a focus on innovation in the DE report (as there is a special focus on one or two principles in each successive evaluation report). In some cases, the added value of each specific principle is not analysed and few reports address the way in which each principle has contributed to the actual reduction of inequalities and discrimination in the labour market. Analyses by theme are often lacking, except for the implementation of the innovation principle. Lessons are usually drawn at programme level for the other principles, which, a posteriori, seems a reasonable choice, especially in MS with small programmes.
- *Networking and mainstreaming* have, as is logical, been devoted more attention in the 2005 reports than in the Mid-term and 2nd Interim reports.
- *Impacts* have been addressed in a variety of ways and to varied extents: 9 reports adopt to a greater or lesser extent, and with more or less variants, the approach proposed by the EU-wide evaluators in the 2004 partnership meeting or provide material which can be re-analysed in this light. The BEfrg evaluators prefer to look at the contribution of DPs to reaching the CIP objectives. The DK and NL evaluators have focused on impacts for participants (this is also looked at by other evaluators but alongside other analyses). The DE and PT evaluators will analyse impacts in their next report, and the FI and FR evaluators provide a very preliminary analysis and/or isolated examples, as the stage of implementation at DP level did not allow for more.
- When the *added value* of EQUAL has been addressed, this has generally been done by assessing the added value of the EQUAL principles (all or some of them), which is logical given that the key principles have been the distinctive feature of the Community Initiative.

Some of these differences are due to the fact that the reports analysed have **different statuses**: in a majority of cases, we are dealing here with final reports. In other cases (BEfrg, DE, GR, IT, PT), other evaluation reports are expected²⁰.

Methodological instruments

The variety of methodological instruments resorted to by national evaluators has been more important in the 2005 reports than in Mid-term and 2nd Interim reports, which has probably given rise to more triangulation of data. Only in very few cases is there only one major source of data. This can be a problem especially when this source of data is a DP survey, as it means that assessments are mainly based on DPs' self-perception. However usually a review of DP monitoring reports has also been carried out in these cases, which can provide evaluators with another basis for forming their own judgement. In addition, survey questions can be asked in such a way as to bring much qualitative information, from different perspectives, which can then be compared: thus the DP survey has been the main instrument used this year by the BEfrg evaluators, but their report is extremely complete and provides qualified assessments.

Table 1.2 – Overview of main methodological instruments used for the 2005 evaluation reports

	Desk research (use of national	Interviews with programme	Participation in & organisation of	Case studies, visits and interviews at DP	Surveys
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²⁰ We ignore what the situation is for NL.

	monitoring data, DP reports etc.)	stakeholders (other than DPs) and/or external actors	seminars and meetings	level	
AT	x	x	x	No DP case study for this report but case studies of enterprise participants	x (2)
BE _{FRG}	x	x	x	Not for this report	x
DK	x	x	x	x	x (3)
DE	x	x	x	x	x (2)
ES	x	x	x	x	x (3)
FI	x	x	x	x	x (4)
FR	x	x	x	x	x (2)
GR	x	x	x	x	x
IE	x	x	x	x	No
IT	x	x	x	x	No
LU	x	x	x	x	No
NL	x	x	No	x	x (4)
PT	x	x	x	x	x (3)
SE	x	x	x	x	No
UK _{GB}	x	x	No	x	x (3)
UK _{NI}	x	x	x	x	x (2)

Source: national evaluation reports (2005). The more developed table which served as a basis for this one and is presented in annex 1.2 has been checked by national evaluators (with the exception of the NL evaluators).

A more developed table is provided in Annex 1.2.

Desk research

Desk research usually consists of a review of policy and guidance documents as well as of the analysis of programme monitoring data. DP reports have also quite systematically been analysed, although in the countries with large EQUAL programmes this would naturally only concern a sample. Some evaluators have complemented the analysis of monitoring data with statistics on the target groups – e.g. the DK evaluators have studied the social security database, which provides quite a detailed picture of employment trajectories. However, as employment has not been an important outcome of the programme, only limited lessons could be derived. It is interesting to note that, in GR and PT, the evaluators have had access to the self-assessment reports and have analysed them, which, combined with surveys of DP co-ordinators and case studies, allows for a multi-stakeholder approach to the experience of DPs. We ignore the ways in which these reports have been accessed, and of course this raises questions as to the status of self-assessment. However, in principle, the consultation of DP evaluators by the national evaluator appears as an interesting approach, which could also form the basis for the formation of a network (or ‘community’) of EQUAL evaluators and thus consolidate the evaluation practices in these countries.

Interviews with programme actors and external actors

Interviews with programme actors on implementation issues, i.e. with the Managing Authority, the National Support Structure, members of the Monitoring Committee, have been carried out by almost all evaluators, contrary to what we had found in our 2nd interim report. In addition, NTN moderators and experts were often interviewed. In FR, this involved an exhaustive survey of officials of regional support structures, a relevant approach in a country in which programme implementation has been devolved, and for the knowledge that these actors have of the DPs on their territories.

External actors, such as experts or officials of other public administrations were only interviewed in few countries. In FR, again, an interesting approach, in principle, has been to interview 30 staff of the Public Employment Service, not involved in EQUAL, to identify links between EQUAL and on-going policies (especially the Social Cohesion Plan): these can be considered as interviews with potential policy users of the EQUAL results. However, as far as we could see, not many lessons could be derived from their responses as they seemed to have only a generic knowledge of EQUAL. In other countries such an enquiry has taken place more at DP level, which turned out to be more useful (see below, case studies).

Participation in and organisation of events with programme actors

Here the focus and purpose of such methods is varied – they can be one more mechanism for gathering data, or, as well, a way to engage with DPs or programme actors in a more interactive way. As a source of information, such methods seem all the more useful when the number of participants is small and the agenda is focused: in other cases there is a risk of gathering only rather general information and opinions.

On the one hand, it has been frequent for evaluators to attend DP meetings, whether national or transnational, i.e. to carry out ‘participant observation’. Evaluators have also attended other types of meetings involving DPs, for example NTN meetings. Several evaluators have set up or contributed to set up meetings with DPs, to discuss specific issues: in IT and PT for example, regional and provincial conferences were organised, which represented a major source of information for the evaluators. Such meetings could also serve to gather DPs’ feed-back on the evaluation, as in FI. The GR evaluators set up focus groups with participants in DP actions (outside of the individual DP case study context). In addition, the IT evaluators also organised an evaluation group with the officials of the Ministry and the Regions, where mainstreaming strategies were discussed.

In three countries (AT, DE and PT), workshops were organised with DP evaluators, which is an interesting way of capitalising on the knowledge of these actors without running into the issues raised by the use of self-assessment reports. This also provides a multi-stakeholder view on DPs, since DP co-ordinators have also been surveyed or interviewed.

There were also in some cases, group discussions with selected experts and/or programme actors, for example on innovation (in DK and FR).

Case studies of DPs and interviews at DP level

Case study methodologies and samples vary widely across evaluators. Some evaluators have only carried out a small number of case studies, with a specific focus. Thus the DE evaluators carried out 10 case studies of R1 DPs on innovation (sample = 10%); the DK evaluators carried out 4 case studies (sample = 19%) in order to identify the characteristics of ‘good projects’; the FR evaluators carried out 12 case studies of round 1 DPs on transnationality; 9 case studies of R1 DPs on best practice of capitalisation and 11 case studies of R1 DPs on self-assessment (total = 14%). The IE and IT evaluators are also in this configuration.

Other evaluators carried out more exhaustive case studies, on a wide range of issues, with a representative sample of DPs. This has been the case in ES, PT and the UK^{gb}, with samples respectively of 25% R1 DPs and 16% R2 DPs (ES); 23.5% R1 DPs (PT); and 36% R1 DPs (UK^{gb}).

The sampling in PT was particularly interesting as it was based on a prior clustering of DPs in 5 groups (see below). The variety of views gathered by the UKgb evaluators, which we already signalled in our 1st Interim, Mid-term and 2nd Interim reports, is impressive: interviews took place with project managers, key staff, partners, steering group members, transnational partners and beneficiaries. Only the ES evaluators mention case studies of Action 3 projects specifically, but this is also due to the fact that in many countries Action 3 was automatically carried out by all DPs, and the review of Action 3 projects probably formed part of the scope of the case studies.

The FI evaluators have developed, since the beginning of the evaluation, an on-going communication with all FI DPs. Interviews have taken place regularly with DP co-ordinators, project co-ordinators and other partners. The GR evaluators have also carried out interviews with all 40 DPs, and had more in-depth case studies with 8 of them. Such comprehensive approaches would be expected in smaller programmes, but, amongst these, only the UKni evaluators carried out case studies of all R1 and R2 DPs.

Finally, at this stage of the evaluation where it was relevant to look outside DPs and assess dissemination and take up of results, the methodology adopted by the SE evaluators appears as quite relevant, with the interviews of about 35 potential and actual users of DP lessons. The UKgb evaluators included such interviews in their case studies. The IT and PT evaluators also interviewed ‘external partners’.

Surveys

Nearly all evaluators carried out surveys of R1 DPs, although some addressed all partners, alongside or in parallel with DP co-ordinators and others focused on DP co-ordinators. Response rates varied widely, from about 1/3 (in AT – where all partners were surveyed – and FR) to 100%. Again surveys could be general and address implementation issues as well as results or could be more focused on specific aspects. In PT two surveys were carried out with R1 DPs, one on Action 2, and one on Action 3 projects.

R2 DPs were surveyed in DK, ES, FR, NL, PT and the UKgb usually with very high response rates. The UKgb carried out interviews of unsuccessful R2 applicants as well, as they had done in R1, a very useful tool for assessing the selection process.

A few evaluators carried out surveys of beneficiaries, with varied success as could be expected given the difficulty to contact beneficiaries especially once the action has come to an end. The AT evaluators carried out a unique and difficult exercise of surveying participants in 2 waves, one in 2004 and one in 2005. The loss was very significant (only one third of the 1st wave respondents could be included in the 2nd wave). The 2nd wave also included new participants (up to a total of 875 responses). The ES evaluators surveyed 2,000 participants (we ignore the response rate), the NL evaluators about 1,150 participants (2.8% response rate), and the PT evaluators reached 44.4% of participants having completed training courses (we ignore the absolute figure). These surveys bear on expectations and outcomes for participants, including soft outcomes. They provide a general view on the effectiveness of the programme with respect to concrete outcomes (employability, employment, business creation, advancement in work). However, as they cannot be related to the specific innovations produced by single DPs, it is difficult to derive lessons as to which DPs and DP projects have really made a difference for beneficiaries.

There have been other surveys as well. For example, the DE evaluators surveyed DP-level evaluators, again, an interesting step for contrasting views with those of the DP co-ordinators. The FI evaluators carried out, in addition to their DP surveys, a survey of NTN steering group members and one focused on the adaptability priority (survey to individual and enterprise participants).

Other

Few other tools were added to this already impressive array of methodological instruments. The most original one has been the cluster analysis developed by the PT evaluators, as already mentioned. These clusters not only served for the elaboration of the case study sample, but also to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme.

The clustering criteria used concerned project management and partnership issues. They included: budget size; quality of the diagnosis assessment; consistency between objectives and activities; quality of self-assessment; diversity of partners; and extent to which tasks are distributed amongst partners. 5 DP clusters were defined on that basis²¹.

1.2.2.2. The national evaluation reports in the New Member States

The evaluation process in the NMS

9 NMS out of 10 proceeded to an evaluation of their EQUAL programme which led to the publication of evaluation reports, validated by evaluation committees at the end of 2005 for some of them.

As far as we know, the national evaluation process usually took more time than planned and important delays were noted in half of the NMS. However this is due to a very tight schedule in the first instance (evaluators had very few weeks and in addition, these were during Summer):

- in HU, evaluators only had 7 weeks to give their conclusions;
- In PL, the evaluation report was prepared in 2 months;
- In LT, LV and SI, evaluators only had 6 weeks (at least initially) to complete their report.

In addition, at least in several cases, evaluation budgets were very limited.

Member States have made different decisions concerning the overall timeframe of the evaluation:

- In the first group of MS, evaluators were appointed up to the first evaluation report. In those NMS (EE, HU, LV, SI, CZ), the MA did not want to be committed for all the period. They will organise a new call for tender for the next evaluation report (September 2006).
- In the second group of MS, evaluators are appointed up to the end of the programme, ie for 3 years, beginning in 2005 and finishing in 2008 (MT, LT, SI).

We also noted that in 4 cases the evaluation team was supported by evaluation experts from the OMS (the MT evaluator worked with a NL consultancy, the HU evaluator is a subsidiary of a DK consultancy, the EE evaluation has been carried out by a consultancy partly held by a NL consultant, the LT evaluator asked for some expertise from a NL consultant, precisely from the EE-based company).

In most cases, the period covered by the evaluation reports extends from June 2004 to June 2005 except for CZ (where more recent findings are included as field work lasted until December 2005). Thus, in a majority of NMS, DPs had only been operational for a few weeks at the time of the evaluation.

The evaluation process has led to the production of one single report, except in PL where 2 evaluation reports were presented.

²¹ 1. Projects with evidence of underrating by formal evaluation processes. 2. 'Short sighted' projects. 3. Ambitious projects. 4. Projects with work load concentration on few partners. 5. Poorly structured projects.

All of them were approved, though not always straight away (the LT Managing Authority requested re-submission). In EE the managing authority decided to publish a written reaction to the report, stating its main points of disagreement.

Some smaller countries had difficulties to identify an evaluation team, especially where there were possible conflicts of interest (LV) but the main difficulties may have come from the limited budgets dedicated to the evaluation in the NMS especially in LT, LV, EE and PL.

Some of the evaluators come from private consultancy companies (HU, MT, LT, LV, SK, SI, CZ) and only a few are coming from the University (e.g. LV).

Scope and objects of the national evaluation reports

The table below maps out the scope of national evaluation reports against the evaluation questions outlined in the TOR proposed by the European Commission.

In most of the 9 NMS, the Managing Authority followed the recommendations of the European Commission for evaluation and used the model of Terms of Reference provided, although not answering to all questions. For example, no assessment of monitoring systems was carried out in HU and MT. In PL, appropriateness of strategy was not a topic of the evaluation report. In SK, management at DP level was not addressed. Self assessment approaches were not evaluated in MT, HU and SK. 2 NMS (SI and SK) had more global difficulties in following the EC's evaluation guidelines.

In theory, the implementation of the EQUAL principles, except transnationality, was not to be assessed at this stage. Nevertheless, in some reports, partnership or empowerment have been studied. Furthermore, in LT, recommendations for mainstreaming were given.

Finally, some questions that were not included in the TOR were addressed by the evaluators, for example, concerning management and implementation systems at the CIP level, the role of Managing Authority, the question of eligibility of expenditure and the role of MA in facilitating mainstreaming were addressed in EE, the selection procedure was also addressed in LV and in HU.

Table 1.3 – Scope of evaluation reports in the NMS

Proposed topics of evaluation (source : terms of reference proposed by the European Commission)	CZ	EE	HU	LT	LV	MT	PL	SI	SK
1. Appropriateness of strategies	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
Clear priorities?	x	x	x	x	x	x	no	x	x
Taking forward domestic priorities? Addressing real policy (delivery) needs and emerging labour market issues?	x	x	x	x	x	x	no	partly (1)	partly
Addressing the variety of local, regional and national social and economic contexts?	x	x	x	x	x	x	no	partly	x
Consistency between DP work programmes and CIP priorities?	x	x	x	x	partly	x	x	x	x
2. Management and implementation systems at CIP level	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	partly	partly
What type of organisations is involved in the management of EQUAL in the Member States?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Selection criteria? Weighting? Gender perspective?	x	x	x	partly	x	x	x	x	x
How effective is the monitoring system?	x	x	x	x	x	partly	x	no	partly
What guidance have the national management authorities provided for DPs in their self-assessment?	x	x	no	x	x	partly	x	no	partly
3. Management and implementation systems at DP-level	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	partly	yes	partly	no
Core partners. Participation of non-traditional partners. Participation of all relevant partners.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	no
What procedures have been put in place in order to agree on objectives to develop a strategy, and to identify key priorities for activity?	x	x	x	x	x	no	x	no	no
Effectiveness of monitoring systems?	x	x	x	x	x	no	x	no	partly
Budget appropriateness?	x	x	x	x	x	no	x	no	partly
What use has been made of the self-assessment at DP level?	x	x	not started	not started	x	no	x	no	no
4. Management and implementation systems at Transnational Cooperation level	yes	yes	yes	partly	partly	partly	partly	no	no
How have DPs ensured that transnational activities provide added value to their strategy?	x	x	x	no	x	no	no	no	no
Thematic field of transnational partners, impact of different thematic fields.	x	x	partly	no	x	no	no	no	no
Role definition, decision making procedures, organisational arrangements	x	x	no	no	partly	no	x	no	no
Budget appropriateness?	x	x	x	x	partly	x	no	no	no
Barriers to transnationality	x	x	no	no	partly	no	x	no	no
Effectiveness of monitoring systems?	x	x	partly	partly	partly	no	partly	no	no
Implementation of principles (across thematic fields)	x	x	no	no	no	partly	x	x	partly

(1) 'Partly' means here that the question was not treated in depth by the evaluation report.

Source: National evaluation reports in the NMS.

In our view, it would have been relevant to provide more in-depth analyses on the following issues:

- *Information campaigns and publicity on EQUAL*: especially in the new Member States, where the concept of partnership proposed by EQUAL could be new, it seemed interesting to know who had been targeted in the run up to the application phase, who had participated in the information meetings etc.
- *Selection*: the only question asked by the model Terms of Reference proposed by the European Commission concerns the evaluators' 'opinion' on the selection criteria (their definition, weighting, and the application of a gender perspective), but no analysis of the selection *process* is required. There are no questions, for example, on who was responsible for the selection (were external experts appointed? On what basis? What was their influence? Was there a selection committee? What was its influence?), on possible conflicts or tensions or disagreements during the selection process and how these were to be solved and were effectively solved, on the overall fairness of the process and its capacity to deliver a mix of DPs which actually had the best potential to reach the CIP objectives, on selection rates (which can be very different by theme as in EE), on what happened with the non-selected DPs etc.
- *Overall programme consistency*: EQUAL is more than a sum of DPs, it is a programme, at the national level. The CIP orientation, the selection criteria, the priorities decided by DPs, and then the mainstreaming strategies, especially vertical mainstreaming by public authorities, all contribute to making it a policy change programme: it would have been interesting if evaluators had been invited to provide their first analysis on how all this was taking shape in their country.
- *The question of programme management* is dealt with only through the composition of the different programme management structures and the monitoring system. However staffing, human resources, capacity, and guidance issues should, in our view, have been researched, especially in the context of capacity building in the NMS.

In terms of evaluation scope and objects, the HU evaluation report also presents the main conclusions of the implementation of the EQUAL Pilot programme in R1, which had been managed by the Ministry of Education at that time (this is not the case anymore). The HU evaluator formulated 3 conclusions: 1) the pilot programme did not really have a strong influence on the new programme 2) the way in which the pilot programme was handled was very different from the way in which the EQUAL programme is handled today 3) TN activities require higher resources than in the PHARE phase and the number of partners has to be increased.

Mapping of evaluation methods used by the national evaluators

The following table (see details in annex 1.3) maps out the methods adopted by national evaluators.

All evaluators resort to a *mix of methods* and tools ranging from documentary analysis to interviews at various levels of implementation and quite often surveys. But it is interesting to note that case studies and workshops/seminars are rarer : case studies were carried out in only 2 NMS (PL, CZ) while seminars and/workshops were developed in 3 NMS (HU, LT, SK). One explanation is that in most of the NMS, evaluators did not have, as said, enough time to write their report, whereas case studies are very time consuming. However, in a 'qualitative' initiative such as EQUAL, and in the NMS context of capacity building, resort to case studies appears as highly relevant.

Interviews/surveys of DPs not selected in preparation phase were usually not organised, except in MT. Such interviews are usually quite informative for the assessment of the selection process, but, as said above, the selection process has not been a frequent evaluation topic.

In two member States, the evaluation methodology adopted has been very restrictive, and may have been insufficient for carrying out a proper evaluation exercise: In SK the evaluator was not supposed to interview anybody else than the representatives of the Ministry. As a consequence, these interviews

were together with a documentary analysis, the only methodological tools used to carry out the evaluation. Similarly, in SI, the evaluators only carried out an interview of the MA and did not have any contact with selected DPs.

Table 1.4 – Mapping of evaluation methods in the NMS

	Documentary analysis	Interviews with programme level	Surveys of applicants	Case studies	Workshops/ seminars
CY	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
CZ	x	x	x	x	no
EE	x	x	x	no	no
HU	x	x	x	no	x
LV	x	x	x	no	no
LT	x	x	x	no	x
MT	x	x	x	no	no
PL	x	x	x	x	no
SI	x	x (but only with MA)	no	no	no
SK	x	x	no	no	x

NA = Not available

Source: National evaluation reports in the NMS.

1.3. STATE OF PLAY

At the end of R1 and at the beginning of R2, EQUAL can be said, first of all, to have stimulated a very intense networking activity across the EU, for combating inequalities and discrimination in the labour market:

Table 1.5 - Distribution of R1 DPs by CIP and by thematic priority

	Our sources	1A	1B	2C	2D	3E	3F	4G	4H	5I	TOTAL	% TOTAL
OMS												
AT	AR 2004	21	8		12	3			11	3	58	4.3%
BEfrg	ER 2005	17		5		11		3		1	37	2.7%
BEnl	AR 2004	9	1	1	3	3			1	1	19	1.4%
DE	ECDB & ER	45	6	8	8	10	13	5	5	9	109	8.1%
DK	National data	11				3			4	1	19	1.4%
ES	ER	48	7	25			24	22	32	1	159	11.8%
FI	ER	14	5		6		8		2	1	36	2.7%
FR	ECDB	66	22	23	28	35	28	25		4	231	17.1%
GR	ECDB & ER	11	3	6	5	5	5		4	1	40	3.0%
IE	ECDB & ER	10		3		5		2		1	21	1.6%
IT	ECDB & ER	84	7		71	81			34	2	279	20.6%
LU	ECDB & ER	1						1		1	3	0.2%
NL	AR 2004	30	2	10	7	15	5	12	8	6	95	7.0%
PT	AR 2004	30	5	21	6	5	24	5	5	1	102	7.5%
SE	ECDB	16		6		17			5	3	47	3.5%
UKgb	ECDB & ER	23	9	13	8	11	5		4	3	76	5.6%
UKni	ECDB & ER	5							1		6	0.4%
TOTAL OMS		441	75	121	154	204	112	75	116	39	1337	98.9%
NMS												
CZ	CIP R2	4	1	2		1	1	1			10	0.7%
HU	ECDB	5									5	0.4%
TOTAL NMS		9	1	2		1	1	1			15	1.1%
TOTAL		450	76	123	154	205	113	76	116	39	1352	100%
Distribution of DPs across priorities		33.3%	5.6%	9.1%	11.4%	15.2%	8.4%	5.6%	8.6%	2.9%	100%	

Sources: AR = Annual Reports prepared by the Managing Authorities. ER= national evaluation reports. ECDB = European Common Database.

- **1,352 Development Partnerships (DPs) in Round 1 (R1)**, gathering about 14,000 partners across the 19 initial CIPs (including CZ and HU)²²;
- **1,999 DPs in round 2 (R2)**, gathering about 13,300 partners across the 27 CIPs, including all New Member States;
- **453 Transnational Co-operation Partnerships (TCPs) in R1** (34% gathering 2 DPs, 33% gathering 3 DPs, 20% gathering 4 DPs, and 13% gathering 5 or more DPs)²³;
- Possibly **715 TCPs in R2**²⁴ gathering 2,040 partners;

²² Source: ECDB. The number of partners has to be taken as an approximation, as the data has not been updated since 2003 and we know that the data was inaccurate for some countries at the time.

²³ Source: 1st EU-wide evaluation report (2003), on the basis of data provided by the EQUAL Unit.

- A minimum of **693** Action 3, i.e. dissemination transfer and mainstreaming projects (some of them collective projects gathering several DPs) across the 14 CIPs for which we have data;
- **97 National Thematic Networks** in R1; as well as
- Numerous encounters and events, at the regional, national and European level. Amongst the latter, some events have given rise to more stable European networks (e.g. on ex offenders issues, in the social economy etc.)

Table 1.6 – Action 3 projects in EQUAL R1

	TOTAL DPs in Action 2	Total Action 3 projects	Number of National Thematic Networks
			(b)
AT	58	58	11
BEfrg	37	37	5
BEnl	19	N/A	3
DE	109	109	14
DK	19	7	4
ES	159	98	3
FI	36	36	5
FR	231	80	9
GR	40	40	4
IE	21	21	2
IT	279	37	2
LU	3	3	-
NL	95	95	5
PT	102	N/A	9
SE	47	N/A	8
UKgb	76	73	8
UKni	6	6	1
CZ	10	N/A	4
HU	5	N/A	0
TOTAL	1,352	693	97

Source: National evaluation reports

²⁴ Source: Presentation by the EQUAL Unit in the Meeting of Managing Authorities of 30/6/2005. At the time, the total of 715 TCAs included: 58 in force, 522 in Managing Authority approval, 21 at DP validation stage, and 73 rejected TCAs (usually the TCAs rejected are revised and finally approved). No data was available thereafter.

Table 1.7 – Distribution of R2 DPs by CIP and thematic priority

	1A	1B	2C	2D	3E	3F	4G	4H	5	Total	% difference with R1	% TOTAL
OMS												
AT	24	4	0	8	5	0	0	7	4	52	-10%	2.6%
BEfrg	19	0	7	0	7	0	1	0	1	35	-5%	1.8%
BEnl	9	1	2	4	10	0	2	3	1	32	+68%	1.6%
DE	48	8	9	9	15	16	8	9	8	130	+19%	6.5%
DK	4	0	0	0	2	0	0	10	1	17	-10%	0.9%
ES	72	13	37	0	0	38	32	36	1	229	+44%	11.5%
FI	15	7	0	13	0	10	0	7	1	53	+47%	2.7%
FR	72	21	21	18	30	35	14	0	8	219	-5%	11.0%
GR	15	6	9	10	6	8	5	3	2	64	+60%	6.5%
IE	9	0	3	0	5	1	2	0	2	22	+5%	1.1%
IT	119	8	0	111	123	0	0	51	6	418	+50%	20.9%
LU	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	0%	0.2%
NL	43	2	15	7	27	4	5	11	3	117	+23%	5.9%
PT	19	6	16	6	3	22	9	4	1	86	-16%	4.3%
SE	10	0	3	0	8	0	0	3	1	25	-47%	1.3%
UKgb	28	9	13	10	16	11	1	6	4	98	+29%	4.9%
UKni	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	13	+117%	0.7%
TOTAL OMS	516	85	135	196	257	145	80	155	44	1613	+19%	80.3%
Distribution of DPs across priorities (OMS)	32.0%	5.3%	8.4%	12.2%	15.9%	9.0%	5.0%	9.6%	2.7%	100%		
NMS												
CY	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	7		0.4%
CZ	12	3	10	9	9	4	4	4	4	59		3.0%
EE	5	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	1	13		0.7%
HU	16	0	0	0	16	0	0	5	2	39		2%
LV	4	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	1	9		0.5%
LT	20	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	1	28		1.4%
MT	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	5		0.3%
PL	37	0	0	24	0	25	12	0	3	101		5.1%
SK	23	14	0	24	0	21	0	14	3	99		5.0%
SI	16	0	0	0	5	0	0	4	1	26		1.3%
TOTAL NMS	138	17	11	57	30	50	37	28	18	386		19.7%
Distribution of DPs across priorities (NMS)	35.8%	4.4%	2.8%	14.8%	7.8%	13.0%	9.6%	7.3%	4.7%	100%		
TOTAL	654	102	146	253	287	195	117	183	62	1999		100%
Distribution of DPs across priorities (all)	32.7%	5.1%	7.3%	12.7%	14.4%	9.8%	5.9%	9.2%	3.1%	100%		

Source: ECDB April 2006.

In both rounds, development partnerships have been formed mostly to address the employability and lifelong learning priorities, both reflecting the priorities set by Managing Authorities in line with the European Employment Strategy and possibly the experience in European work thanks to the previous Community Initiatives. However, the weight of these priorities has decreased in R2; conversely the weight of the DPs located in the social economy, addressing adaptability issues and gender segregation, has increased. The social economy and gender de-segregation may have attracted more interest due to the visibility acquired in R1. The rise in adaptability DPs may be due to the increased attention given to restructuring, especially in two New Member States (PL and SK) but also in ‘Old’

Member States (DE, ES, FR and UKgb have invested more or much more in this priority in R2 than in R1)²⁵.

This partnership and networking experience has given rise to a stock of experience in terms of project and partnership management, with the learning or further development of modes of working with partners – nationally and transnationally, the development of project management methods – in particular with regard to monitoring and evaluation, and learning on ways of implementing equal opportunities policies in the organisations taking part in EQUAL and in their projects. This stock of experience, which it is the remit of this evaluation report to analyse and assess²⁶, is in the process of being capitalised in view of the next ESF programming phase²⁷.

It has also given rise to new practices or improvements in existing practices for combating labour market discrimination and inequalities – again the extent and nature of this contribution is assessed further in this report (see especially Chapters 5 and 10). At the European level, this contribution has started to be described and disseminated, through the publication of 29 ‘policy briefs’ and 30 ‘success stories’ so far (see Chapter 9 for an analysis). The European Commission is currently preparing an electronic database or repository of EQUAL good practices and DP lessons and products, with links to the national databases. 300 products and practices should be presented in this database.

²⁵ See Chapter 2 for an analysis of the strategic choices made in the R1 CIPs and Chapter 11 for the analysis of strategies in the NMS.

²⁶ See Chapters 3-8 and Chapters 12-13.

²⁷ See Chapter 9.

2. APPROPRIATENESS OF STRATEGIES

2.1. EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The Terms of Reference for the EU-wide evaluation requested an assessment of the appropriateness of strategies in EQUAL on the basis of the following criteria:

- The clarity of the priorities identified in the CIPs;
- The consistency and complementarity of the policies identified with those of ESF as a whole and with national employment policy. A focus on existing gaps was expected;
- The responsiveness to the diversity of local contexts;
- The consistency between DP objectives and CIP priorities.

In this Chapter, we have sought to answer these evaluation questions by building upon the results of the analyses carried out for the 1st Interim, Mid-term and 2nd Interim reports as well as by addressing the main changes between the two EQUAL rounds, especially with regard to:

- The choice of thematic priorities and their definition;
- The definition of target groups; and
- The relevance of strategies in the national policy contexts.

Our main sources have been the 2005 national evaluation reports and the previous synthesis reports at the EU level. We have complemented these with an analysis of ECDB data.

The evaluation of the appropriateness of strategies at the national level

Most of the 2005 national reports have addressed the theme of appropriateness of strategies through a specific analysis and pointing out the main changes that have occurred between the first and the second round of EQUAL.

Two evaluation teams (AT, DE) did not specifically address this issue in their 2005 report, but had done so in their Mid-term reports. However the DE evaluators stress the continued relevance of the programme and do not see any need for programme adjustments. In FR, the report does not have a specific chapter on this subject, but the evaluators analysed the consistency of the revised CIP with the priorities of the National Action Plan, the National Inclusion Plan and the European Employment Strategy. The UKgb report addresses appropriateness in a broad way.

The evaluators who addressed appropriateness of strategies did so in a similar way. The questions asked, scope and criteria are usually the same. Their analysis usually included:

- *An assessment of external coherence and consistency* of the CIP, namely the coherence of the programme with other national programmes with related objectives. This analysis was carried out by the LU, PT, FI, UKni, BEfrg, IE, and DK evaluators;
- *A reassessment of appropriateness*, understood as the relevance of programme priorities and objectives with regard to the changes in the political and socio-economic environment. This analysis was carried out by the UKni, PT, IE, DK and ES evaluators;

- *An assessment of the internal consistency* of the programme, i.e. of the consistency of programme objectives with priorities and actions. This analysis was carried out by the LU, PT, UKni and GR evaluators;
- *An assessment of the complementarity of the programme with national policy*, carried out by the FI and NL evaluators.

2.2. CIP RELEVANCE AND CONSISTENCY

2.2.1. Clarity and focus of CIP priorities

In our Mid-term report, we had indicated that there seemed to be a tension between the need for CIPs to clearly define target groups and priorities, and the need to leave a certain flexibility to DPs. National evaluators seemed to disagree on this matter, some of them advocating more specifications at CIP level, whilst others validated the choice made to leave an important margin of manoeuvre for DPs to define their orientations. On reflection, the analysis of DP priorities (see below) shows that homogeneity of actions across all themes, and, in some Member States, vague targeting of beneficiaries may have stemmed in part from a lack of specification at CIP level.

In a way, this lack of specification at CIP level could be said to derive from that of the EQUAL guidelines themselves. Thus a training project targeting the reintegration of women in the labour market could be eligible for funding, in principle, under theme 1A (facilitating access and return to the labour market); theme 3E (promoting lifelong learning and inclusive work practices which encourage recruitment and retention); or under theme 4G (reconciling family and professional life, as well as the re-integration of men and women who have left the labour market). As a result, several evaluators found that DPs tended to focus on labour market access and employability measures, whatever the thematic priority they operated under.

CIP focus and spread

In our first Interim Report, we had noted wide divergences in the extent of focus or, conversely, spread of thematic priorities in the various Member States. These different strategies were not necessarily related to the size of the programmes. Thus, in 8 CIPs, all priorities (DE, GR²⁸, NL, PT), or all but one or two priorities (BEnl, ES, FR, UKgb), had been selected. In 4 CIPs, 6 priorities had been selected out of 9 (AT, FI, IT). And in the other CIPs, one or less priority per pillar had been selected. Retrospectively, it can be said that opting for a focused or more spread programme appears as a strategic decision with important consequences for the effectiveness of the programmes, in particular with regard to mainstreaming.

Thus a large number of priorities allows for the spreading of risks, but at the same time requires more efforts by programme actors for the harnessing of innovation, the networking of DPs and the preparation of mainstreaming strategies, especially if the specificity of each thematic priority has been well defined. Conversely, more focused programmes provide less space for transnational exchange, but are more manageable on all fronts and more conducive to exchanges between DPs within the Member States concerned. Such strategies also facilitate mainstreaming, as efforts can be focused on the mobilisation of a smaller number of actors.

²⁸ Although finally no DP was selected in theme 4G (reconciling family and professional life) in R1.

2.2.2. Overall relevance

Despite some changes in the macro-economic environment, the CIPs are generally regarded as being still valid in their main orientations. National evaluators came to this conclusion even in the Member States in which the macroeconomic environment underwent major changes. Thus the deteriorated socio-economic situation in PT has increased the risk situations identified in the initial CIP diagnosis, and, logically the importance and relevance of EQUAL has been reasserted. Conversely it is the tensions in the IE labour market which increase the relevance of EQUAL: as the demand for labour was increasing and the percentage of unemployed was falling to its lowest level in three years, driven by expansion in the construction and financial sectors, bringing additional groups (people with disabilities, older unemployed, and migrants) into the market was an economic necessity.

However the main reason for the continued relevance of the CIPs is that EQUAL seeks to address structural inequalities, which were independent from the business cycle and unlikely to change in the short term. Thus the UKni evaluator mentions that, in spite of employment growth and a fall in unemployment, the NI labour market continues to face major structural weaknesses through a strong presence of marginalised groups, important gender differentials in terms of labour market participation and earnings, high levels of economic inactivity for women.

Nevertheless, as stressed in our Mid-term report, some evaluators had advocated a thematic adjustment in R2, in order to address the insufficiencies identified in R1. These included:

- An insufficient focus on specific groups faced with some form of disadvantage in the labour market, such as older workers in DK or people with disabilities in the UKgb.
- A lack of specification of the thematic priorities.
- A partly inadequate distribution of thematic priorities, which was not conducive to added value;
- The need to reintroduce specific issues, which had not been enough taken into account in the initial formulation of thematic priorities.

As explained below, several of these recommendations were taken into account.

In our 1st Interim report, we had ourselves highlighted several possible problems in terms of relevance of CIP priorities, some of which proved to be persisting lacks. For example, our diagnosis of labour market inequalities had shown that, whilst there were severe obstacles to labour market access of non-EU nationals in AT, DK, NL and SE, in the Southern European countries (ES, GR, IT), access was not so much of a problem, indeed unemployment rates were lower than average for non-EU nationals. However, in ES, FI, FR, SE and PT, the incidence of fixed-term employment was considerably higher than in other Member States. And in general, where fixed-term employment was high, non-EU nationals, as well as young people, and to a lesser extent, women, were much more likely to be in fixed term employment than the rest of the workforce. Despite these well known data, no initiative has, to our knowledge, been reported in the countries concerned, for the improvement of employment conditions of non-EU nationals and more generally very few initiatives have been reported for the improvement of the quality of employment contracts. As will be seen in Chapter 5, such initiatives were mainly found in the care sector. In any case the quality of employment for migrants seems to remain a pending issue, and, more generally, inequalities in employment conditions.

This problem links with another lack pointed out by some evaluators and highlighted in our Mid-term report, namely, in some cases, a lack of depth in the diagnosis of the causes of labour market discrimination and inequalities at CIP level. In particular, CIP diagnoses were, in some cases, directly derived from the National Action Plans for Employment or from other national programmes. Whilst this ensured a high consistency with the national labour market strategy, we had voiced doubts as to whether such general exercises can lead to the full exploitation of a programme such as EQUAL, designed to find new solutions for combating ingrained inequalities and discrimination. Some national

evaluators had pointed out to differences in the depth of analysis between themes, or to adequate diagnoses in ex ante evaluations but an unsatisfactory translation into the CIP documents and into operational priorities. In brief, progress was required in starting diagnoses, an issue which has not really been taken up in R2 but which remains valid for the future generation of programmes.

2.2.3. Consistency with national labour market policies

In most cases, national evaluators have stated that there is a high level of consistency between the CIPs and the wider employment policy orientations.

In our Mid-term report, we already stated that national evaluators either:

- Stressed a high level of consistency and ‘complementarity’ between the CIP and the national policy framework;
- Pointed to a high level of consistency but also of additionality with regard to national policies;
- Argued that their Member States were giving attention to new priorities through EQUAL.

In general, national evaluators stressed the consistency of EQUAL with the national policy framework, or at least with the NAPs and Objective 3.

Some national evaluation reports identified both consistency with national policies and additionality, as specific aspects addressed by EQUAL received less attention in the national programmes.

Thus the NL evaluators had pointed to a high consistency with the national mainstream policy, but found that EQUAL was focusing on different, more marginalised groups. Similarly in DK, this focus on marginalised groups not usually addressed in mainstream policy was quite apparent in the definition of the thematic priorities themselves, since the employability theme (theme 1A) was focused on ‘increasing the labour market integration and opportunities for immigrants, refugees and their descendants’ and the lifelong learning theme (theme 3E) was focused on ‘increasing the labour market integration and opportunities for the socially marginalised and people with physical and psychological disabilities’. In DE, the national evaluators had stressed that the relevance of EQUAL might rise in the context of budget cuts in employment subsidies. The ES evaluators had highlighted the relevance of the selection of themes which allowed to go further on ‘emerging issues’ in ES (fighting racism and xenophobia, reconciling work with family life, and asylum seekers). The AT evaluators had also found that some of the priorities of EQUAL, e.g. combating racism, lifelong learning and the social economy, were new features of employment and inclusion policy.

The 2005 national reports confirm and reinforce the analyses concerning the consistency of EQUAL with the national policy framework, its additionality and even its anticipation on specific changes in the labour market. Thus, for example:

- The BEfrg evaluators point out that the CIP is in line with the new orientations in employment policies (e.g. intensification of guidance to the unemployed with a focus on young people, more responsiveness to employer requirements, labour market integration of ‘new’ groups such as asylum seekers, older workers, etc.). *EQUAL has sometimes anticipated these changes by testing certain practices* (e.g. ‘*cellules de reconversion*’ – resource centres on restructuring). The evaluator recommends that this laboratory function be maintained and developed in policy making once EQUAL comes to an end.
- The IE evaluators particularly stressed the relevance of lifelong learning and up-skilling measures for the national economic objectives (becoming a more knowledge-based and innovative economy).
- In DK, the evaluators point out that the EQUAL function as a laboratory for supply-side labour market initiatives is a very good supplement to the Government’s growth strategy ‘Growth on

Purpose' and the employment strategy 'More people in Work'. The two strategies mostly focus on the demand side and try to strengthen growth through structural changes.

- The PT evaluators remark that recent political changes have determined a change in the emphasis given to social policy, which have reinforced the policy relevance of EQUAL. There are also strong potential synergies between EQUAL and the national programmes for Employment, Vocational Training and Social Development; Education; and for the Information Society.

Financial additionality

It is worth complementing these national assessments with our own assessment of the place of EQUAL in ESF in the Member States and in the wider context of active labour market policies (ALMPs)²⁹.

Table 2.1 – An approximation of the contribution of the ESF (Objectives 1 and 3) to the expenditure on ALMPs and the share of EQUAL in ESF in the Member States

	AT	BE	DK	FI	FR	DE	GR	IE	IT	LU	NL	PT	ES	SE	UK
ALMPs in % GDP	0,37	1,03	1,8	0,91	0,96	1	0,26	0,78	0,41		0,91	0,25	0,65	2	0,09
ALMPs in % GDP per unemployed (x10 ⁵)	27	36	146	38	4	3	6	115	2		46	12	3,5	87	0,6
ESF in % ALMPs	7,5	4	1,8	5,9	4,1	5,9	58,4	8,8	8,3	9,7	3,5	40	24,6	2,8	14,6
Share of EQUAL in planned ESF funding in %	13.7	6.8	6.8	9.0	5.1	4.4	2.3	2.9	4.4	9.2	9.9	2.4	8.2	4.2	5.3

Source : European Commission, 2001, Communication on European Social Fund Support for the European Employment Strategy. COM(2001) 16 final/2 and Employment in Europe 2002 for numbers of unemployed.

As can be seen from the above table, the contribution of ESF to the expenditure on ALMPs varies widely across Member States. It is residual in DK and SE; very limited in the NL, BE, FR; limited in FI, DE, AT, IE, IT; substantial in the UK, very substantial in ES and crucial in PT and GR. The share of EQUAL in ESF (which amounts to 5.6% for EU 15), is significantly above EU-average in AT, FI, LU, NL and ES. Conversely, EQUAL has a minor financial weight by comparison with total ESF resources in PT and GR.

Unfortunately, national evaluators have not analysed co-funding in a systematic way. We have therefore used the information presented in the country fiches prepared for R2.

In most MS, co-funding is ensured by the Government and by other public institutions (such as social security and other public bodies), as well as by regional and local public authorities.

As is shown in table 1.2, in 12 out of the 27 CIPs, the Government is providing the whole of co-funding. In other CIPs, the Government provides nearly all co-funding, but requires 5% of matched funding by private resources (EE, FI, PT) or 10% (UKni). Finally, in some MS (IE, IT, PT), co-funding comes mainly from different public organisations at different levels. Unfortunately, we do not have any indication as to the actual volume of public co-funding in DE, FR, BENl, SE and the UKgb. In this last set of countries private co-funding or co-funding by NGOs is likely to have taken place.

²⁹ Source: 1st Interim report of the EU-wide evaluation.

The share of required co-funding was at 25% for the NMS (except CZ where it stands at 27%) as well as in IE and PT. In DE and ES, the share of co-funding varies with the type of regions (with objective 1 regions getting higher funding share of ESF). In the UKni the national funding is set at 35%. For all other MS, co-funding requirements amount to 50%.

Table 2. 2 – Share and source of co-funding

CIP	Share of co-funding	Source of co-funding	Comments
AT	50%	Government (full)	Ministry for Economic Affairs and Labour, Ministry for Education, Science and Culture, Ministry of Social Security and Generations
BEfrg	50%	Government (full)	N/A
BEnl	50%	Different Sources	Limited structural co-funding foreseen. Coordinators have to look for matched funding themselves
CZ	27%	Government (full)	National co-funding used for advance payments
DK	50%	Government (full)	
DE	36-56%	Different sources	Minimum 56% of co-funding in West-Germany and minimum 36% in East Germany. DPs have to find co-funding of ESF-funding by themselves
EE	25%	Government (nearly full) 5% other sources	Additionally, DPs must arrange 5% self-financing. ESF + national co-funding make up 95% of the budget of DP
ES	35% (varying from 25% to 50%)	Different sources	ESF-Funding amounts to 75% for Objective 1 regions and to 50% for all other regions. DPs have to find their co-funding by themselves
FI	50%	Government (nearly full) 5% other sources	Only in Theme F DPs are required to ensure 30% private funding
FR	50%	Different Sources	Each DP is responsible for finding match funding
GR	25%	Government (full)	N/A
HU	25%	Government (full)	N/A
IE	25%	Government partly and diverse sources	DPs must provide their own match funding however most of this originates as exchequer funding. R2 projects will receive a standard ESF allocation of 24,000 € and this will be co-funded by Government funding 8,000 € per project
IT	50%	Government (nearly full)	Including national, regional and local resources. Private funding is also admitted
LV	25%	Government (full)	N/A
LT	25%	Government (full)	N/A
LU	50%	Government (full)	N/A
MT	25%	Government (full)	N/A
NL	50%	Different sources	DPs have to find co-funding of ESF-funding by themselves
PL	25%	Government (full)	N/A
PT	25%	Government Partly	Social security budget or the entities (public sector) themselves at the rate of 25% of all public spending 5% by private sector profit organisations
SK	50%	Government (nearly full)	Government full if DP lead partner comes from the NGO sector If the DP lead partner comes from the private sector, the DP has to co-finance 5%
SI	25%	Government (full)	N/A
SE	50%	Different sources	DPs have to find co-funding of ESF-funding by themselves. Most co-funding is 'in kind' (e.g. salary costs for people working within the DP)
UKni	35%	Government (partly)	Other co-funding: 10%
UKgb	50%	Different Sources	DPs have to find co-funding of ESF-funding by themselves

Source: EU EQUAL website, country fiches.

The advantage of co-funding by the Government is linked to the nature of EQUAL as a 'laboratory'. The risks linked to the development of innovation are thus financed by public authorities. It would have been interesting to analyse the extent to which private funding had been mobilised and who have been the contributors, in the MS where public co-funding has not been automatically foreseen, but data is lacking.

The allocation of national public funds to promote innovation constitutes an added-value in itself. The AT evaluators argue that in the context of public spending cuts in some policy areas – as for example for the promotion of equal opportunities between men and women – public resources were mobilised which would certainly not have been spent on this issue and it is likely that no other resources would have been available. A similar comment has been put forward by the DE evaluators. Although

EQUAL plays only a minor role in DE with a share of 1 to 2 % of active labour market policy measures, its role for particular target groups has been much more important.

Consistency between DP objectives and CIP priorities

In our Mid-term report, we had highlighted that, although national evaluators generally found a good level of consistency between CIP priorities and DP objectives, some of them also alerted to possible pitfalls:

- *There was evidence, for example in the ES, NL and UKgb reports, that access to the labour market might represent an even stronger focus in the DP work programmes than was reflected in the thematic spread of EQUAL.* This however could also have been a consequence of a lack of definition of CIP priorities to start with, as suggested above. This early evidence has been partly confirmed by our analysis of DP actions, carried out for the identification of innovative practices in Chapter 5 below. In particular, DPs under themes 4G and 4H (equal opportunities pillar) have often offered training to women, whilst actions targeting the actual inequalities in company structures (recruitment and career advancement procedures for example) do not appear to have been a major focus.
- *Problems in the definition and numbers of beneficiaries:* even though EQUAL was never envisaged as a programme with quantitative objectives, the much lower numbers of beneficiaries could be indicative of a lack of adequate targeting in the first place or of a lack of adequate understanding of constraints for beneficiaries' participation. This was pointed out for example in the UKgb Mid-term report for all themes except theme 5I. Similarly, in their 2005 report, the BEfrg evaluators confirmed that rates of implementation have been very low (46% of targeted beneficiaries actually took part in training actions), especially in theme 3E (lifelong learning). Unfortunately, even at this stage of the implementation of EQUAL, we have very few data on the volumes and profiles of beneficiaries.
- Discrepancies in the definition of beneficiaries between CIP intentions and DP work programmes and actual interventions also lied in the *profile of beneficiaries*. Thus in BEfrg, the evaluators noted in their 2005 report that beneficiaries were not systematically the most vulnerable – but this was especially due to priority 2C (business creation), where expectations may have been unrealistic in that respect. In their Mid-term report, the UKgb evaluators had noted that themes 3E and 3F (which belong to the adaptability pillar and involve amongst others, skills-upgrading initiatives) may not have the results expected by the CIP since it was originally anticipated that 90% of those receiving support would be employed when in practice, this category only represented 27%. This links with the above mentioned issue that DPs have tended to privilege actions of support to labour market integration under all themes. Our overview of DP actions and innovations (Chapter 5) tends to confirm this, as actions in companies and targeting workers appear to have been few and far between. An indirect and imperfect indicator for this is the share of companies and trade unions amongst DP partners (however companies could very well take part in DP actions without being partners): according to the ECDB statistics, enterprises represented 11.8% of partners in R1 – but we have to bear in mind that the 'enterprise' category could very well include organisations with an enterprise legal status but not involved as *employers*, and trade unions, 5.2%.

Responsiveness to local needs

In our Mid-term report, we had pointed out that a majority of DPs constructed their projects at a very local level. Indeed, ECDB statistics showed a predominance of geographical DPs (59.2%) but that did not mean that geographical disparities between labour markets were tackled – and in fact very few CIPs paid attention to geographical imbalances. First elements on impacts (see Chapter 10) confirm that DP strategies have been very local – indeed mainstreaming to higher levels has been difficult so

far. But we are still unsure, overall, as to whether a share of DPs have been located in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Nevertheless remote rural areas have been targeted for example in ES and GR with some success (e.g. with actions targeting potential women entrepreneurs or through distance learning schemes). The UKgb evaluators had recommended that more attention should be paid to rural areas in R2. This recommendation has been followed in Scotland, where 2 DPs in theme 3E (lifelong learning) are focusing on remote rural areas. But again, we are still ill-equipped, even at this stage of the Initiative, for making more general assessments.

2.3. CHANGES BETWEEN R1 AND R2 AT CIP LEVEL

Most national evaluators have analysed the changes between R1 and R2 at CIP level in terms of evolution of the thematic priorities, the definition of target groups, the geographical scope and/or the links with employment and social inclusion national policies.

For some Member States no relevant changes are mentioned while in others, the CIPs have been revised and adjusted quite thoroughly on the basis of the lessons learnt in R1 and of national policy changes.

2.3.1. CIP priorities

The thematic priorities for R2 have remained exactly the same as for R1 in several CIPs (e.g. DE, IT, SE, UKni), due to their persistent contextual relevance.

In ES and PT **minor changes** were introduced. In ES, the only slight change with regard to the thematic priorities is that the *social economy* is explicitly included as eligible field of action under priority 2C. The evaluators also note that the adaptability priority (3F) makes more mention of possible actions in the social economy. The greater inclusion of the social economy in the programme, without allocating it to any specific thematic priority, had been a recommendation of the Mid-term evaluation. With regard to the financial distribution amongst thematic priorities, the ES evaluators also highlight the continuity between the 2 calls, with the clear dominance of thematic priority 1A (facilitating access and return to the labour market). The only notable change has been the reduction of the budget for the asylum seekers priority. The Mid-term evaluation had recommended the reduction of the financial allocation given the low rate of execution, itself due to the reduction of the target group. In PT, the only change concerns the more explicit reference to lifelong learning in priority 3E.

In LU, the three initial thematic priorities were maintained in R2. However no DP was finally selected in the asylum seekers theme. This remark needs to be balanced by the fact that LU has few DPs.

Conversely, some CIPs have been **adjusted** to better take into account specific or new labour market issues or to address the needs of new target groups.

In IE, the already mentioned focus on the expansion of the labour force has influenced the change in priorities by theme between R1 and R2. Indeed, individual projects in R2 specifically target groups such as early school leavers, travellers, older workers and those with disabilities, while in R1 this was less prevalent, with a greater number of projects concentrating on wider long-term unemployment or social exclusion issues covering a cross-section of target groups.

In DK, more emphasis has been given to the gender equality priority.

In FR, in R2 each theme has been specified to a greater extent and targeting has been changed. Thus the focus of Theme 1A (facilitating access and return to the labour market) is not ICT anymore: broader approaches are promoted to tackle disadvantage. Theme 1B (combating racism) is characterised by specific actions with/for 'travellers'. In Theme 2C (opening up business creation to all), mobilisation and empowerment of local authorities is a major objective. Age issues are given more prominence in Theme 3E (lifelong learning). Theme 3F (adaptability) has been refocused to

address sector shortages (construction industry, crafts). Theme 5I has been opened to victims of human trafficking. These changes were prompted by the need to take into account national policy changes between R1 and 2. The evaluators also point out that the revised priorities fit better with the EES and the NAP.

In the GR CIP, new horizontal priorities were defined, e.g. concerning people with disabilities. More emphasis was given to the social economy and asylum seekers priorities. In line with the 2nd communication on EQUAL, two new target groups were introduced in the CIP – victims of human trafficking and the Roma community. There was also a change in the thematic allocation of funding, in part informed by R1 results³⁰.

Finally it is worth noting that some progress was made in the **formulation of thematic priorities**, even when their broad orientation remained the same as in R1.

Thus, in ES, the evaluators noted important progress in the definition of thematic priorities in the CIP for R2 and especially in the Programme Complement. Examples of actions developed by R1 DPs were included, which makes each priority more concrete. The results and lessons from the Mid-term evaluation were also mentioned. This has helped R2 applicants to define their own objectives in a clearer way. The greater level of specification of thematic priorities in the FR CIP has already been noted above. Progress was also mentioned by the IT evaluators with regard to the formation of priorities at the regional level.

The improved definition of thematic priorities is likely to have had a direct impact on the quality of the DP selection and is likely to enhance programme relevance and results.

2.3.2. Target groups

Some MS have reoriented their CIPs toward specific target groups. This sometimes stemmed from the concern that the ‘hardest to reach’ had perhaps not been targeted enough in R1. However, other, more economic, considerations have also come into play, at least in some Member States, as new groups are also targeted in order to increase the labour supply. In any case, the more precise focus on well defined target groups was one way of making the added value of EQUAL in R2 more visible.

In the UKgb, there has been a greater focus on priority target groups who are seen as most likely to benefit from EQUAL. In other words, R2 DPs which are more likely to address particular target groups than R1 DPs, have been selected in priority to improve focus. Thus the evaluator notes that ‘in Theme 1A³¹, for example, there is an even more acute focus on ex-offenders in R2 – in line with current discussions on reform of the prison service/criminal justice system’. It was also decided to reduce the proportion of DPs with a national focus, which was matched by a corresponding increase of DPs with a sub-national focus. The evaluator clearly finds this shift appropriate.

In FR, as said, theme 5I (asylum seekers) has been opened to a new target group, victims of human trafficking.

In BEfrg, new attention has been given to DPs addressing young unemployed people.

³⁰ Funds were re-allocated to theme 1B (combating racism) from themes 1A (facilitating access and return to the labour market) and 3F (adaptability). This was done following the recommendation of the interim evaluation. Theme 2D (social economy) also received additional financial support, following the EC guidelines for the 2nd round. The evaluators consider the strengthening of theme 2D of particular importance. However they stress that the reduction of the budget for theme 3F could have been smaller and that more resources could have been removed from theme 2C (opening up business creation to all) since it had demonstrated a smaller degree of innovation than theme 3F.

³¹ Facilitating access and return to the labour market.

In IE particular attention is paid in R2 to school leavers, travellers, older workers and those with disabilities, in the context, as explained above, of a national strategy for increasing the labour supply.

It has to be noted that EQUAL had not initially encouraged a target group focus of interventions. On the contrary, the thematic approach was expected to lead to actions exploring new ways of tackling problems common to different types of discrimination and inequality, rather than focusing on a specific target group³². This accounted for example for the fact that the EQUAL guidelines required each thematic field to be ‘accessible to all such groups’ (par.14). However some Member States adopted a target group from the start (e.g. DK, where for example only refugees and immigrants were targeted in theme 1A – Facilitating access and return to the labour market). The new Member States have privileged an understanding of inequalities and discrimination by target group over and above the thematic approach (see Chapter 11, volume 2).

Overall, a focus on clear and specific target groups can improve the effectiveness of an initiative such as EQUAL. Some themes, in particular support to business creation (2C) have sometimes suffered from an insufficient focus. Similarly, given the very wide formulation of theme 3E (lifelong learning), and even of theme 3F (adaptability), actions targeting workers usually deprived of access to training do not seem to have been frequent. It has also been argued (see Chapter 5) that a clear target group focus facilitated the production of innovation.

On the other hand, focusing on target groups also means that the explanations of discrimination and inequalities may tend to be put in terms of deficits and lacks affecting the target groups rather than in structural terms (structural labour market inequalities). Although this is not necessarily the case, this tendency has been noted in some CIPs.

2.3.3. Evolution of DP distribution between R1 and R2

As a result of the adjustments made at CIP level, there have been changes in the thematic distribution of DPs in R2.

Globally, the number of DPs selected has increased by 21% between R1 and R2 in the OMS. However this overall increase conceals important differences between countries, as opposite choices were made. Thus the number of selected DPs for R2 *decreased* by 47% in SE, 16% in PT, 11% in DK and 10% in AT. Conversely, the most significant growth took place in the UKni (13 R2 DPs against 6 in R1) as a consequence of a very proactive communication campaign in the launch phase (see Chapter 3 below), in BEnl (+68%), GR (+60%) and IT (+50%). This Member State already had the largest number of DPs in R1. The greater decentralisation implemented in R2 is likely to underpin this important increase.

The increase was particularly high within some thematic priorities: +34% R2 DPs in Theme 4H (Reducing gender gaps); +29% in Theme 3F (Adaptability of firms and workers); +27% in Theme 2D (Social economy); and +26% in theme 3E (Lifelong learning and inclusiveness). Conversely, themes 4G (Reconciling family and professional life), 2C (Business creation) and 5I (Asylum seekers) have experienced the weakest increase.

Again, this overall picture of thematic evolution conceals important differences between Member States:

(a) In the MS with an overall drop in the number of selected DPs, two scenarii prevailed:

³² Source: Tender specification for the EU-wide evaluation on the Community Initiative EQUAL 2000-2006, p. 2.

- + *The drop concerns all thematic priorities*, evidencing a different way of using the EQUAL funds in R2 across all themes: this is the case of SE;
- + *The drop concerns some priorities but some themes have been allocated more DPs*: this corresponds to a *de facto* re-orientation of EQUAL even when the CIP priorities have not changed:
 - This is the case of AT with a strong increase of selected R2 DPs in 3 priorities (life long learning, asylum seekers and labour market integration) in spite of a weaker number of selected DPs in R2;
 - In BEfrg, more DPs have been selected in 2 themes (business creation and labour market integration);
 - In DK, theme 4H (Reducing gender gaps) has been allocated more DPs, which is consistent with the already mentioned greater emphasis on this theme decided in the CIP;
 - In FR, more DPs were selected in 3 themes (asylum seekers, adaptability and labour market integration); finally
 - In PT, more DPs were selected in theme 4G ('reconciling family and professional life').

(b) Similarly, amongst the MS with an increase of the overall number of DPs, two main trends can be distinguished:

- + *The increase has been general*, evidencing, as in SE but in an opposite direction, a different way of using the EQUAL funds in R2 across all themes: this is the case in ES, FI, GR, IT, UKgb and UKni.
 - in ES the increase in selected DPs has been particularly important in theme 1B ('combating racism'). However no major thematic reorientation has occurred.
 - In FI the increase concerns all priorities, but more so theme 4H ('Reducing gender gaps'), 2D ('social economy') and 1B ('combating racism');
 - In GR DPs were selected in theme 4G ('reconciling family and professional life') while none had been selected under this theme in R1;
 - In the UKni, attention was given to ensure that there would be a better balance between the 2 chosen themes than happened in R1. The Equal Opportunities theme had been under-represented (1 out of 6 DPs) despite it being an important issue for the NI labour market.
- + *The selection has served to focus the programme on a smaller number of priorities*:
 - In BEnl, the increase of selected DPs in R2 has been focused on themes 3E ('lifelong learning and inclusiveness'), 4G ('reconciling family and professional life') and 4H ('Reducing gender gaps');
 - In NL, two themes are less represented: 5I ('asylum seekers') and 4G ('reconciling family and professional life').

Table 2.3 – Evolution of DP distribution between R1 and R2

	1A			1B			2C			2D			3E			3F			4G			4H			5I			TOTAL		
	R1	R2	% change	R1	R2	% change	R1	R2	% change	R1	R2	% change	R1	R2	% change	R1	R2	% change	R1	R2	% change	R1	R2	% change	R1	R2	% change	R1	R2	% change
AT	21	24	14%	8	4	-50%				12	8	-33%	3	5	67%							11	7	-36%	3	4	33%	58	52	-10%
BEfrg	17	19	12%				5	7	40%				11	7	-36%				3	1	-67%				1	1	0%	37	35	-5%
BEnl	9	9	0%	1	1	0%	1	2	100%	3	4	33%	3	10	233%				2	2	100%	1	3	200%	1	1	0%	19	32	68%
DE	45	48	7%	6	8	33%	8	9	13%	8	9	13%	10	15	50%	13	16	23%	5	8	60%	5	9	80%	9	8	-11%	109	130	19%
DK	11	4	-64%										3	2	-33%							4	10	150%	1	1	0%	19	17	-11%
ES	48	72	50%	7	13	86%	25	37	48%							24	38	58%	22	32	45%	32	36	13%	1	1	0%	159	229	44%
FI	14	15	7%	5	7	40%				6	13	117%				8	10	25%				2	7	250%	1	1	0%	36	53	47%
FR	66	72	9%	22	21	-5%	23	21	-9%	28	18	-36%	35	30	-14%	28	35	25%	25	14	-44%				4	8	100%	231	219	-5%
GR	11	15	36%	3	6	100%	6	9	50%	5	10	100%	5	6	20%	5	8	60%	5	5	100%	4	3	-25%	1	2	100%	40	64	60%
IE	10	9	-10%				3	3	0%				5	5	0%	0	1	100%	2	2	0%				1	2	100%	21	22	5%
IT	84	119	42%	7	8	14%				71	111	56%	81	123	52%							34	51	50%	2	6	200%	279	418	50%
LU	1	2	100%															1	1	0%				1	0	-100%	3	3	0%	
NL	30	43	43%	2	2	0%	10	15	50%	7	7	0%	15	27	80%	5	4	-20%	12	5	-58%	8	11	38%	6	3	-50%	95	117	23%
PT	30	19	-37%	5	6	20%	21	16	-24%	6	6	0%	5	3	-40%	24	22	-8%	5	9	80%	5	4	-20%	1	1	0%	102	86	-16%
SE	16	10	-38%				6	3	-50%				17	8	-53%							5	3	-40%	3	1	-67%	47	25	-47%
UKgb	23	28	22%	9	9	0%	13	13	0%	8	10	25%	11	16	45%	5	11	120%		1	100%	4	6	50%	3	4	33%	76	98	29%
UKni	5	8	60%																			1	5	400%				6	13	117%
Total	441	516	17%	75	85	13%	121	135	12%	154	196	27%	204	257	26%	112	145	29%	75	80	7%	116	155	34%	39	44	13%	1337	1613	21%

Source: ECDB April 2006

The evolution of the DP distribution by theme is, at least in part, the outcome of strategic decisions made concerning the respective weight of priorities in R2, although it also depends on the greater or lesser attractiveness of the themes with potential applicants and on the quality of the applications received. The following table synthesises, for each EQUAL priority, those Member States which have increased/reduced significantly³³ the number of DPs selected.

Table 2.4 – Synthesis of evolution of DP numbers by theme

1A	MS with a significant DP increase (in %) in R2	ES, GR, IT, LU, NL, UKni
	MS with a significant DP decrease (in %) in R2	DK, PT, SE
1B	MS with a significant DP increase (in %) in R2	ES, FI, GR
	MS with a significant DP decrease (in %) in R2	AT
2C	MS with a significant DP increase (in %) in R2	BE _{nl} , ES, GR, NL
	MS with a significant DP decrease (in %) in R2	PT, SE
2D	MS with a significant DP increase (in %) in R2	FI, GR, IT
	MS with a significant DP decrease (in %) in R2	AT, FR
3E	MS with a significant DP increase (in %) in R2	AT, BE _{nl} , DE, IT, NL, UK _{gb}
	MS with a significant DP decrease (in %) in R2	SE, PT, FR, DK, BE _{frg}
3F	MS with a significant DP increase (in %) in R2	ES, FR, GR, IE, UK _{gb}
	MS with a significant DP decrease (in %) in R2	-
4G	MS with a significant DP increase (in %) in R2	BE _{nl} , DE, ES, GR, PT, UK _{gb}
	MS with a significant DP decrease (in %) in R2	BE _{frg} , FR, NL
4H	MS with a significant DP increase (in %) in R2	BE _{nl} , DE, DK, FI, IT, UK _{gb} , UK _{ni}
	MS with a significant DP decrease (in %) in R2	AT, SE
5I	MS with a significant DP increase (in %) in R2	AT, FR, GR, IE, IT, UK _{gb}
	MS with a significant DP decrease (in %) in R2	LU, NL, SE

Source: elaboration on the basis of ECDB April 2006.

We had noted, in R1, an insufficient focus on inequalities at work, in particular with regard to employment conditions. This is likely to continue in R2, judging from the ECDB statistics presented below. In a way, this could be expected since the new Member States still face more problems of unemployment and access to the labour market than problems of inequalities in working and employment conditions. However, the shift away from actions targeting people in work is very significant:

Table 2.5. – Main types of discrimination targeted by DPs in R1 and R2

Type of discrimination	R1	R2
Discrimination and inequality in employment	19.3%	5.6%
Low qualification	16.8%	19.7%
Unemployment	16.5%	20.8%
Gender	14.8%	16.2%
Disability	8.2%	7.7%
Racial	6.6%	7.8%
Targeting Asylum seekers	1.5%	1.5%
Other	8.5%	1.6%
Sexual orientation		1.0%
Religion/belief		0.8%
Age		6.9%
Support to entrepreneurship	7.9%	10.5%

Source: ECDB 01/01/2003 for R1 and 11/07/2006 for R2

³³ The definition of a significant increase or reduction of the number of DPs is not formal, but corresponds to our own appreciation of important difference between R1 and R2 of selected DPs for one theme with regard to the MS and thematic averages.

2.4. CONCLUSIONS

Clarity and focus of CIP priorities

There has been a *lack of differentiation* between thematic priorities in the EQUAL guidelines, and, consequently, in some CIPs, which in turn has contributed to a lack of differentiation between types of activities carried out by DPs across themes. In particular, there has been a tendency to focus on access to the labour market and employability measures. This lack of specification and differentiation may have accounted for the fact that actions at company level, tackling *inequalities at work* (employment contracts, access to training, career paths) have not often been reported: even in theme 3E (lifelong learning) it was possible for DPs to focus on training for access to jobs rather than training for employed workers.

Thematic priorities have been better defined and focused in R2. However, this enhanced focus has mainly stemmed from a better definition of target groups, and it is unclear whether *types* of eligible actions have been differentiated to a larger extent.

It has to be noted that EQUAL had not initially encouraged a target group focus of interventions. On the contrary, the thematic approach was expected to lead to actions exploring new ways of tackling problems *common* to different types of discrimination and inequality. However some 'old' Member States adopted a target group approach from the start. The new Member States have privileged an understanding of inequalities and discrimination by target group over and above the thematic approach. Although a target group focus facilitates effectiveness and monitoring, it can also lead to setting aside more general and structural factors of discrimination and inequality in the labour market.

In 9 CIPs, 7 to 9 priorities have been selected. In 4 CIPs, 6 priorities have been selected out of 9. And in the other CIPs, including all new Member States except CZ, one or less priority per pillar has been selected. Opting for a focused or more spread programme appears as a strategic decision with important consequences for the effectiveness of the programmes, in particular with regard to mainstreaming, as, when there are less thematic priorities, efforts can be focused on the mobilisation of a smaller number of actors.

Relevance of CIP priorities and consistency with (former) National Action Plans for Employment and ESF Objective 3

Overall there has been a high degree of relevance of CIPs to structural problems of inequalities and discrimination in the labour market, in both rounds and in most Member States. In 'old' Member States, this assessment did not vary between R1 and R2, given the structural character of the problems addressed.

Nevertheless, we had pointed out, early in the EU-wide evaluation process and on the basis of labour market data in EU-15, that some inequalities were not or not sufficiently targeted: in particular, in several Member States, inequalities affecting migrants are not primarily, or not only, in terms of labour market access, but in terms of employment conditions (fixed term contracts and low wages). However there is a lack of actions targeting in-work inequalities, for migrants and more generally, and ECDB data show that this has worsened in R2.

This may have been linked to a problem in the starting diagnoses in the CIPs, which have sometimes tended to be modelled on the National Action Plans for Employment but failed to provide an in-depth analysis of the causes underpinning discrimination and inequalities in the labour market. This lack of in-depth diagnosis was also highlighted at DP level in R1 and has undermined the effectiveness of DP actions and of the programmes in some Member States.

Responsiveness to local needs

In R1 a majority of DPs constructed their projects at a very local level. Indeed, ECDB statistics showed a predominance of geographical DPs (over sector-based DPs). However, this does not mean that geographical disparities between labour markets were tackled – and in fact very few

CIPs paid attention to geographical imbalances, although rural and remote areas were adequately targeted in some Member States (Southern Europe). The geographical focus of DPs has decreased slightly in R2, mainly due to the New Member States, which, because of the small size of their programmes, have generally preferred a sectoral, nation-wide focus, even though many partners are located outside the capital cities. Overall, therefore, it can be said that EQUAL has had a very local anchorage, but, even at this stage in the initiative, we lack the appropriate data to assess whether it has been able to address the problems of specifically disadvantaged areas.

Consistency between DP objectives and CIP priorities

Although there has generally been a good level of consistency between CIP priorities and DP objectives in R1, access to the labour market was sometimes an even stronger focus in the DP work programmes than was reflected in the thematic spread of EQUAL.

Discrepancies between CIP orientations and DP work programmes were also noted, in a few Member States, with regard to the profiles of targeted beneficiaries, in particular in themes 2C (business creation) and the two Adaptability themes (3E and 3F), where, as said, workers did not appear as the main target. This finding is reinforced by the fact that the share of enterprises taking part in EQUAL is rather low, all the more so that the statistical category ‘enterprise’ does not only represent employers but could designate any partner with a for profit legal status. However, even at this stage it is difficult to say more, due to the considerable lacks in the monitoring systems at all levels (DP, national and European levels).

Role of Mid-term evaluations

Generally speaking, as said above, the responsiveness of Managing Authorities to evaluators’ recommendations has been excellent, not only for the adjustment of CIP priorities in R2, but also for programme management. There have been examples of significant changes in the weight of priorities, towards priorities where most innovation had been detected by the evaluators (e.g. in GR); of indirect introduction of priorities which had not been targeted in R1 (e.g. the social economy in ES is explicitly included in priority 2C – business creation); of improved links with national policy agendas (lifelong learning in IE, measures targeting prisoners and ex offenders in the UKgb etc.). Evaluators’ recommendations have also been taken into account for the improved translation of the key principles into selection criteria (e.g. in terms of partnership size, the clearer justification of innovation, the presentation of mainstreaming plans, etc.).

3. MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION SYSTEMS

3.1. EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The Terms of Reference for the EU-wide evaluation included the following evaluation questions regarding the implementation of programme management in EQUAL:

- What types of organisations are involved in the management of EQUAL?
- What procedures for project selection have been put in place?
- What procedures have been put in place to develop a strategy, to identify key priorities for activity and to select projects?
- What criteria have been applied for the selection of DPs? How have these been weighted? Has the gender perspective been taken into account?
- What types of core partners are participating in the DP? To what extent have relevant partners been involved? Have DPs succeeded in involving non-traditional partners?
- To what extent did the key principles had an impact on the management and implementation system?
- How effective are the monitoring systems at CIP and at DP level?

For this final evaluation report, we have sought to go beyond the ToR questions and to structure the analysis of management and implementation systems in EQUAL around three main concerns:

- To what extent and how have the management systems, the selection procedures, the implementation dynamics and the monitoring systems contributed to the quality of EQUAL overall?
- To what extent and how have national evaluations fed back into programme management and implementation? and
- What changes and improvements have been introduced within the management system at the different stages of the implementation of the initiative?

In order to respond to these questions, we review implementation in R1 (section 3.3) and changes made in R2 (section 3.4 below). However elements of context are first recalled in section 3.2.

3.2. THE CONTEXT OF PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION IN THE (OLD) MEMBER STATES

The way in which programme priorities are framed and implemented and the type and extent of the influence that the programme may have on policy is highly dependent upon the programme actors, their relative influence and interests, and how decisions are made.

Key ‘moments’ shaping the programme include the elaboration of the CIP programming document, the selection process, implementation and dissemination and mainstreaming. The extreme heterogeneity of how these were designed in the various Member States is indicative of very different models and traditions of policy making, and more specifically of uses of the European Social Fund programmes.

In this section, we look at the institutional and organisational framework for the elaboration and delivery of the programme within the broader context of the institutional frameworks for

decision making. In particular we will analyse the role of the different actors involved in the programme management and implementation system.

3.2.1. National framework for employment policies

EQUAL has been implemented differently according to the level of decentralisation of employment policy within the Member States.

- In two Member States, regional authorities have produced their own CIP: the UK – UKgb and UKni; and BE – Flanders (BEnl) and Wallonia/Brussels/German community (BEfrg).
 - In the UK, NI has the responsibility for employment policy while in BE, the level of the ‘Communauté’ is the relevant level for employment policy³⁴. The NAPs and ESF programming are in both cases under the responsibility of the national level, with participation of other policy and administrative levels, but, in BE, the management of ESF is decentralised and there is complete separation de facto between ESF programming and management.
 - In the UK, EQUAL co-ordination mechanisms have been set up between the different National Support Structures (NSS) and the IE NSS is taking part. A Joint Support Structure has been established between EQUAL Managing Authorities and NSS bodies representing NI, Scotland, England, Wales and IE. In addition, a steering group, involving Managing Authorities and NSS bodies North and South Ireland has been designed to facilitate cross-border co-operation on policy lessons for mainstreaming and dissemination.
- In several Member States, EQUAL is implemented in a context of territorialisation of employment policies, and the responsibility for employment policy is shared between the national level and the regional or local level of government.
 - This is the case for example in ES, where many Autonomous Communities (regions) now co-ordinate their Public Employment Service, whilst central government retains competence over benefits and labour law; and in IT, where the decentralisation of employment policies has significantly enhanced the role of local and regional actors. However the choices made for EQUAL have been different in these two Member States, as IT opted for a regional implementation of the programme whereas it remained centralised, in the main, in ES.
 - This involvement of various government levels is also addressed in the drive towards the territorialisation of labour market policies, where more and more fields of policy are locally co-ordinated, including employment, education, social assistance and local development or regeneration policies. This is the case for DE, where labour market policy is centrally designed, but the *Länder* retain a great deal of autonomy in the design of education policies as well as in regional economic development policies. In addition, the *Länder* can manage their own employment programmes. In Scandinavian and in most ‘Continental’ Member States, local authorities are in charge of social assistance, and are actors of the labour market policy. The *Länder* as well as other actors are present in the Steering Committee for EQUAL, and they have taken part in the selection of DPs. In FR, although employment policy strictly speaking is the responsibility of central government, the territorialisation is on-going with more responsibility given at the local level. Moreover, vocational training is the responsibility of regional authorities (*Conseils Régionaux*). *Départements* (County Councils) and *Communes* (Municipal authorities) share responsibilities over social policy. As a

³⁴ Although now the Walloon ‘Communauté’ has transferred this competency to the German speaking community on its territory.

result, the organisation of EQUAL in FR has been marked by a strong involvement of the Regional level.

- *Member States with centralised employment policy*, although local employment strategies are developing (GR, PT, LU and IE).
 - In GR, the local authorities have no autonomy in the design of employment matters and have so far been little involved in the drafting or implementation of the NAPs. Neither Regional offices nor local authorities are involved in the management and monitoring of the CIP. However, they do take part in the programme through their participation in DPs.
 - The PT situation is somewhat similar. Policy-making and administration is centralised, and this is also the case for employment policy and the elaboration of the NAPs. However, partly under the influence of European programmes, regional networks for employment have been developed, as well as territorial pacts in which not only the regional offices of ministries but also local authorities are involved³⁵. In fact, even though no regional level of government exists, the territorial dimension of employment policies has become more embedded in PT. Thus EQUAL was designed centrally, but the regional offices of Ministries were involved in drafting the CIP.
 - In LU, although local authorities play an important role in the implementation of employment policies, they are not involved in their elaboration process. Similarly, in EQUAL, local authorities are not party to the selection committee nor to the 'follow-up' committee.
 - Finally, in IE, Regional Assemblies have been little involved so far in employment policy or more specifically in the NAPs. There is a whole array of local partnership arrangements involved, among other things, in delivering active labour market policies, and some of them are also involved in EQUAL DPs. However, the two Regional Assemblies (Border Midlands and West Region and Southern and Eastern Region) are taking part in the Monitoring Committee.

3.2.2. Organising a regional level of programme management

Some EQUAL CIPs have been implemented through the organisation of a regional level of programme management, with full control over the selection, guidance and mainstreaming processes within a nationally agreed framework. This is the case in three Member States, the UKgb, FR and IT, although within a completely different institutional framework. In FR the regional level of management of the programme is mostly in the hands of the delegations of the Ministry of Employment, whereas in UKgb, it corresponds to elected assemblies, and in IT, to the regional administration.

A close involvement of regional level actors in the programme management favours the regional relevance of EQUAL. Selection Committees members know well the operators and have an overall view of their region. They can thus have a rather precise knowledge of the innovation potential of each DP as well as of the desirable balance between DPs. However, the question is whether regional innovation is what is aimed at in EQUAL. Another issue is perhaps the increased possibility of conflicts of interest, as institutions participating in selection committees may also be involved in regional projects. Despite the caution taken in selection mechanisms, the closer links between regional selection committees and DP actors may account for the lower selection rates and higher numbers of DPs selected than forecasted in R1.

³⁵ Melo, A. (2002). 'Review of the Implementation of the Guidelines on Local Development in the Employment NAPs from 1998 to 2001. Portugal'. Contract VC/2001/0320. European Commission, DG Employment and Social Affairs.

3.2.3. The stakeholders in programme management

Various mechanisms have been set up to involve all relevant actors to some extent, at the different stage of the management process.

3.2.3.1. The involvement of public institutions within the Programme management

The broad spectrum of themes covered by EQUAL means that a number of government departments or institutions are systematically involved in Monitoring Committees and have sometimes been involved in drafting the CIPs. However, the role of Monitoring Committees in the programme should not be exaggerated, as some evaluators remark that they have met relatively rarely since the beginning of the programme (DK, FI, IT). Furthermore, in two cases, AT and FI, other government departments are sharing the co-ordination of the programme with the Ministry of Employment or its equivalent, and have responsibility over a number of DPs.

A specific case is that of UKni, where the Department for Employment In Learning (DEL) and the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) work closely together. The SEUPB was established under the Belfast Agreement of 1998 to manage the EU Programmes PEACE and INTERREG as well as to clarify linkages with PEACE II Programme. The Equal Monitoring Committee is jointly chaired by both the assistant secretary of DEL and by the Chief Executive of SEUPB.

3.2.3.2. The involvement of social partners

In a number of Member States, the responsibility for employment and labour market policy has traditionally been shared with the social partners or has been designed in co-operation with them. Although the social partners have been, as far as we are aware, systematically involved in Monitoring Committees, they are likely to have made a greater contribution in those Member States where they are active stakeholders of the employment policy (e.g. AT, DE, FI, IRL, LU, PT and SE).

Examples of social partner involvement had been provided in the 2003 Annual and Evaluation reports:

- In LU, the organisation of EQUAL closely followed that of the NAPs: the drafting and implementation of the NAPs were a responsibility shared by the government, the unions and employers. This tri-partite system also structures the EQUAL programme, as the social partners were involved with the Managing Authority in the selection committee, the 'follow-up' committee and the pilot committee. This involvement apparently created some conflicts of interests at the selection stage, which were then noted by the national evaluator.
- In GR, the active involvement of social partners in the formulation of employment policy was relatively new. As far as the elaboration of the NAPs was concerned, they were now taking part in working groups, which represents an improvement as compared with previous formal consultation exercises, even though the social partners are asking for more participation. Their role appears to have been quite important in the management of the EQUAL programme, where they have been involved in the Steering Committee and have played a crucial role of dissemination of information in their own networks.
- In the UKgb, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) was represented in at least one of the National Thematic Networks, at the selection stage and in mainstreaming work. It was also involved in several DPs.

3.2.3.3. The involvement of NGOs and NGO networks

A detailed assessment of the role of NGOs at programme level was only provided in the 2003 UKgb report. In that Member State, the consultation for the elaboration of the CIP was systematic to a point unknown in other Member States except in the UKni. It provided ample scope for all interested parties to make sure that their suggestions of adjustments were taken on board. The highest response rate to the questionnaire sent out at that time by the government was found with the voluntary sector and local authorities.

The fact that National Thematic Networks, called National Thematic Groups (NTGs) in the UKgb, were set up at the very start of the programme and played a role in the selection process is also relevant. NTGs were formed by governmental agencies and non-governmental organisations competent in each theme. Some of the latter had also bid for EQUAL funding, which had been criticised by unsuccessful applicants at the time. The evaluator's analysis then had been that this was a strength of the programme (*'leading policy stakeholders involved in guiding and delivering EQUAL'*) but that it might affect 'perceptions' of fairness. In any case, this pointed to the strong organisational capacity and influence of some voluntary organisations, which had been involved in designing the programme, selecting applicants, and were supposed to be involved in delivery and in mainstreaming 'best practice'³⁶.

3.2.4. Place and role of National Support Structures

3.2.4.1. The role of the NSSs in R1

Information and advice to applicants and then to DPs, monitoring, support to the Managing Authority and sometimes to the Monitoring Committee, have been common tasks of the NSSs across the Member States.

The main difference in the roles of the NSS took place in relation to the selection process: in some Member States, the NSS was not directly involved; in others the NSS was involved in preparing the files on each applicant without participating in scoring; finally it was sometimes responsible for the technical assessment of applications.

Interestingly, when NSSs were involved in the selection process, opinions were divided among national evaluators on the fact whether potential guidance previously provided by NSS to DPs could be a problem or not. So that, whilst the FR and the SE evaluators recommended that regional or national Support Structures should not take part in the selection process, other evaluators did not comment on this issue.

Few national evaluators highlighted the double role of NSSs in providing administrative and financial guidance to DPs, and helping them with their methodology of implementation. These roles of course mobilise quite different competencies, and should probably be allocated to different staff. Evaluators found that administrative guidance tended to take precedence, partly as a response to the most urgent demands from DPs.

3.2.4.2. The Organisational location of NSSs

In our 1st interim and Mid-term reports, we had highlighted three models of organisational location of National Support Structures: (a) the NSS is integrated within the Managing

³⁶ However the actual role of NTNs in transfer and mainstreaming has sometimes been disappointing (see Chapter 8).

Authority, (b) the NSS is an agency or a unit depending on the Managing Authority exclusively dedicated to technical assistance, (c) the NSS is externalised.

These models are still valid although the DK MA decided to externalise its National Support Structure in 2004.

Thus, the distribution of Member States according to our typology is the following:

- Eight National Support Structures are integrated within the Managing Authority (BEfrg and BEnl, FI, DE, GR, LU, SE and PT);
- Two are government agencies or units depending on the Managing Authority but exclusively dedicated to technical assistance (the NL and ES);
- Seven are externalised (AT, DK, FR, IE, IT, UKgb and UKni).

3.2.4.3. The size of the NSS team

Some NSS teams have had tight human resources: this has been the case in UKni (2 Full-time equivalents), DK (2 FTE), LU (2 FTE), BEfrg (3 FTE), IE (4 FTE), GR (5), FR (6 FTE), FI (6 FTE), NL (7 FTE).

In the other Member States, the NSS teams were larger.

- In the UKgb the NSSs have 34 members in total: the GB team has 29 members of its staff dedicated to EQUAL, the Scottish team has 3 staff and the Welsh team 2 staff;
- In PT, the NSS has 19 full time staff. Part-time experts are also contracted for the moderation of NTN;
- The SE NSS counts with 13 Full-time equivalents,
- In DE, the NSS employs 24 civil servants and 7 support staff (public relations, data management etc.).

As can be seen, there is no proportional link between the size of the NSSs and the size of the EQUAL programmes.

Table 3.1 – Institutional mapping of Managing Authorities and National Support Structures

CIP	Location of the Managing Authority	Location of the NSS
AT	Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Labour	NSS functions are contracted out to <i>Finanzakademie Austria Holding & Cap Gemini Ernst & Young</i>
BEfrg	ESF Agency (Ministry of French Community)	ESF Agency
BEnl (1)	ESF Agency (Ministry of Flemish Community)	ESF Agency
DK	The National Agency for Enterprise and Housing (EBST) is a department under the Danish Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs	In 2004, the NSS functions were contracted out to COWI
FI	Ministry of Labour, Policy Department, part of Structural Policy Team	The NSS is located in the Implementation Department of the MoL
FR	Ministry of Employment, Labour and Social Cohesion	NSS functions are contracted out to a non profit organisation called RACINE, which was also involved in previous Community Initiatives
DE	Federal Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs	The NSS is part of the Federal Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs
GR	Ministry of Employment and Social Protection, General Secretariat of Management of Community and Other Resources.	The NSS is a unit of the MA
IE	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	NSS functions are contracted out to WRC, formerly called the Work Research Co-operative, which has also been involved in the management of other European programmes
IT	Ministry of Labour and Welfare and Regional Departments for Labour and Professional Training	NSS functions are allocated to ISFOL for general assistance and transnationality, CONSEDIN (since 2003) for technical and IT assistance and COGEA (since 2004) for assistance on Action 3. (In R2 regional support structures have been introduced)
LU	Dept. of Labour of the Ministry of Labour and Employment	The NSS is based in the same Ministry
NL	Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, division ESM (European Subsidy Measures)	The NSS is in the same Ministry, but a separate Agency, directly responsible to the minister.
PT	Ministry of Labour and Social Security	The NSS is in the same ministry.
ES	‘Unit for the Administration of the European Social Fund’ (UAFSE), which is included in the General Directorate for the ‘promotion of the Social Economy and the European Social Fund’ within the Employment General Secretariat of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	The Managing Authority has set up a ‘Support Unit’ within the UAFSE
SE	Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications	The ESF-Council is in charge of the NSS and belongs to the Ministry of Labour, itself located in the Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communication.
UKgb	Department for Work and Pensions	NSS functions are contracted out to ECOTEC for GB and allocated to the Scottish and Welsh Support Units respectively in Scotland and Wales
UKni	European Unit of the Department for Employment and Learning	NSS functions are contracted out to PROTEUS

Source: Mid-Term and 2005 evaluation reports.

3.3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME IN R1

In our Mid-term report, we had described the implementation of the programme and the implementation of Action 1 (preparation phase), Action 2 (implementation phase) and Action 3 (Transfer to policy and practice) in R1. We recall the main findings before turning to the main changes pointed out in the 2005 national evaluation reports.

3.3.1. The preparation phase (Action 1)

A different use of Action 1 has been made in the Member States, depending on whether or not there was a second selection for entry in Action 2.

The objective of the preparation phase was to improve work programmes and to develop partnerships. For this exercise a period of 6 months was planned. Our mid-term EU EQUAL evaluation has highlighted two types of use of Action 1:

- In some Member States, Action 1 was used for the consolidation of selected partnerships;
- In others, Action 1 was used as a period to prepare DPs for selection for entry in Action 2.

These two conceptions of Action 1 led to a different organisation of the selection process. There were:

- Member States in which the most important selection phase was the selection of DPs for entry in Action 1: DE, DK, GR, IT, LU, PT, and the UKgb.
- Member States, where both selection stages – for entry in Action 1 and in Action 2 - were important. AT, FR and the UKni are found there. In this group, selection rates between Action 1 and Action 2 ranged between roughly 70% and 90%.

The problems which arose in some Member States at the beginning of the implementation phase (Action 2) confirmed that the consolidation of partnerships via a ‘Preparation Action’ is a decisive step, all the more so that CIP guidance to applicants sometimes lacked clarity. Thus, in a number of Member States, clear target groups had not been identified in Action 1 and this weakness had to be addressed at the beginning of the implementation phase (e.g. as pointed out in the Mid-term evaluation reports for AT, BEfrg, ES and FR). The vagueness of the CIPs with regard to the definition of the EQUAL principles also had repercussions on the design of DP actions (Action 1) and their implementation (Action 2). There was also evidence that DPs could sometimes have been clearer in their expected outputs. In brief, the design of DP projects and their effective implementation seemed to require even more and earlier guidance (including during the application phase).

Different approaches were taken to the **definition and weight of selection criteria**:

- In some Member States, the final distribution of DPs in the thematic priorities and political criteria played an important role (e.g. in BEfrg, DE, ES and the UKgb);
- In others, technical criteria prevailed (e.g. GR, PT).

As a result of this, and of the differences in ‘attractiveness’ from one theme to the other, the variation of selection rates between Member States and themes ranged between 10% and 100%. Thus, the selection rates for Pillar 1 were in general low. Theme 1A (facilitating access and return to the labour market) attracted the greatest number of applications. The selection rates were lower than for Theme B, revealing higher interest, more expertise in submitting applications, and probably also enhanced possibilities for building up on past experience. Selection rates for Pillar 4 were on average significantly higher, especially in BENl, ES and NL.

When the planned thematic spread had been based on clear political priorities resulting from a diagnosis made in the CIP, it seemed logical to stick to already agreed thematic priorities. The danger linked to such a procedure, however, consisted in not paying sufficient attention to the EQUAL principles, in particular to DPs' innovation potential.

3.3.2. The Implementation phase (Action 2)

Action 2 has been the phase of implementation of DP work programmes and covered a period of 2 to 3 years. Its implementation was assessed in our Mid-term report. We recall the main findings below.

Guidance to DPs

During Action 2, Managing Authorities and National Support Structures focused on administrative assistance to DPs, monitoring and control of DP activities, and communication.

Several evaluators made a positive assessment of guidance to DPs during Action 2, especially in ES, FR and NL, three Member States in which the NSS/RSS played a key role. For example, in FR, 90% of DPs stressed that technical assistance helped them manage their project and 80% that the NSS or RSS³⁷ helped them to take into account the key EQUAL principles in their projects.

Other evaluators were much more critical. The main source of dissatisfaction expressed by DPs in many Member States was the very important administrative burden. In some cases, there have also been some financial/economic problems, notably on the issue of eligibility of expenditure.

However, even in Member States where guidance has been positively valued, some evaluators recommended that more methodological assistance should be provided (e.g. in ES).

Budgets

Budgets for the implementation of the work programmes were assessed as realistic and appropriate in most Member States. However Action 2 was behind schedule and financial resources were under-used in several Member States.

A change of strategy at programme level took place in SE and, to a lesser extent, in FR and GR. In these Member States, more DPs were selected for Action 2 than planned. Consequently, each DP received less funding than planned in Action 2, which logically generated a lot of dissatisfaction, particularly in DPs with a large number of partners where budgets are not realistic.

The UKgb and UKni evaluators pointed out that DP forecasts had under-estimated the level of expenditure required, especially for administrative support, which resulted in strains for management at DP level and in doubts about the sustainability of activities.

³⁷ Regional Support Structure

Implementation at DP level

As reported in our Mid-term and 2nd Interim reports, national evaluators had identified implementation difficulties and sources of delay in the following areas:

- Transnationality
 - Delays in setting up the transnational partnerships;
 - The lack of co-ordination between Member States with regard to the start of activities and payments, which inhibited joint actions with foreign partners;
 - Delays in the finalisation of Transnational Co-operation Agreements and in their final approval.
- Partnerships
 - Under-estimation of the time required to set up the partnership;
 - Changes in project teams;
 - Project under-staffing;
 - Gaps in project management;
 - Under-estimation of the time required to co-ordinate partners.
- Delivery
 - DP difficulties in contacting the target groups.
- Finance and administration
 - Delays in Action 1 payments, which caused a delay by 3 to 6 months for DPs. More general deficiencies in the payment systems were identified in several Member States;
 - Lack of cash, especially for those DPs who do not involve public partners (as these generally can anticipate funds);
 - Problems to obtain clear matched funding from partners;
 - The very time-consuming effort requested from DPs regarding the quantitative and qualitative information that they have to submit to Managing Authorities.

The 2004 national evaluation reports had confirmed the delays experienced by DPs in Action 2 (BEfrg, BEnl, FI, GR, NL, SE, UKni, UKgb). Delays concerned sometimes few DPs (e.g. GR, BEfrg), but have sometimes been more generalised (NL, SE). The main reasons provided were:

- The long transition between Action 1 and Action 2, which had consequences on the transition between Action 2 and Action 3 (UKni);
- Initial delays which have repercussions on the subsequent stages of implementation: DPs need therefore more time to complete their activities (GR);
- The changes operated in the activities of some DPs, which implied a modification of the initial schedule (reported by the BEfrg and UKgb evaluators. In BEfrg all DPs but 3 asked for an extension);
- The extension granted to DPs for remaining in TCPs (66% of the NL DPs, 40% of the SE DPs).

3.3.3. The phase of transfer to policy and practice (Action 3)

Action 3 has been dedicated to the organisation of networking, dissemination of good practice and mainstreaming activities. The way in which Action 3 budgets were distributed amongst single DPs or groups of DPs differed amongst Member States, as is explained further in Chapter 8. Schematically, three main mechanisms can be distinguished with regard to the organisation of Action 3 :

- *Individual Action 3 budgets were included by DPs in their DPA, along with Action 2 budgets: in this case, all DPs could thus benefit from an Action 3 budget according to their own planning and requests.* This mechanism was applied in AT, BEfrg, DE, FI, IE, LU, and NL.
- *Individual or collective Action 3 budgets (for individual DPs or groups of DPs) were accessible through a call for proposals, and therefore not all DPs could obtain such funding.* This has been the choice in ES, FR, IT, and PT.
- *Action 3 budgets were made accessible, as an option, to all DPs, which had to submit an application for this:* this was the choice made in the UKgb and the UKni. Although the process took some time to get started, in the end almost all DPs (except 3 in UKgb) submitted such applications.

3.4. CHANGES IN PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION IN R2

EQUAL being an experimental initiative at all levels, designed to promote the evolution, not only of the implementation of inclusive employment policies, but also of policy-making itself, it was logical that the EU evaluation was required to assess the programme adjustments at the national level between R1 and R2.

The main changes introduced at programme level³⁸ for R2 have been largely based on the recommendations formulated in the 2nd communication on EQUAL³⁹ but also on the recommendations formulated in the national evaluation reports. Except in a few cases (see below), evaluators' recommendations have been adequately taken into account.

3.4.1. A new design and phasing of Actions

It had been noted by all programme actors, as well as in the 2nd Communication on EQUAL, that the move from Action 1 to Action 2 had sometimes created a break in DP activity. In addition to the recommendation made in the Communication to simply validate entry in Action 2 (rather than operate a new selection stage), Member States took concrete steps to increase the flexibility of each Action and of their phasing:

- *A new distribution of the budget dedicated to Action 1:* in ES, the compulsory 3% devoted to Action 1 in R1 disappeared, and each DP could devote to this Action the percentage it considered convenient.
- *A new phasing of the three Actions:* e.g. the UKgb MA considered that drafting separate contracts for each of the Actions may be a barrier to the efficiency of the DPs. In R2, single contracts have been issued and cover the three aspects. Actors have been encouraged to plan ahead further than they did in R1 and DPs will have the opportunity to start Action 3 at the same time as Action 2 (as was the case in some Member States already in R1). A similar decision was made in ES. In AT, the MA merged Action 1 and Action 2 into one single phase.
- *More flexibility of implementation:* in GR, the implementation of the Actions has been made more progressive and more flexible. Selected DPs submitted a Technical Report for Action 1 to be included in the programme. At the end of Action 1, a new technical report was submitted for Actions 2 and 3, to start implementation. Actions 2 and 3 are

³⁸ Changes included changes in the distribution of thematic priorities and in the definition of target groups. These have been dealt with in Chapter 2 above.

³⁹ COM(2003) 840 final, 30.12.2003

thus planned jointly, but Action 3 starts under certain specific conditions after the approval by the MA. Action 2 becomes in this round a unique activity by itself instead of comprising a variety of 11 activities as determined by the Integrated Information System in R1. These changes were derived from R1 experience and the suggestions of the interim evaluation for removing some of the management pressure.

3.4.2. Improvements in NSS role and capacity

National Support Structures were **strengthened** in some Member States, through new recruitment and the implementation of new modes of organisation.

- For example in PT, the NSS staff increased from 18 to 19 permanent employees, to improve DPs monitoring and for a more streamlined financial and administrative management of projects. The evaluators assess the change positively, although they consider that more has to be done to improve NSS monitoring capabilities of DP activities.
- In SE, contact persons have been nominated to act as a daily support for the DP. When visiting DPs, they have to ensure that the DP follows the approved work-programme. They are also supposed to act as a coach for DPs (both by explaining the programme and by answering DP demands).
- In FR, there had been too much heterogeneity in the way technical assistance operated from a region to another with important consequences for the implementation of the EQUAL principles. To face this problem, a partial convergence of technical assistance mandates was decided. Thus, the revised CIP included an 'Action 4' in which the technical assistance is used to support the implementation of the programme. The Action 4 budget was fixed at 6% of the whole programme. The objectives were to create a common part of services in the terms of references or mandates of all technical assistance (for example, organise meetings with potential DPs, organise training of DPs on subject like innovation, equal opportunities, transnationality, self evaluation etc. at the same point in time) and to improve information sharing between NSS and MA at the regional level.
- In IE, the key change has been the recruitment of a financial controller/advisor in the NSS, a relevant decision according to the evaluator.

Another important improvement has been the **clarification of the distribution of tasks between MA and NSS**.

- In UKni, during the initial stages of R1 there was a perceived overlap in programme responsibilities between MA and NSS which hindered progress. Progressively, both the MA and the NSS became more established in their roles and provided more direct and different guidance and support to the DPs during the implementation and the preparation phases. Furthermore, the reallocation of roles between the MA and the NSS with regard to financial and non-financial monitoring at the beginning of R2 has helped to 'free up' the NSS to undertake developmental support role with projects which has been broadly welcomed. But according to the evaluator (interviews with the DPs), the NSS was becoming over-stretched given the volume of activity in R1 and R2.
- The already mentioned changes in the mandates of Regional Support Structures in FR is likely to result in a better distribution of roles between RSS and regional MA and an improved use of competencies.

However some more ‘risky’ decisions have been made. Thus in IT, the regions were to set up support structures in R2. Although the national evaluators warned that this would require large-scale co-ordination (as indeed has been shown in FR), they also consider this new development as a positive step forward, consistent with the on-going decentralisation, and because it is one of the true innovations introduced by the programme in institutional relations. The national evaluators observed an improvement in the management of relations between the MA and the regions in R2, and talks about an ‘institutional learning curve’. In the EU-wide evaluators’ view, regional support structures increase the responsiveness to DP needs and demands, and can also play a positive role in regional networking and mainstreaming (see Chapter 8 below).

3.4.3. Improvements in the launch, application and selection stages

More guidance was provided in the launch and application phases to promote an improved implementation of the EQUAL principles, on the basis of the lessons derived from R1. In some cases, the practical conception of the principles was revised:

- *The approach to ‘Equal opportunities’* was promoted more clearly as a horizontal approach structuring all phases of DP work (e.g. in ES, FR, GR and the UKni). In addition, in the UKni, the MA/NSS were more proactive to attract applications in the theme 4H (Reducing gender gaps), by working closely with the Equality Commission in the lead up to the 2nd call. As a result of the promotional campaign, 5 applications could be selected in R2 whereas only 1 had been selected in R1.
- *A clearer focus was advocated for the partnership principle:* in 2004, several evaluation reports pointed out the lack of efficiency and managerial difficulties of large DPs. Accordingly, several MAs decided to avoid selecting large DPs (e.g. in DE, ES, FR, GR and the UKni). More precisely, the ES and FR MAs limited the maximum number of partners. In addition the ES authorities decided to try and assess partners’ commitment as it appears already at application stage. This was clearly motivated by the findings of the Mid-term evaluation. Similarly, in FI, more attention was paid to partners’ commitment than to ‘long lists of partners’.
- *Guidelines for the design and management of transnational co-operation were revised:* new guidance was provided in ES and FR concerning budgets and expenditure. In ES, recommended transnational budgets were lower than in R1. More generally MAs/NSS intended to encourage joint production in TNPs, and a move away from the mere exchange of experience. The UKni NSS provided much more guidance in Action 1 (a residential was even organised with all DPs). They mainly wanted to draw the attention of DPs on the need to be flexible in day to day work with transnational partners.
- *Mainstreaming requirements were strengthened:* in BEnl, DP policy relevance and policy links became a selection criterion. Dissemination activities had to be planned as an integral part of the DP, not as an added-on. Similarly in DE, the policy links of applicants with the Länder was given more attention at selection stage. In ES, applicants had been advised to incorporate a Mainstreaming Strategy in the design of their workplans. The purpose was to engage policy makers from the beginning of the projects.
- *Increased guidance for real experimentation* to take place at DP level was planned by the FI MA, and R1 DPs were asked to present their innovations to applicants in the launch of round 2 in UKni. In NL, particular importance has been given to innovation in R2 selection, as it was felt (especially by NTN actors) that this dimension had been neglected during R1.

The Managing Authorities also sought to increase the number and the quality of applications. Thus efforts were made notably to improve the **communication strategy** and to simplify (and clarify) the administrative burden (e.g. UKni, SE, GR). The UKni experience was described in-depth by the evaluators (see box below).

In the UKni, the first major change in R2 has been in the *communication strategy* to raise awareness and ensure there would be a higher spread of application to select from than in R1. In preparation for R2, the call for applications was initiated in February 2004 with a series of *road shows* followed by a launch event and publication of the application pack. The road shows took place throughout NI (in 6 locations) and were attended by 118 individuals and organisations. Guidance material was made available on the internet, as well as via conventional means. Success stories were communicated widely to provide a positive image of EQUAL. Canvassing and mail shots were sent to potential applicants totalling 1,775 organisations. A service was held in May 2004 to assist applicants.

As far as the actual call for applications is concerned, the changes were as follows:

1) *Simplified procedures*: as the application form in R1 was long and burdensome, this justified the adoption of a shorter Part A application form that allowed applicants to register interest first and examine whether their project was applicable.

2) *Drawing on R1 DPs*: R1 DPs were also invited to attend each road show to present their achievements and provide examples of innovation and project activity.

According to the evaluator, '*This helped to communicate the objectives of EQUAL and 'bring the programme to life' for potential applicants by presenting evidence of DP practice*'.

Some changes were also made in the organisation of the **selection procedure**, in order to increase its effectiveness and the quality of outcomes. They included:

- *Resort to external expertise*: the SE MA set up an *external appraisal group in charge* of providing a technical assessment of DP applications. In DE, each application was assessed by – at least – two external experts, in addition to the regional assessment carried out by the Länder Ministries. This was also the case in DK where applications were analysed by experts of each thematic area.
- *The harmonisation of regional selection processes*: in FR, where regional projects are selected at the regional level, efforts were made to improve and to *harmonise regional selection processes*, by providing common tools to the regional selection committees.
- *Meeting of applicants*: In BEfrg, a *first selection stage* has been introduced, so that applicants can meet with each other and find common ground to present the definitive application. This procedure has been introduced as a result of the finding by the national evaluator that the 'mergers' operated by the MA in R1 had made it difficult for DP partners to work according to common objectives.
- *Multiple time schedules*: In PT, one of the more relevant changes in application and selection procedures was that the application process in R2 followed *different time schedules* according to EQUAL priorities (Employability, Entrepreneurship, Adaptability, Equal opportunities and Asylum seekers) in order to improve NSS capability to manage the workload of application analysis. This change was justified by the lessons derived from R1 and the evaluators assessed it as appropriate.

Scoring tools and the weight of criteria were changed in some Member States. Examples include:

- In the UKgb, the selection criteria were more weighted toward *mainstreaming*, which remained a gateway question alongside equal opportunities. All applications were treated similarly irrespective of R1 experience, although an additional comment under the innovation box asked existing DPs to benchmark their activities and allowed added value to be assessed.
- In PT the *evaluation grid* was adjusted in order to improve its effectiveness. This change has been justified by the lessons learned from R1, and from the evaluators' thorough

assessment of the R1 evaluation grids, whose complexity meant that they were poorly used. The changes introduced sought to ensure the selection of those applications with the clearest innovation and mainstreaming potential.

- In FR, selection was reinforced for entry into the preparation phase and the assessment for entry into the implementation phase was aimed at confirming the initial selection, whereas in R1 it had represented a second stage in the selection process. Hence the higher requirements concerning innovation, experimentation, diversified partnerships and the participation of partners experienced in European programmes. The Equal Opportunities principle has also been a key selection criterion (and representatives of Delegations to women's rights took part in the selection committees).
- In IE, more emphasis was put on *innovation* amongst the selection criteria. More attention was also paid to the *added value* with respect to mainstream provision, the *mainstreaming* potential, and the planned *added value of transnational activities*. The changes introduced in NL were similar:

In NL, applicants had to answer questions such as: 'how have you established the extent of innovativeness of your project? What existing similar projects/methods/instruments do you know at the local/regional/national/international level dealing with the same problem as your proposal? What is the added value of your approach compared to existing approaches? Do you know whether there is a need for new approaches and how have you established this need? Is the proposed innovative approach transferable? What are the expected policy effects of the innovative approach?'

In several Member States, the selection procedure remained the same between R1 and R2. Sometimes recommendations for improvements had been included in the Mid-term evaluation reports but were not taken into account.

Thus the ES evaluators, in their 2005 report, found that important recommendations made in the Mid-term report (written by a different evaluation team) had not been taken up. The evaluators had recommended to give more weight to the measurement of the internal project consistency and to the quality of the initial diagnosis (as these had proved to be weaknesses in the implementation of R1); to appoint external experts rather than relying solely on NSS staff for the technical assessment; to limit the weight of the political criteria (distribution across regions and themes); and to enhance the information provided to unsuccessful applicants on the reasons of their non approval.

3.4.4. Improvements in monitoring

Several MA/NSS improved their management instruments and their monitoring systems in R2 and adopted a **more qualitative** approach to DPs and their projects, shifting away, to some extent, from the quantitative and administrative focus which had been found to prevail in R1.

Thus, in BEfrg, the evaluators report on the on-going revision of the monitoring system towards more qualitative monitoring of projects, through *on-site visits* and the use of support tools based on the logical framework methodology, in order to better identify problems and success factors at project level. The NL and UKgb MA/NSS also visited DPs during the preparation phase (Action 1), a change which was positively assessed by the evaluators.

The FR evaluators also noted an improvement in the *quality of the guidance* provided by the Regional Support Structures and a high satisfaction of surveyed DPs. This was due in particular to the organisation of training sessions for RSS staff, e.g. on the Programming document, on the Equal Opportunities principle, and on the FR monitoring system OLIMPE.

In PT, the shift has been of a different nature and is consistent with the importance given in the programme to capitalisation and the identification of good products (see also Chapter 8). Thus the monitoring of DPs has moved from an 'intervention' dimension to a 'production' dimension, *from a focus*

on processes to a focus on outputs. This decision was made on the basis of the evaluators' previous report and as a result of the reflexive process in the MA/NSS.

The **nature of the data required** for the information and monitoring system was also adjusted in some Member States, to improve simplicity and 'user-friendliness', effectiveness, transparency of expectations, and pay more attention to confidentiality issues.

Thus, in GR, more *quantifiable and concrete indicators* are being designed. Changes will also be made at DP level: the indicators used by DPs in the submission of their Technical Reports will be simplified. In DE, a *new monitoring system has been developed* (EQUAL-2-Online), more clearly structured, and allowing for rapid data transfer and data calculation. The system covers all needs for data exchange (change of applications, document registration, reporting, and data provisions for ECDB). In NL, the MA and the NSS have decided to establish more precisely the information that would be included in the monitoring reports drawn up after the monitoring visits. These changes were introduced because there was much uncertainty among DPs about what information to supply. In LU, the monitoring system has been made more demanding and more qualitative explanations are required from DPs.

In the UKni, an important change has been the introduction of the Rickter scale⁴⁰ to help DPs monitor *soft outcomes*. The evaluators report that the Rickter scale is a positive change which was introduced as a response to a recommendation for a common methodological tool to examine soft outcomes set out in the mid-term evaluation report. During a two-day induction residential programme held in November 2004, the DPs were introduced to this tool. Training on the methodology was delivered to an initial group of DPs in August 2005 and a further session took place at the end of September 2005. The justification was that DPs needed to be able to measure the 'distance travelled'.

Some Member States faced persisting difficulties with their monitoring systems. This has been particularly pointed out by the ES and DK evaluators. However it has to be said that the in-depth analysis carried out by the ES evaluators was not necessarily mirrored in other Member States, and similar difficulties might exist elsewhere, and simply not be reported by evaluators.

The ES evaluators carried out a comprehensive assessment of the 'Monitoring module' set up by the NSS with the aim to unifying the items required by the Managing Authority and the ECDB. The assessment is globally negative, as the module has proved difficult to set up at DP level and complex to manage. It has also lacked rigour - for example concerning data on beneficiaries, it has been unclear from the beginning whether pathways had to be counted as one action or whether the distinct actions were to be counted separately; a distinction between 'direct' beneficiaries, and 'indirect ones' (i.e. from publicity and dissemination actions) should have been introduced; etc. Finally usefulness is doubtful, as aggregating data has proved impossible, either at DP level, by theme or at programme level. The Monitoring module has been the NSS tool 'less well assessed by DPs' (whereas the NSS is usually well perceived by DPs).

The consequences of these problems appear quite clearly when the evaluators try to do an analysis of the 'physical realisation' of the programme in Action 2 and 3, as it is impossible to rely on the comparison between the planned numbers of beneficiaries and the actual numbers: in some thematic areas, planned numbers included beneficiaries of dissemination actions (which could be numbered by thousands and hundreds of thousands) and actual numbers did not. Similarly, in DK, the evaluators point out that the programme-level monitoring system is still a

⁴⁰ The UKni MA purchased this system from the Rickter company, based in Scotland. It is a data collection tool which can be tailored to suit different types of projects and which has already been used quite extensively in ESF programmes in Scotland.

burden for the DPs. The evaluators stress that this had been an obstacle for the presentation of innovative applications.

3.5. CONCLUSIONS

Overall CIP management and implementation systems have improved over time towards greater quality and efficiency.

Types of organisations involved in the management of EQUAL

Various mechanisms have been set up to involve all relevant actors in the design and management of the programme. A number of *government departments or institutions* are systematically involved in Monitoring Committees and have sometimes been involved in drafting the CIPs. However we do not know the actual role taken up by the social partners and by NGO networks in programme management, even if we can assume that social partners are likely to have made a greater contribution in those Member States where they are active stakeholders of the employment policy.

When EQUAL has been implemented in a context of territorialisation of employment policies, regional and local authorities have been involved in programme management, though to varying extents and at different stages. In FR, IT and the UKgb, programme management (selection, guidance and mainstreaming) has taken place at the regional level and in DE and ES regional actors were involved at the selection stage. The close involvement of regional level actors has favoured the regional relevance of EQUAL. Selection Committee members know well the operators and have an overall view of their region. They can thus have a rather precise knowledge of the innovation potential of each DP as well as of the desirable balance between DPs. On the other hand, the involvement of regional actors in DP selection has sometimes 'politicised' selection, in the sense that the regional distribution of funding played an important role.

Procedures for project selection, selection criteria

In some Member States, the most important selection phase was the selection of DPs for entry in the preparation phase. Action 1 was thus used for the consolidation of selected partnerships. In other MS, both selection stages – for entry in Action 1 and in Action 2 - were important. Action 1 was then used as a period to prepare DPs for selection for entry in Action 2. Even though it seemed more rigorous to keep the possibility of de-selecting DPs at the end of Action 1, in practice this caused many difficulties, and thus, it seems more reasonable to maintain this possibility, but as an exceptional case, as has been done for example in LT in R2.

Different approaches were taken to the definition and weight of selection criteria: in some MS, compliance with planned budget spread between programme measures has been determining; in others, technical quality criteria prevailed. Partly as a result, selection rates between MS and themes ranged between 10% and 100% in R1. Both strategies have their relevance: following strictly the planned budget allocation is relevant when new fields are being explored and few applicants are expected – as selection only on the basis of the quality of applications could lead to having very few projects in these specific priorities. This means that important guidance efforts have to be made to enhance implementation. Conversely when the priorities selected in the CIP are not new, an assessment mainly on the basis of the technical quality of applications seems more adequate. Some MS have opted for the reinforcement of the technical assessment of applications in R2.

The involvement of the National Support Structures (NSSs) in the selection process has been variable in the different Member States. Where they have been involved, this participation has raised questions – as NSS staff members usually have a very good knowledge of applicants,

especially if they have provided support during the application phase, but for that very reason can be considered to be both judges and parties.

In the NMS, the selection process has generally been assessed positively. Nevertheless, the low quality of applications was pointed out in several cases and led to severe selection rates.

Preparation and implementation of EQUAL

In R1, the importance of the *preparatory phase* (Action 1) has been demonstrated. However, more intense methodological assistance by the NSSs would have been required. The NMS NSSs in R2 have sometimes provided considerable support to DPs in the preparatory phase, which shows that the lessons of R1 were drawn.

In Action 2 (implementation phase) of R1, NSSs have focused on administrative assistance to DPs, monitoring and control of DP activities and communication. Indeed the very important administrative burden for DPs has been a major source of dissatisfaction. In addition, the complexity of management sometimes absorbed too much of the energies of R1 DPs and has not been conducive to an optimisation of the innovation potential. Similar and even more serious difficulties have been experienced in the NMS in R2: the heavy administrative procedures (in particular for the verification of eligibility of costs), the payment delays, and the low advance payments have affected NMS DPs' implementation capacity. In CZ, the creation by DPs of a *Council of Final Beneficiaries* has been an original response to these difficulties. Again, more methodological guidance is required, but a precondition for this is the simplification of administrative and payment procedures.

The phase of transfer to policy and practice (Action 3) has been dedicated to the organisation of networking, dissemination of good practice and mainstreaming activities and has taken place through 3 main mechanisms: (a) individual Action 3 budgets included by DPs in their DPA, along with Action 2 budgets, in which case all DPs could benefit from an Action 3 budget; (b) individual or collective Action 3 budgets accessible through a call for proposals, in which case not all DPs could obtain such funding; (c) Action 3 budgets made accessible, as an option to all DPs that submit an application. At this stage, we do not have enough elements to assess the relevance of each of these three options.

In R2, several changes were introduced which are likely to improve the quality of implementation and of outputs. The most significant changes include the increased flexibility of each Action and of their phasing; the clarification NSSs' role, which also helps to optimise the distribution of tasks between the MAs and NSSs; and more qualitative guidance and monitoring.

Monitoring systems

Programme-level monitoring systems have been a weak point in R1. National evaluators often found that monitoring systems were not user-friendly and sometimes unreliable.

In R2, several MA/NSS improved their management instruments and their monitoring systems. In some MS, more quantifiable and concrete indicators are being designed. The nature of the data required for the information and monitoring system was also adjusted in some MS, to improve simplicity and 'user-friendliness', effectiveness, transparency of expectations, and to pay more attention to confidentiality issues. However some persisting difficulties were mentioned and it could be useful to organise a peer exchange between NSSs on this issue.

In the NMS, the monitoring system has not been assessed thoroughly probably because the evaluation period covered only the beginnings of its implementation. However, when assessments are available, the same criticism has been put forward as in the OMS in R1.

4. EFFECTIVENESS AND ADDED VALUE OF THE PARTNERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES

4.1. INITIAL GUIDELINES AND EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The principles of partnership and empowerment are addressed together, not only because these issues are assessed together in several evaluation reports (FI, DE, NL, ES), but also because, according to the EQUAL guidelines, the concept of empowerment can be read as complementary guidance of how EQUAL DPs should operate.

According to the EQUAL Guidelines, Development Partnerships constitute the structures in charge of the implementation of the initiative⁴¹, while the principle of ‘empowerment’, supposed to be central to each DP (par.26), means active participation both of DP members and people targeted for assistance. On the one hand, the empowerment of DP members had implications for the decision-making structure of the DP. On the other hand, ‘the active participation of those targeted for assistance should be positively assessed in the selection for Action 1 funding and the confirmation of selection for Action 2’.

The initial guidelines (paragraphs 22 to 25 for partnerships and 26 for empowerment) suggested several requirements for a successful implementation of the partnerships:

- Partnerships were to be ‘*strategic*’. This means that partnerships were expected to have a *project orientation* : to work together on an initial diagnosis (‘identify the factors leading to inequality and discrimination in connection with the labour market within their chosen thematic field/s’) and to design and implement ‘innovative solutions’ addressing the problems highlighted in the diagnosis, through the pooling of ‘their efforts and resources’ (par 22). In short ‘strategic’ first refers to the fact that partnerships were to be put together for designing and carrying out a project (or projects). Secondly the term ‘strategic’ probably refers to the involvement, at some time, of public (especially local and regional) authorities whose participation is likely to ‘strengthen the probability of mainstreaming the results’ (par. 23).
- Partnerships were to include a ‘*core of partners*’, as well as a wider pool of partners to be involved ‘during the life of the partnership’: public authorities, the public employment service, NGOs, the business sector (in particular SMEs), and the social partners are mentioned. The involvement of ‘small organisations’ was also promoted, as they could contribute ‘innovative ideas’. It was thus expected that the wider pool of partners would be quite inclusive (but not necessarily from the start) and gather all ‘*relevant actors*’ (par. 23).
- The principle of empowerment (par. 25) goes some way towards requiring democratic, or at least *participative governance mechanisms* in EQUAL DPs: ‘those involved in the implementation of activities should also take part in the decision making’.
- Other important features include the possibility to opt for ‘geographical’ or ‘sectoral’ partnerships, as most fit for tackling the identified problems (par. 24); the fact that DPs are considered as the ‘*final beneficiaries*’ (par. 25); and the required handling of administrative and financial responsibilities by an organisation with ‘the capacity to manage and account for public funding’ (par. 25).

The key hypothesis made by EQUAL, and to be evaluated, was that such partnerships could lead to effective implementation, innovation and mainstreaming.

⁴¹ ‘EQUAL will be implemented by partnerships established at geographical or sectoral level and called Development Partnerships (DPs). The partners within the DPs will define and agree a strategy to be followed, along with the means of bringing it to fruition using innovative approaches...’ par. 11.

Accordingly, the evaluation questions asked in the Terms of Reference for the EU-wide evaluation aimed at:

- *Characterising the experience of partnership in EQUAL:* What has been the experience of consolidating and operating DPs? What were the roles played by the public sector, private business, third-sector organisations and social partners in the various partnerships? In which stages were they more actively involved? What type of contribution have the partners made for the implementation of activities (financial, non-financial)?
- *Assessing how the various dimensions mentioned in the Guidelines were implemented:* This is implicit in the above questions, but also in the specific question as to whether partnerships have managed to identify and define problems and common goals related to the needs of a geographical area or sector;
- *Assessing whether (and under what conditions) the partnership and empowerment principles were conducive to innovation and mainstreaming:* Can any differences be found in the working methods and, if so, their impact on the innovation? Were DPs which were built on existing partnerships more effective? To what extent have the partners been active in the dissemination and mainstreaming of results?

Some national evaluators translated these evaluation questions into more concrete sub-questions. In particular they aimed at assessing:

- *Whether the principles have been understood and implemented correctly:* to what extent have R1 and R2 DPs fulfilled or progressed towards the Commission's definition of partnership in terms of a common or integrated approach to the multidimensional problems of discrimination *by pooling their efforts and resources in pursuit of innovative solutions to jointly defined problems and common goals* (UKni, BEfrg, GR)? Does the type of partnership adopted allow DPs to reach their objectives (BEfrg)?
- *Whether the changes that occurred during the implementation of the project (at different stages) have enhanced the partnership:* Have changes in the preparation phase had a positive effect on the implementation of partnerships (FR)? Have there been any changes/evolution to the partnership models found in the implementation phase (UKgb, BEfrg) and have these changes increased the sustainability of partnerships (UKgb, NL)? Has R2 allowed for a renewal of DP partners? At which level? (lead partners, other)? Are the initially targeted partners (small organisations, NGOs, social partners) actually involved (FR, ES)?
- *Whether the implementation of these principles has had a positive effect for the projects:* Has the principle of empowerment contributed to the effectiveness of the partnership (BEfrg)?

To answer these questions, national evaluators focused their analysis on the strengths and the weaknesses faced in the implementation of the partnership principles notably by looking at:

- DP composition and its relevance: (UKni, NL, LU, IE, PT, BEfrg, FR, GR)
- The management of partnerships: level of achievement of planned activities (BEfrg, PT, ES) , monitoring system and financial arrangements (IT, DE, LU, PT)
- The distribution of roles within DPs: role of lead partners, forms of decision making (UKgb, UKni, IE, PT, ES, GR, BEfrg); participation of beneficiaries in the project and project phases in which they took part: diagnosis, project design, implementation, evaluation (NL, PT).

4.2. IMPLEMENTATION, FACILITATING FACTORS AND OBSTACLES

4.2.1. Partnership composition and inclusiveness

4.2.1.1. Partnership composition

National evaluators have highlighted the factors facilitating the implementation of the partnership and empowerment principles. They have focused on the extent to which the

composition of Development Partnerships is adequate and the **type of stakeholders** who are (and should be) included in the EQUAL partnerships. There have been two different (but not necessarily opposed) trends – one in which the representation capacity has been promoted by including a large number of relevant institutions, and another trend in which partnership composition was more based on the pooling of expertise.

In R1, national evaluators have noted the diversity of the type of stakeholders involved at DP level. This has been encouraged by Managing Authorities. The following table illustrates this diversity.

Table 4.1 – Partnership composition (EU level)

Types of organisations involved as DP partners (R1) In %	Partners including lead partners (overall EQUAL R1)	Lead partners (overall EQUAL R1)
Public authorities (national, regional or local)	23.70%	24.40%
Training and education organisations	16%	21.60%
Organisations providing support/guidance to disadvantaged people	13.70%	11.30%
Enterprises	11.80%	9.20%
Employer organisations	6.10%	2.80%
University and research organisation	5.70%	5.80%
Social economy enterprises	5.40%	3.60%
Social services	5.30%	6.20%
Trade unions	5.20%	1.90%
Employment services	3.30%	5.90%
Chambers of commerce/Industry/Crafts	2.30%	1.10%
Financial institutions	1%	0.80%
Organisations specifically set up for DP management	0.50%	5.40%
Total	14,057	1,215

Source : ECDB. The %ages have to be taken as approximations, as they are based on January 2003 data, a date at which there were still many errors in the ECDB. No update of these statistics is available on the EQUAL website for R1.

Public authorities and education and training organisations have been the most frequent lead partners on average in R1. Enterprises and the social partners (trade unions, employer organisations) have been more involved on average as DP partners than as lead partners.

However, some national characteristics are worth highlighting⁴², even though they may in part be due to differences in the understanding of the categories used in the ECDB:

- Thus, in FR, 17% DP partners have been drawn from the social services;
- In FI, 28% DP partners have been drawn from enterprises and trade unions;
- In BEnl, 30% DP partners have been representatives of the social partners (employer organisation, trade unions);
- In ES and the UKgb, more than 30% DP partners have been organisations providing support and guidance for disadvantaged groups;
- Finally, in IE, more than 17% DP partners have been drawn from the employment services.

National evaluators stress a lack of involvement of certain types of stakeholders. More precisely, many of them report the **insufficient participation of private companies and non profit organisations** (e.g. BEfrg, UKni, FR, DK) although this is not the case in FI and GR, or the weak involvement of employer associations (e.g. ES, PT) while others mention a weak representation of the public authorities, at the national, regional or local levels (NL).

⁴² Source: ECDB 1/1/2003.

The assessment of what ‘sufficient participation’ means depends on the national contexts. For example, the DK evaluators assess the share of private companies (14% of partners) as too low, whereas the European average is 11.8%. They also highlight the low participation of NGOs (8%), which, in this case, seems indeed to be lower than the European average (13.7%, if we identify ‘organisations providing support/guidance to disadvantaged groups’ with NGOs).

In NL, around a quarter of the surveyed lead partners report that one or more important partners were missing in their DP: 23% of respondents stated the lack of employer organisations, 14% the lack of organisations representing the industry, 14% the lack of educational organisations, 18% of local or national government and 14% stated that organisations providing financial support to unemployed and disabled were missing.

The underlying question in fact concerns the conditions for a successful partnership. Thus, it is not only the capacity of gathering the ‘right’ partners (i.e. the partners bringing added value for the implementation of DP actions) that matters, but also the phasing of partner involvement at different stages of project implementation. For example, the difficulty to attract enterprises has been explained by the complexity of administrative requirements in EQUAL (as signalled by the DK and FR evaluators), but also by the fact that a sustained participation throughout the DP lifecycle is difficult for companies: this suggests that the adequate phasing of partner involvement is important.

Other conditions for success were proposed by the national evaluators:

- *Including all strategic partners*⁴³ in the DPs is seen by some evaluators (e.g. in AT and SE) as a pre-requisite for the sustainability of the partnerships and DP actions and results. However other evaluators have shown that other strategies were possible, e.g. including partners with ‘lobbying’ skills. What thus seems to matter is to engage early with institutional actors and multipliers, not necessarily to have them within the partnership (see below, section 4.3);
- *Favouring a concrete and active participation of partners.* According to some evaluators the most important difficulty is not only the weak representation of certain partners⁴⁴, but the ‘**unequal involvement**’ of partners described as an obstacle to achieving the DP objectives, and as an obstacle to empowerment. This unequal involvement results in a lack of collaboration between the partners (as pointed out by the BEfrg and FR evaluators), bad co-ordination (BEfrg), poor attendance or a passive behaviour of some partners at meetings (UKni).

The requirement for ‘inclusiveness’ has thus been interpreted in two different ways:

*(1) First, it has been interpreted as the involvement of a wide variety of organisations, representing different sectors of policy and practice. This **representation** is seen as enhancing DPs’ implementation capacity:*

- On the one hand, the participation of organisations representing the target groups or working with them is assessed as a *facilitating factor for outreach activities and for empowerment* by the UKni, BEfrg, ES, NL, IE and AT evaluators. Several evaluators (ES,

43 Strategic partners are members that are not actively involved in the DPs’ work, but which have are supposed to play a role for mainstreaming.

44 The BEfrg evaluators mention that 13% of the coordinators and 15% of the project partners state that the lack of involvement of the private or NGO sector has been a major problem in the partnership. The UKni evaluators stress that some ‘DPs suffered from insufficient private and/or community sector representation’.

UKni⁴⁵, NL⁴⁶, BEfrg, IE and DE) point out that a large majority of DPs has counted with partners representing the target groups or with NGOs working with the target groups. In addition, these groups and organisations have largely contributed to increasing the diversity of points of view in the Development Partnerships.

- On the other hand, the involvement of influent policy makers and of other key partners such as companies is assessed as positive for *mainstreaming purposes*. Thus the ES evaluators regret the insufficient participation of employer organisations, on the grounds that such participation is required for raising employers' awareness, fighting prejudices and securing the sustainability of the actions. The PT Managing Authority has decided to favour the involvement of public authorities in R2 DPs, so as to facilitate mainstreaming. However in practice, their participation has remained similar. Conversely, more companies have been involved as lead partners (11.5% in R2 as compared with 5.2% in R1), which is also positive for mainstreaming. In GR, the share of local authorities involved as DP lead partners increased from 12.5% to 26.6%).

However, ensuring the representation of relevant institutions and organisations is not sufficient:

- Some evaluators have shown that the involvement of partners representing or working with the target groups tends to lead DP members to think (wrongly) that they have the right skills within their partnership for reaching out to the target groups, since they have the right actors. This has proved a misconstrued hypothesis, and adequate diagnosis tools (e.g. for identifying the factors facilitating and hampering beneficiaries' access to the actions proposed, as stressed by the ES evaluators) as well as innovative outreach activities (as pointed out by the UKni evaluators) are also crucial.
- Similarly, the inclusion of political decision-makers in the partnerships has sometimes been interpreted as a guarantee that mainstreaming and transfer would take place, whereas these depend on the interest, time, capacities and real status of the persons in charge.

(2) Secondly, inclusiveness has also been interpreted as ensuring the coverage of the full range of required skills (in this case partners are invited to join on account of their specific skills and potential contributions).

The UKni and ES evaluators highlight the benefits of such approach to the construction of partnerships, both for mutual learning between partners and for effectiveness (mobilisation of the right skills at the right time). This way of interpreting inclusiveness thus promotes the professionalisation of partnerships, and their reliance on expertise.

In ES for example, the evaluators report that, although partnerships were first formed so as to ensure adequate representation of all sectors, DPs have generally intended to optimise the contribution of each partner by allocating functions according to experience and know-how: there could thus be forms of work organisation, based on experience/know-how which would counterbalance/enrich the initial formation of the partnerships on the basis of representation. A major search for partners on the basis of their specific competencies and added value was carried out ahead of the 2nd call.

⁴⁵ The DPs have worked to address empowerment, and the level of involvement of beneficiaries in steering the projects has been fairly high. According to the evaluators' survey of DP partners, 41% of the respondents found the target groups have been centrally involved in all discussions in steering the project while 41% felt that beneficiaries had an important role to play. By contrast, just 6% considered that the target groups had a limited role in steering the project while 12% felt that they had no role in steering the project but did receive benefits from the project.

⁴⁶ The NL evaluators state that 70% of the DPs have incorporated one or more target groups or organisation representing them in the design, implementation or evaluation of the projects.

All in all, these two trends, towards a large institutional representation and towards professionalisation and expertise, are not necessarily opposed but should rather be seen as complementary. Several national evaluators conclude that a successful partnership composition is one providing for an adequate mix of both public and private organisations, strategic and operational partners, and allowing for the mobilisation of complementary competencies and resources. For example, the PT evaluators point out that institutions with a past record of joint work tend to become core partners of DPs and to open up later (e.g. when moving from the preparation to the implementation phase) towards specialised institutions with relevant experience with the target-groups and in the fields of activity foreseen in the project.

Most of the national evaluators who have provided information on EQUAL R2 highlight that the composition of partnerships is largely marked by continuity with some elements of novelty (new type of partners, new expertise) corresponding to the quest for more effectiveness.

Table 4.2 – Examples of changes in DP composition between R1 and R2 according to the evaluation reports

BEfrg	51% of the organisations involved are NGOs, 23% are para-public (training) organisations, 14% are public authorities, 9% are universities and 3% are ‘other’. In R2 there are more NGOs and less para-public/training organisations than in R1 (one of the problems identified in R1 was the lack of sufficient involvement of private organisations and NGOs). However DPs still do not count with many enterprise partners.
UKni	Significant progress is reported in moving from R1 to R2: ‘In R2, there is a greater level of private sector involvement in the partnerships as the partners understand the need to engage with employers’ (p.47 of the report)
UKgb	Substantial progress has been made in involving community organisations especially as lead partners. Amongst lead partners, there is no increase in further education or private sector lead, respectively at 8% for both Rounds for FE colleges and 10% in R1 and 11% in R2 for the private sector. However progress is mentioned in involving ‘policy influencers’ with strong mainstreaming potential, including private companies.
IE	Only 3 of the original 21 DPs were funded in R2. This brought many new actors into EQUAL. It had been difficult to involve ‘the industry’ in R1, because of worldwide recession, particularly in ICT, and companies cutting back on all expenditure which they felt was unnecessary. The development of practical products in R1 sparked company interest and there is more company involvement in R2.
PT	The Managing Authority decided to favour those partnerships showing a wide variety of partners. However one requirement which has not changed concerns the participation of companies, which was mandatory in both rounds.
AT	The Managing Authority explicitly warned that no R1 DP could continue be funded in R2 without substantial changes both in terms of partners as well as content. We have no information about the reality of the DPs changes.
DE	Half of the DPs existed already in R1, but only very few partnerships continued their cooperation without any change. Most of them changed partners for R2. The other half did not exist before or had prior experience of co-operation, but outside EQUAL. Among R2 partnerships with prior experience of joint work, 30 % of the partners (including ‘strategic’ partners) were involved in R1.

Source: 2005 national evaluation reports

4.2.1.2. Size of partnerships

Overall, the average number of DP partners in R1 has been 15.4 according to the ECDB⁴⁷, but the differences are important between and within Member States⁴⁸, which testifies to a different conception of what a partnership is.

⁴⁷ ECDB data have to be taken with caution. For R1, they are indicated as of 1/1/2003 and it is possible that the data had not always been correctly provided at that date. For example the ECDB indicates an average size of 31 partners in GR in R1, whereas the national evaluators find an average size of 18 partners. For FR the figures are respectively 13.4 and 7.3.

- Large partnerships (around or more than 20 DP partners) have been implemented in some MS (GR, IT and the UKgb).
- Small partnerships (less than 10 DP partners) have been DPs' preference, on average, in the three Nordic countries and in IE.
- Finally intermediate sizes were found in the other Member States: in AT, ES, NL and the UKni, the average has been between 15 and 20 partners. In BEfrg, BEnl, FR, LU and PT, the average size has been lower, with between 10 and 15 partners.

Size can also be approached through budgets. According to the ECDB, nearly two thirds of R1 DPs has a budget of between 500,000 and 2 millions €. Only 13.5% DPs had less than 500,000€. 23.5% had a budget of more than 2 millions €.

Again there have been wide differences between MS in R1:

- Some MS such as AT, ES, GR and the UKgb have favoured DPs with very large budgets: 80% DPs have a budget of more than 1 million €;
- Conversely, some MS have favoured 'small' partnerships: in IE, PT, SE and the UKni, more than 80% DPs had less than 1 million €;
- Other MS have made an intermediate choice.

Considering these two indicators, we find MS such as AT, ES, GR and the UKgb where the preference in R1 had gone to large partnerships with important budgets. At the other end, we find IE, PT and SE, which opted for partnerships with less partners and lower budgets. It is worth noting that there has not necessarily been a correspondence between the 2 indicators: thus in the UKni, the number of partners has been relatively important, but budgets were comparatively more limited than in other countries.

The transition between R1 and R2 has been an opportunity to raise the question of the 'adequate' DP size. Thus in R2, the average DP size has decreased very significantly across Europe (7.6 partners on average according to the ECDB) and in a large number of MS: for instance, in GR (average of 18.2 in R1 vs. 11.2 in R2) and in FR (average of 7.3 partners for R1 vs. 6.2 for R2). Conversely, in some Member States the partnerships have grown (e.g. in PT, 58% of R2 DPs have 4 partners or less, to be compared with 75% in R1), sometimes considerably (as in the UKgb).

Both increases and decreases in sizes have not happened by chance: there are powerful rationales for both.

- The aim of *wide partner networks* is to favour mainstreaming and to increase the sustainability of the partnership.

The UKgb evaluators illustrate this rationale with two DP examples: a Theme 1B⁴⁹ DP grew from 5 to around 30 partners, and a Theme 2C⁵⁰ DP became an almost 'virtual partnership' gathering 55 partners. In this last case, the DP lead partner felt that the partnership was ultimately too large and unwieldy, which is in tune with the findings from other large DPs in the UKgb, but it has proved beneficial in 'establishing a common voice for lobbying and policy work' (UKgb report, p. 26).

Such large partnerships are thus well placed for lobbying, but are difficult to manage and do not facilitate the active involvement and empowerment of partners.

⁴⁸ No ECDB data was available on DE.

⁴⁹ Combating racism.

⁵⁰ Opening up business creation to all.

- The aim of *restricted partnerships*, sometimes encouraged by the Managing Authorities during the preparation of R2, is to be more reactive, more manageable and hence more efficient in their project implementation.

In FR, the MA/NSS advised applicants to limit their number of partners, in view of improving DP management and results. DPs abode by this recommendation, and the average DP size decreased in R2. R2 DPs recognised that this was an important factor of partnership dynamism.

In ES, DPs followed the MA's recommendation to limit the number of partners but at the same time sought to widen the spectrum of the types of organisations involved.

However, small partnerships also present weaknesses: for example the UKgb evaluators find that it has been more difficult for small partnerships to apply the other EQUAL principles.

The question of the optimal size of the DPs remains therefore debated and often the 'actual size' is perceived by DPs as being the optimal size. This is the case in NL: the evaluators mention that more than half of the DPs has 5 or more partners and more than 70% of the DPs see this size as optimal. Pillar III has the largest share of large DPs; it also has the highest score on 'actual size = optimal size'.

In addition, the more or less appropriate number of DP partners also depends on the phase of implementation. Partnerships tend to enlarge in the transition from the preparation to the implementation phase. When they arrive at the stage of transfer to policy and practice, different strategies are followed. The PT evaluators report that the partnerships again reduce their size (possibly due to operational partners leaving) whilst the UKgb evaluators note an increase in size (as new actors join for mainstreaming purposes).

Thus it does seem that there is no ideal partnership size, but rather that there are various possible models depending on the DP objectives and style. However what seems to matter is that programmes allowed for sufficient flexibility over time, within an overall stable framework (see next section). In any case, even partnerships of limited size can succeed in bringing quite diverse partners together.

4.2.2. The evolution of the concept of partnership

The stability in the composition of the partnership is generally reported and regarded as a facilitating factor for implementing DP projects and reaching the aim of EQUAL.

However, fluidity is also a characteristic of the composition as well as of the ways of operating for a substantial number of EQUAL partnerships. This observation, made in several national evaluation reports, confirms the trend towards fluidity pointed out in our second interim report (march 2005) and seems to show that both fluidity and stability are necessary for an adequate implementation of EQUAL projects.

Changes are mentioned in NL where 30% of the DPs report the withdrawal of at least one partner and 20% of the DPs report the arrival of a new partner; in the UKgb, where a significant proportion (39%) of the R1 DPs reported further changes to the partnership in the past 12 months, or in PT (about 53 % of the DPs have had changes in their composition during the implementation phase of R1).

In ES, the dominant pattern is the stability in the composition of DPs: 76% of DPs had not experienced any change in the DP organisation in 2003-2004 (which is the period the evaluators report on). However this also depended on the themes: in theme 2C (business creation) 42.9% of the surveyed DPs had experienced changes. Moreover, the evaluators stress that stability is sometimes formal, as ad hoc and informal co-operation mechanisms with external organisations have been set up in the delivery phase.

In most cases, changes in the composition of the partnership occur in the phases of transition between the EQUAL Actions. For example, 61% of the PT DPs which have experienced a change in their composition, did so during the transition from the preparation to the implementation phase (as opposed to 31% during the implementation phase and less than 8% during the preparation phase).

These changes are in part unwanted, notably when there is a withdrawal of partners. As pointed out by several national evaluators, the withdrawal of partners is essentially due to changes in personnel (UKni, LU), financial or organisational difficulties of small NGOs (NL, AT, SE) or to the lack of involvement of certain types of partners (ES, BE). Withdrawals are therefore part of the organic ‘life’ of partnerships but this becomes a weakness when a key partner or the lead partner leaves.

In other cases, changes are strategic. They reflect the necessity to strengthen the dynamism of the partnership at the different phases in the partnership lifecycle. In these cases the aim is to:

- *review the composition of the partnership*: national evaluators point out that one of the main reasons for change in a DP is the need to include new partners for ‘societal’ or public support (37% of the reasons provided for changes by PT DPs) and the need to include partners with specific knowledge (as mentioned in the NL report);
- *adjust size* as already mentioned in the previous section;
- *adjust the work programme or re-scale or re-design the actions* once the needs of the target groups were better known (ES).

Such adjustments are assessed positively because they testify to the capacity of DPs *to re-orient their* projects thanks to an adequate *monitoring and reflexive process*. However they may also indicate an initial weakness in the diagnosis performed at the beginning of the projects (the preparation phase).

This analysis confirms that there needs to be a balance between an overall stability of partnership composition and some extent of fluidity. Fluidity may be needed to enhance the responsiveness of partnerships to the changes identified in their monitoring process, especially during implementation. Stability is important in the first stage, for consolidation purposes, and in the last phase (mainstreaming), to enhance credibility.

4.2.3. Decision-making

The question addressed here is that of the more or less participative character of the governance mechanisms set up by DPs: has the trend towards decentralisation of decision-making, observed in our previous report, been confirmed, and what have been its consequences on DPs’ mode of organisation⁵¹?

The *design of partnerships* shapes participation in decision-making processes. In practice, decision-making has tended to be the prerogative of a core of agents, but capacity building has taken place with positive effects for participation, notably of small organisations.

The national evaluators point out two tendencies, each with its strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, *streamlining* of the partnerships has taken place, towards more centralisation and specialisation. Although such evolution can lead to more effectiveness, the risk is to limit the involvement of a number of partners in the decision-making process. On the other hand, an evolution towards less centralised partnerships, close to ‘*networks*’, has also been observed. In this case, more partners take part in the decision-making and they are placed on a more equal footing, but the sustainability of such arrangements can be at stake.

⁵¹ This issue has not been directly addressed by the FR, LU, NL, DE, IE and AT evaluators.

4.2.3.1. Models of co-operation

Decision-making mechanisms depend on the nature of the co-operation built between partners. Several national evaluators have put forward typologies of co-operation between partners, and have analysed work organisation and the decision-making process in each of their models:

- The UKni evaluators studied the *extent of mutual knowledge and networking*⁵² that existed between the partners prior to EQUAL. More precisely, the evaluators found that *the model based on ‘moving beyond bi-lateral partnerships’ appears to be the most successful approach within NI’s EQUAL programme in RI*, because it provides well-established partners with the opportunity to broaden their network, their expertise and resources through the inclusion of other perhaps less familiar, but critical groups. In the ‘novice model’, there is a risk that the partners may not fully understand the level of commitment required.
- The UKgb evaluators had proposed a typology (already presented in our 2nd interim report) distinguishing 2 models of co-operation: the ‘*centralised model*⁵³ where the steering group acts as the main driver, with fluid sub-groups’, and the ‘*hub and spoke model*, centralised for management and decentralised for operational purposes, with a more devolved project or site-based structure, typically involving a larger number of distinct components to the DP’. In this model partners come together less frequently. The centralised model seemed to be more frequent in partnerships involving a small number of organisations, and the hub and spoke model was more frequent in large partnerships, or partnerships with a national scope. The *hub and spoke model has generalised*, even amongst regional and local partnerships.
- The ES evaluators have proposed a typology of partnerships based on the extent of previous experience of core partners and on the nature of decision-making processes. They thus distinguish, on the one hand, between DPs with a core of partners with prior experience of co-operation and those without this experience, and, on the other hand, between DPs with a trend towards equalitarian decision-making and those with a more hierarchical model of decision-making. This gave rise to a matrix of 4 possibilities:

Table 4.3 – The ES evaluators’ typology of partnerships

	Core of partners with previous experience of collaboration	Partners without previous experience of collaboration
Hierarchical	‘exclusive core’ model	‘hierarchical coalition’ model
Participative	‘integrative core’ model	model of ‘coalitions oriented to participation’

Source: ES Mid-term and 2005 national evaluation reports.

The evaluators found a higher incidence of participative decision-making mechanisms, whether there was a core of partners with prior experience or not.

- The PT evaluators provide a classification of partnerships into three categories: (a) *pyramidal partnerships* – where the lead partner or a very restricted number of partners make decisions and run the DP while the bulk of partners have a more instrumental role in

⁵² Three models of networking are defined: (1) Natural partners: These were organisations with long established working relationships from past experience. (2) Moving beyond ‘bi-lateral partnering’: DPs in which different partners in the group had worked together previously on different projects, but in which all the partners had never worked together on a collective basis before. (3) Novices: Those who established partnerships involving members who had no pre-existing working relationships. In the novice model, there is a risk that the partners may not fully understand the level of commitment required.

⁵³ There is, from our point of view, a slight difficulty with the vocabulary used, as the term ‘centralised’ evokes hierarchical rather than democratic structures, whereas steering groups could actually involve representatives from most partners and thus constitute a rather democratic forum. As the hub and spoke model is also described as ‘centralised’ in management terms, this is slightly confusing.

the implementation of the activities. There is thus a three level structure: lead partner, partners in the core group, and remaining partners; (b) *Symmetrical partnerships* – in this model, except for the lead partner, which has a greater role and power, all partners are more or less at the same level; (c) *Networks* – in this model, there is a more or less equal weight of partners in decision-making, which brings about more intense participation.

These different typologies seem to point towards the two overall organisational trends mentioned in the introduction to this section:

- *A tendency towards the 'streamlining' of partnerships*: this trend, which is for example illustrated in the 'hub and spoke model', corresponds to an increased centralisation and specialisation in the decision-making process in order to enhance effectiveness. The consequence is a more limited involvement of partners in decision-making. As pointed out by the UKgb evaluators, 'streamlining' leads to a better formalisation of the role of each partner in the DPs, which may mean that some partners leave when the DP moves to Action 3, but this does not mean that DPs 'disintegrate'.

Conversely, the ES evaluators observe that partnership work has been threatened in cases of excessive specialisation and fragmentation of the work, but this can be counter-acted if all the sub-projects give rise to working groups with the participation of all partners. The trend towards fragmentation in DPs is assessed as stemming from a lack of co-ordination mechanisms and a lack of 'culture of co-operation', more marked in the largest DPs, which leads the evaluators to assess positively the decision made by the MA, for R2, to limit the number of partners to 10-15 by DP.

- *A tendency towards the development of partnerships into networks*: These partnerships are less centralised, less specialised and less formalised. Group work contributes to changing the relationships between partners (as mentioned by the UKni evaluators, who saw 'the 'networking' relationships developing into deeper, substantive working partnerships'). However, these large partnerships are heavier and less sustainable.

4.2.3.2. Participation

In this context, several national evaluators state that the decision-making process (the roles and assignments of each group taking part in the decision process - steering group, working groups, etc.) has been stable during R1. In BEfrg and PT, most DP stakeholders have declared that they were satisfied with the decision making processes (94% in BEfrg and 91% in PT).

Most of the time, decision-making takes place at DP steering group meeting. In some countries these meetings involve almost all the partners. In PT for example, the decentralised decision-making process is characterised by a collective decision after large discussions including most partners.

However, there are downsides to participative decision-making processes. In the UKgb, for example, DP lead partners complain about the time required in such a model for reaching a decision. The evaluators also stress that the beneficiaries involved may find it difficult to follow some of the intricacies of project management, which may have a disempowering rather than an empowering effect. There is thus a tension between the EQUAL requirement of 'participative decision making' and the daily reality.

In practice, even in those cases where the partners and the beneficiaries are regularly involved in different groups, key decisions tend to be made by a core of agents despite of the risk, already pointed out in our 2nd interim report on the basis of the UKgb evaluators' findings, that an additional layer of administrative/financial power was created and despite the risk of fragmentation of the partnership. As stated by the AT evaluators, the trend towards an increased

decentralisation of implementation over time is not necessarily coupled with decentralised decision-making.

The national evaluators stress the importance of an ‘adequate’ participation of partners (rather than an equal participation) to avoid the risk of fragmentation and unbalanced involvement: to participate at the ‘right time’, and according to the specific skills of each partner. The DE evaluators mention for instance that DP lead partners, DP members, representatives of the target groups as well as strategic partners, women representatives and gender mainstreaming experts, were strongly involved in the preparation phase of R2, particularly in the analysis of the context and in the definition of the target-groups but to varying degrees (depending on the stakeholders and on the issues addressed).

In fact, several national evaluators differentiate between formal and actual decision-making processes. In their analysis, the ‘true’ decision-making bodies are the working groups, much more than the partner assemblies or the steering/monitoring committees, seen as ‘slow and cumbersome mechanism of governance’ (in the words of the UKni evaluators) as these meet rather infrequently.

For this reason, the ES evaluators stress the importance to secure a representation of all the partners in these working groups, to counter-act the trend towards ‘fragmentation’, which was highlighted by 83% of ES DPs. The UKni evaluators report that, in order to address ‘time constraints’, sub-committees devoted to achieving certain objectives have been introduced. Some DPs even gave up steering group meetings entirely and only used sub-committees to coordinate the entire project. One DP chose to have a core group of partners with further ‘looser’ partners described as ‘reference points’. The tasks of these reference points was to comment on the core group’s briefing papers, to provide a contact person for advice and to help with dissemination.

4.2.3.3. Capacity building and partners empowerment

Several evaluators (UKni, FI, ES, SE, UKgb, PT, DE) report that capacity building has taken place.

- The UKni evaluators show that the partnership process acted as a *forum for capacity building and ‘social learning’* in large DPs. They illustrate this point with the example of a large DP of 18 members, in which the partners with more knowledge of EU programmes were able to transfer their experience to smaller organisations and improve their level of engagement within the programme.
- In ES, small ‘grass-roots’ partners and partners representing beneficiaries, interviewed by the evaluators in their case studies of R1 DPs, stress that, through the participative decision-making processes which were set up, they had been put on an equal footing with public administrations, something which would not happen outside EQUAL. This also represents an element of progress with respect to the beginnings of the implementation of the programme in ES, where more weight was originally given to the organisations with more financial contribution (typically regional and local authorities). It thus definitely can be said, according to the evaluators, that capacity building *has* taken place. This has sometimes required conscious efforts, for example on the part of lead partners, to explain (‘translate’) the terminology of the programme, perceived as highly complex, to their partners.
- In the UKgb, capacity building is assessed as one of the main positive results of the implementation of the partnership and empowerment principles. For DPs, ‘capacity building’ is regarded as *‘speaking with a common voice’*. Two quotes from the report nicely illustrate this point: many DPs are said to have used EQUAL as a *‘platform to magnify the voices of individual organisations’*, and, in two case study DPs, ‘EQUAL is used as a springboard to effectively develop *new networks for influencing policy.*’

- DK evaluators mention that the most important empowerment of the project participants takes place at the psychological level in the form of increased self-esteem and self-confidence, whereas action-oriented and political empowerment are more limited.

However, several evaluators highlight that obstacles slow down progress in capacity building: (a) *small partnerships are regarded as having difficulties* to achieve a positive impact (as mentioned in the UKgb report), in particular due to the difficulty in making themselves heard and in participating in EC initiatives as complex as EQUAL (as stressed by the AT evaluators). Conversely, reaching *a critical mass in the partnership* is regarded as a facilitating factor for capacity building. (b) The *financial issue is assessed as a persisting obstacle* to the participation of ‘grass-roots’ partners due to the substantial advance of funds required. The ES evaluators mention that small organisations sometimes have had to resort to borrowing with banks, at high rates, and the financial cost of this borrowing was not considered eligible by EQUAL, which was a further problem.

4.2.4. Quality of project management

In any case, the implementation of the partnership and empowerment principles *per se* does not appear to be sufficient for project effectiveness and thus for the reduction of inequalities and discrimination: **the quality of the management of the project** (including the starting diagnoses, the on-going monitoring and the evaluation) is a key condition for a successful partnership; sound financial arrangements are of course also required, and guidance by programme actors also makes a difference.

Little information is in fact provided in the evaluation reports on the quality of DP management. Nevertheless, it can be said that a constant search for enhancement of project management has taken place, both supported by programme actors (e.g. through the new guidelines given to applicants in R2) and at the initiative of DPs themselves (e.g. through changes in the composition of the partnerships, as explained above).

The diversification and change of status of DP lead partners between R1 and 2 is without doubt a key indication for understanding how DPs have sought to improve the quality of management. Some national evaluators point out a higher representation of NGOs and a lower representation of local authorities as a factor facilitating implementation: evidence is given by the BEfrg and the UKgb evaluators. In BEfrg there are more NGOs and less para-public and training organisations amongst lead partners in R2 than in R1 (51% are NGOs, 23% are para-public or training organisations in R2). The UKgb evaluators indicate that 26% DPs were led by local authorities in R1 but their share is down to 19% in R2. More attention was paid to ensuring that Voluntary Sector Organisations would be better represented as lead partners, although there is some continuity with regard to certain actors (e.g. no increase in further education or private sector lead).

The UKgb evaluators have highlighted a series of ‘common principles that support successful partnerships, notably having a clear policy focus and being able to crystallise how the DP will add value. There are, however, a series of characteristics that are particularly pertinent for those partnerships predominated by smaller voluntary and community sector organisations, where the issues are sometimes unique, among them:

- Having a clear innovative idea that can be simply articulated and clearly articulated objectives from the start
- Ensuring that partners are fully cognisant of the nature of EQUAL and what differentiates it from other ESF programmes (partners exposure to transnational working can aid this)
- Undertaking risk analysis upfront, as large-scale programmes put additional pressure on small organisations (workload and cash flow)
- Engaging an evaluator early on and ensure their work will offer critical challenge to the partnership and work plan’ (UKgb report, p. 29).

The quality of project management also depends on DPs' capacity **to monitor their activities and to assess their effectiveness and efficiency** in order to take corrective action if relevant

Few evaluation reports provide information on the monitoring system and the evaluation process implemented at DP level. However on the basis of the information available, it seems that DP-level **evaluation remains a weak point** and this is likely to reduce the quality of project management. In most of the cases where an analysis has been carried out by national evaluators, DP level evaluation and monitoring processes generally seem to be in place but *lack clarity and means*.

In the UKni, it is not clear whether all DPs have adopted a monitoring procedure for their partnership. There is one interesting example: one DP, which found that its objectives were not being achieved, decided to move into a 'review mode' which consisted in examining in more detail the barriers which prevented the client group from engaging in their project.

The UKgb evaluators stress two problems:

- *A lack of clarity in the role and function of the evaluation among many DPs:* the selection and the role of the DP evaluator are often unclear (member of the partnership or independent and external?). This then leads to disappointments with the evaluation results⁵⁴. Besides, timing problems have reduced the potential impact of self-evaluation (e.g. when evaluators were contracted after the implementation phase had started)
- *A significant discrepancy in how much focus different DPs have paid to evaluation:* variations are reported in terms of activities being evaluated by DPs. However there seemed to be a strong focus on the process rather than on the impact/outcomes. Moreover, a separate study about the self-evaluation⁵⁵ work undertaken by the R1 DPs has shown significant differences in the time allocated by DPs to their evaluation activities (from 5 to 101+ days).

According to the NL evaluators, the *situation with respect to monitoring has worsened* as compared with the 1st interim report (2003). Evaluations carried out or commissioned by DPs usually bear on implementation issues and concern less often the results and effects of what has been done. Moreover, evaluations are often based on personal impressions and lack criteria and indicators. The national evaluators highlight important deficiencies:

- 40% DPs do not register whether participants complete the project and/or whether they have benefited from the project.
- 60% of the DPs have no information as to what happens with the participants after they have completed the project.
- Even amongst those DPs which have a monitoring system, one third have no information on the former participants' status after they left or completed the project.

The ES evaluators report difficulties in assessing implementation rates, due to the rather vague formulation of the initial objectives⁵⁶, except in the thematic areas of the asylum seekers and business creation. As a result, the DP final reports do not provide data based on monitoring and evaluation systems. Generally speaking, the evaluators note that DPs still deal with evaluation as something to comply with, not as a tool. However, this is different for those DPs where

⁵⁴ Example: a DP chose an external evaluator but felt that precisely because it was not a DP member, this evaluator failed to provide an appropriate assessment.

⁵⁵ The study was undertaken on behalf of the ESF Division.

⁵⁶ They note differences between what was said in the interviews and what was presented in the DP final reports. This casts some doubt on the very high rates of achievement reported (between 75% and 99% for 78% of DPs, and 100% for 13% of DPs).

promoters had prior experience of EU projects and were thus more familiar with the ‘evaluation culture’. In general, they tended to entrust the evaluation to external evaluators and evaluations tended to be of better quality.

Similarly, the PT evaluators found that 40% of the DPs had set up self-evaluation procedures solely because this was required by the MA. They point out that the best results on the self-evaluation process had been obtained when associated with the external evaluation of the DPs.

Overall, the national evaluation reports show that the importance and role of monitoring and evaluation processes has not been fully understood by DPs in R1, an observation we have also made in our analysis of transnational partnerships (see Chapter 6). Further guidance seemed to be required, which has already been taken into account by some MAs/NSS (see following section).

4.2.5. MA/NSS guidance

4.2.5.1. Activities

Some evaluators point out the changes between R1 and R2 operated in the methodological support provided by the MA and the NSS: this support aims to help the DPs in *administrating, managing, implementing and assessing* their project in a better way, so as to improve the quality of the partnerships in R2 by learning from the experience of R1⁵⁷.

In particular, new guides have been edited and training sessions have been organised:

- In the UKni, the MA and the NSS contracted the Workers Education Association (WEA) to organise DP *training*⁵⁸ and to support the partnership process in the R2, so as to increase ‘partnership skills’. This helped some DPs consolidate their partnerships and establish decision making structures based on sub-groups or operational committees. However, not all DPs seem to have availed of this support.
- In the UKgb, a *self-evaluation guide* has been produced. It has been revised in December 2005 for R2 DPs.
- The LU evaluators report that a *Users’ guide* is regularly updated and is published on the website.
- In ES the NSS has provided several tools to DPs to assist them in the administration, monitoring, management and evaluation of their partnerships. These tools include notably a *Monitoring module*, a *Guide for internal evaluation*; a *guide for the management and control* of EQUAL projects; a *guide for the integration of the gender perspective* in the EQUAL projects; as well as an *EQUAL forum* and a *webpage*.
- The main new support tool in IE has been an *induction seminar* for new successful applicants.

⁵⁷ The NL, FI, DE, SE, AT evaluators do not mention any change between R1 and R2 in the type of guidance provided to DPs.

⁵⁸ The training programme has consisted in an introductory session on partnership building delivered during a two-day induction residential for the DPs in November 2004 and further partnership building. Another residential induction session was planned for November 2005 for new staff employed by the DPs at the beginning of the implementation phase and three partnership training courses were scheduled for October, November and December 2005.

- In BEfrg, programme management actors are taking a more *qualitative approach* to guidance, including *project visits*, *the provision to DPs of analytical tools* based on the logical framework, etc.

Two recent EU guides seem to have been very useful to the MAs/NSS⁵⁹:

- *The EQUAL Guide for Development Partnerships ‘Learning from the experience of EQUAL partnerships’ (2004)* - This guide, written with the active participation of several DPs, is aimed at supporting all the EQUAL DPs to build up an efficient and fruitful partnership.
- *The Partnership Development Toolkit* is a partnership oriented planning, monitoring and evaluation guide for facilitators of EQUAL Development and Transnational Partnerships. Published in September 2005, this toolkit is based on an extensive research into the R1. It is designed as a practical guide providing best practice techniques and explaining how DPs can use the ‘Project Cycle Management’ to design and implement their own projects and to identify and clarify problems.

4.2.5.2. Effectiveness

Some national evaluators have assessed the quality of these tools and their impact on the implementation of the partnerships and on project management.

In ES, the evaluators have assessed each of these tools in turn.

- The *guide for internal evaluation* was assessed positively by DPs although they found it too complex. The evaluators view it as an open and flexible as well as progressive tool. However, it does not seem to have been sufficient to raise DPs’ awareness on the use of the evaluation for their projects;
- The *guide on management and control* of DPs gathers all the basic information that DPs have to know about EQUAL and has been updated by the NSS. All DPs have found it useful, though less so in pillar 2;
- The *guide on gender perspective* has been designed exclusively for DPs within theme 1A⁶⁰. DPs have a very positive opinion of this guide, which they find very concrete, with examples of mistakes to avoid, and clear and precise language;
- *The NSS support is assessed highly positively*, the staff highly committed and this commitment is recognised by DPs. But *the DPs are not as satisfied with the quality of the information provided*.
- Less administrative and more technical, project oriented issues are rarely raised with the NSS⁶¹.

The PT evaluators mention that 20% of the DP partners considered that the support had been improved (20%) or had remained at the same quality level (27,5%), but 95% of the DP leaders considered it as adequate⁶².

In FR, Regional Support Structure staff was invited to participate in training sessions organised by the MA and NSS before or during the R2 preparation phase. According to the evaluators, these training sessions had a positive impact on project management, as the Regional Support Structures have been able to provide more informed advice to DPs, especially on the organisation of partnerships.

⁵⁹ See Chapter 9.

⁶⁰ See Chapter 7.

⁶¹ The 2 main issues on which DPs contact the NSS are (a) the functioning of the ‘Monitoring module’, (b) The doubts on eligibility of expenditure on the other hand. (these two issues do not seem to be specific to ES).

⁶² Source: DP survey.

4.3. ADDED-VALUE

4.3.1. Contribution to the reduction of labour market related inequalities and discrimination

Although it is in most cases impossible and unjustified to disentangle the specific contribution of the partnership principle to the overall objective of EQUAL (i.e. the reduction of labour market related inequalities and discrimination), as DPs as a whole aim at reaching this objective, it is nevertheless clear in some cases that the partnership requirement has played a crucial role. Some of the clearest examples are provided below.

First, the implementation of the partnership principle has stimulated, as already said above, the involvement of local or community organisations with an excellent knowledge of target groups. The result is that **groups who would normally be excluded from training or employment opportunities have probably benefited from EQUAL actions**. We say ‘probably’ because not many evaluators have analysed the profile of the groups actually reached by EQUAL actions. Evidence of targeting and reaching marginalised groups not usually targeted is clear in the UKni and UKgb reports. Conversely the BEfrg and ES evaluators express their doubts as to the effectiveness of DPs in reaching out to the most disadvantaged, especially in some themes. In other cases we do not have much information. As said above, the ES evaluators demonstrate that the participation of grass-roots organisations has sometimes not been sufficient to ensure effective targeting. They suggest that the lack of appropriate diagnosis in the first place has been an obstacle. For example, e-learning platforms, designed in principle to reach out to people who usually do not take part in training, have a very low effectiveness – and this is probably due to a misconstruction of potential users’ relationship to IT tools. In addition, as stressed by the IE and UKni evaluators, imaginative outreach mechanisms have to be devised.

The principle of partnership is therefore not a guarantee *per se* that the most vulnerable people will be reached; *specific research, diagnosis and outreach activities must be carried out*. Conversely, partnerships can be a handicap in the sense that many interests have to be combined and this may have consequences with regard to the definition of the target group and prevent reaching out to the most disadvantaged. mean concessions regarding the target groups.

Secondly, the involvement of ‘strategic partners’ can contribute to increase the **visibility of discrimination issues and stimulate more public debate**⁶³. The UKgb evaluators mention several very concrete examples in this respect, such as that of one DP in which ‘partners have been briefing ministers and have reported at the Trade and Industry Select Committee on gender segregation and the pay gap’ (UKgb report, p.32). The report provides further very specific examples of policy maker engagement such as individual engagement with MPs, submission on specific policy to government, involvement of a lead partner in an All-Party Parliamentary Group and a lead partner of a DP sitting on the Sector Skills Council (a recently created public body in the UKgb) strategy group.

There have also been direct results in terms of ‘**empowerment**’ of groups which are being discriminated against, marginalised or simply forgotten by policies and institutions. This could be expected in a programme focused on the reduction of discrimination, but the partnership and empowerment principles have sometimes been seen by the evaluators as the direct drive for this to happen. Examples mentioned in the reports include:

- A case of close cooperation between the Defence department, the police, the Church and organisations representing homosexual people to promote the latter’s integration in SE. The beneficiaries initiated the activities and participated in the design of the DP actions.

⁶³ This is also dealt with in Chapter 5 (Innovation).

- A case of empowerment of female workers, who have been able to change the employers' negative perceptions of the impact of the family life on work, in BEfrg;
- A case of new support services for people living with HIV, in the UKgb, in which beneficiaries stressed they felt particularly empowered by the fact that issues such as disclosure of HIV status at work and confidence to return to work were addressed;
- Triggering a change of perception of ex offenders by prison staff: one UKgb theme 1A⁶⁴ DP organised a peer research programme, in which ex offenders worked alongside prison officers to carry out research within the prisons: 'Relating to them in that way was incredibly positive, and securing buy-in to the practice of acceptance of ex-offenders back into prisons to work has broken new ground and set a precedent' (UKgb report, p. 59);
- The provision of spaces for the collective voice of target groups to be heard, in AT, particularly in theme 1B (combating racism) and 5 (asylum seekers); a majority of the target groups (59%) argued that the DPs contributed to improving their public image and possibly even to the legislative reform

4.3.2. Contribution to innovation

Several evaluators assess partnership work as **an innovation *per se***: ways of working together have changed as a result of this programme requirement: this would seem to be the case especially in the Member States of Southern Europe. The ES evaluators noted a strengthening of the involvement of employer associations, unions, and organisations representing the target groups in decision making in employment and social inclusion policies. More generally they found that EQUAL had given rise to stable informal socio-economic networks, in which, 'for the first time, all actors sat at the same table' in a given territory. Similarly, the IT evaluators stress that there had been some take up of 'co-ordinated work method through both formal and informal pacts and agreements'. In GR, the EQUAL partnership model, characterised in particular by the constitution of DPs in non for profit private legal entities, was formalised from the start of the programme in a law (Law 2956/2001, Article 42). This has given rise to a recent Ministerial decision for the co-operation of private and public agencies implementing active labour market policies on the basis of the EQUAL DP legal model. Northern European evaluators also identified positive changes in terms of ways of working. For example, the SE evaluators found that co-operation had developed between public authorities and organisations which had not co-operated previously, which they see as having widened the fields of competence for both types of partners⁶⁵.

The pooling of diverse experience and expertise and partnership mechanisms for confronting views in regular meetings have also directly contributed to **boosting learning and partners' competencies**, and thus sometimes to the **elaboration and production of innovative projects and products**. As noted by one of the respondents to the FR evaluators' DP survey, 'the fact that different kinds of people meet and work together twice or three times a year is a source of innovation, of stimulation, but also of questioning (NB of our own practices)'. The IE evaluators found that 'successful innovation' depended, *inter alia*, on the involvement of the target group in the development of the product and on the ability of the partners to provide differing and complementary skills to add value to the development process. The greater involvement of the partners (local and transnational) in Action 1 planning led to enhanced innovation. However, it is also true that innovations had to be planned from the beginning, at application stage, and that at that stage they were not necessarily the product of joint work between partners: the IE evaluators are right to stress that partnership work, when successful, has come to reinforce innovation, but that it has less frequently been at the origin of innovation.

⁶⁴ Facilitating access and return to the labour market.

⁶⁵ This is also taken up in Chapter 10 (Impacts and added value).

There have been obstacles to this kind of mutual learning. The GR evaluators mention that, whilst a majority of the DPs have set up mechanisms which have allowed for effective exchange and debate to take place, there have been cases where the very large number of partners, the lack of common actions, and bureaucratic hurdles created problems. In some DPs, the geographic dispersion of partners put a brake on transfer of knowledge.

4.3.3. Contribution to mainstreaming

Many evaluators have assessed the contribution of the partnership principle to mainstreaming, transfer and sustainability of the EQUAL actions and results. The link between the two principles is obvious, but it has worked out to varying extents (this is taken further in Chapter 8).

The clearest contribution of the principle to mainstreaming simply lies in the fact that mainstreaming usually takes place by transfer of the partnership products to **each of the partner organisations** as well as to informal partners associated in implementation. Although, as shown in Chapter 8, mainstreaming in general is probably the main pending assignment in EQUAL, this level of mainstreaming has worked well according to the evaluators. One example amongst many is provided by the BEfrg evaluators' DP survey: in the opinion of 58% of lead partners, the partnership principle has had a positive contribution to the transfer of knowledge and experience between partners. Other stakeholders such as social workers, educational organisations or parole officers, who were not necessarily DP members but have been engaged in DP activities, can act as multipliers for the dissemination of lessons.

Secondly, the involvement of 'strategic partners' (AT, DE) or 'policy influencers' (UKgb) has been an effective way to promote the transfer and take up of project results. However, the UKgb example shows that these actors were not necessarily involved within the partnerships: what mattered was early engagement with them.

We had already signalled, in our 2nd interim report, **two different strategies** corresponding in part to two different traditions in the relationship between civil society and the policy community: in some Member States (typically in Southern Europe), the partnerships included **representatives of the public authorities**, and this was seen as a guarantee (which as we have said sometimes proved an illusion) that mainstreaming would take place. In the Anglo-Saxon countries, this existed but there is also a more ingrained tradition of **lobbying** work: indeed some partners, e.g. community and voluntary sector organisations, were mobilised especially for their lobbying skills and networks.

An analysis of the advantages and risks of the first strategy is provided by the PT evaluators. Institutional partners in some cases facilitated the mainstream process; on the other hand the instability of their adhesion to DP projects and the rotation of technical staff were a liability. On balance, the evaluators rate their participation as positive, but emphasise that the participation of institutional partners should be ensured at the highest possible level to avoid fluidity in the participation. The IE evaluators also insisted on the need to have senior representatives of all partner organisations in the partnership as a condition for successful mainstreaming⁶⁶.

In the UKgb many DPs were structured around distinct roles (e.g. development; research; delivery; management; policy; lobbying etc.) from the beginning but the evaluators say that it was only towards the end of R1 that it became clear how such an organisational model could add value. We have already mentioned above the example of the 'virtual partnership' of 55 partners where three different roles were distinguished: 'Development partners – i.e. those contributing to the design of products and services and to research projects; Communication partners – those primarily concerned with getting the DP messages across to the wider sector and policy stakeholder community; and Agents – partners that deliver DP products and services

⁶⁶ See Chapter 8.

into the market place (e.g. FE colleges)' (UKgb report, p. 26). As said, this DP proved successful in '*establishing a common voice for lobbying and policy work*' (ditto).

However, in Chapter 8 below, we argue that mainstreaming can not be left only into the hands of DPs, as this would mean that only this type of skilful DPs with good lobbying skills and networks could succeed in mainstreaming their work. Appropriate structures have to be set up at programme level.

4.4. CONCLUSIONS

Main features of the experience of partnership and empowerment in EQUAL and conditions of effectiveness

The implementation of the partnership and empowerment principles, understood as mechanisms for bringing together various relevant actors for tackling an issue, and for working together towards shared goals, has been one of the main successes of EQUAL. It has been key to facilitate access, both to 'target groups' and, though to a lesser extent, to the decision-making community.

The *design of partnerships* has been crucial. Successful partnerships have involved the 'right' partners at the 'right' time and at the 'right' level. Involving the 'right' partners has been understood both as ensuring an adequate representation of all stakeholders active in a given field and/or on a given territory, and/or as mobilising partners with the rights skills for carrying out the tasks set out. Although the two approaches sometimes overlap, this is not necessarily the case: for example, having local authorities on board does not necessarily guarantee that policy mainstreaming will take place as this requires the participation of officials with real decision-making power, commitment and know-how.

The EQUAL experience of partnership has also demonstrated the *relevance of planning and combining different levels of involvement for different partners over time*, rather than requiring continuous commitment. Such a flexible approach is likely to have been particularly suited for the participation of private sector employers, as one obstacle generally acknowledged to the participation of private companies is the time commitment. However, the unequal participation of partners has also been an obstacle to partner empowerment and to collective decision making. Thus, combining 'fluidity' or flexibility in the composition of the partnerships over time with the stability of a core of partners has been an interesting and particularly relevant partnership configuration in EQUAL.

The issue of the optimal size of the DPs remains debated. Restricted partnerships have been regarded as more reactive, more manageable and therefore more efficient but they tend to be less sustainable, and, in the case of really small partnerships, implementation capacity has been at issue (compliance with all EQUAL principles was for example difficult to achieve). Wide partnerships increase the possibilities of sustainability throughout the DP lifecycle as well as the possibilities for mainstreaming, but there is less scope for active participation.

Decision-making mechanisms have been organised on a continuum between two extreme models, centralised decision-making on the one hand, and fully participative decision-making on the other hand. Centralised decision-making has proved quite effective when it was supplemented with adequate consultation mechanisms, whilst fully participative mechanisms have been slower and heavier but have contributed to changing relationships between partners, e.g. between public institutions and third sector organisations. In any case, the importance of these decision-making mechanisms at DP level should not be exaggerated, as the day-to-day decision-making bodies have frequently been project level working groups. This has led to questions around the structure of partnerships in EQUAL, as an additional layer of bureaucracy

(for DP management and administration and the co-ordination between projects) may have been created, especially in Member States where DPs oversaw large budgets, many partners and many projects.

Capacity building has taken place, with a positive effect particularly for the participation in decision-making by small grass-roots organisations. However it has been found that capacity building was more difficult to achieve in small size partnerships and that financial difficulties (in particular due to the substantial advance of funds required) have hampered the continued participation of small organisations.

Not only the adequate composition of partnerships and decision-making mechanisms, but also the implementation of adequate *project management processes* has conditioned effectiveness. In particular the importance of carrying out precise starting diagnoses has been demonstrated (and conversely the absence of such diagnoses has led to difficulties in contacting the target groups, as constraints hampering their participation were not adequately documented). Although progress on DP level monitoring and self-assessment has been noted throughout R1 and into R2, both have generally been weak points in the implementation of partnerships. The objectives of self assessment have been found to be unclear and not enough resources have been dedicated to this task.

NSS guidance to development partnerships has improved over time and has become more qualitative and methodological. This in turn has been a factor in DPs' progress on capacity building and empowerment as well as in project management techniques.

Added value

The partnership and empowerment principles have made a major contribution to the added value of the programme:

- *The involvement of 'strategic partners'* in the partnerships has contributed to raising the profile of the issues addressed, and in some cases has enhanced the visibility of some forms of discrimination and stimulated public debate around them.
- *The involvement of organisations representing the beneficiaries* has led to an improved knowledge of their concrete life situation and of the effects of discrimination, provided this 'proximity' knowledge was backed up with more systematic research. It has also facilitated outreach activities.
- The fact that *very diverse partners* (working in different institutional contexts, in different disciplines, with different statuses and roles) were brought to work jointly in a context in which day to day competition and power relationships could be, partly at least, left aside, has led to a better mutual understanding of the rationales and practices of each, with possible repercussions in their co-operation outside EQUAL.
- In addition, this *mutualisation of knowledge and know-how* has been conducive to innovation as well as transfers between partners, under certain conditions (i.e. provided the management of the partnership itself did not focus all efforts).
- *Speaking 'with a common voice'* has lent some weight to their activities and results and has contributed to mainstreaming and policy influence, again under certain conditions (clear mainstreaming strategy and planning).

5. EFFECTIVENESS AND ADDED VALUE OF THE INNOVATION PRINCIPLE

5.1. INITIAL FRAMEWORK AND EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Innovation is, so to speak, the *raison d'être* of EQUAL: the aim of the initiative is 'to promote new means of combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities in connection with the labour market...' (EQUAL Guidelines, par. 3). The initiative has thus been designed as a 'testing ground to develop and disseminate new ways of delivering employment policies' (par. 9). This is an element of continuity in the programme, as the second Communication talks about a 'laboratory' function (in its introductory paragraph), which permeates the way in which the whole initiative is designed.

This first aspect of the definition of innovation in EQUAL, *as experimentation process*, was not frequently taken up in the CIP documents or in the guidance provided to DPs for the first round, but there were interesting exceptions:

- The PT EQUAL user guide highlighted that 'Innovation is not an isolated and punctual act; it is an occurrence based on uncertainties, probabilities, and opportunities, made of a search, of a succession of acts that happen (when one innovates 'the path is done walking'); it is a change that is framed in a process... Innovation encompasses the combination of different competencies and an interdisciplinary co-operation that should occur within the Development Partnerships; in this context it not only an act of individual creativity and invention; it is a social process that involves trade-offs and negotiations.' (p. 11, EQUAL User Guide)
- The UKgb CIP stressed the importance of deriving lessons, even from failure: 'Partnerships must be clear on the demonstration objectives to ensure that lessons are not lost or become secondary to the achievement of hard outputs. *Much can be learned from innovative approaches which are unsuccessful as those which are and it will be possible for projects to fail but still contribute to mainstreaming activity.* Innovative approaches which emphasise the identification of qualitative outcomes and key lessons will be encouraged.' (p. 106, our emphasis).

This vision of innovation was taken up in the ES CIP in the R2, following the recommendations of the Mid-term evaluators: 'The Mid-term evaluation indicates that innovation is directly related with the capacity for self-analysis and the reflexive capacity of DPs, on their own practices and the social contexts in which they operate. Thus self evaluation and reprogramming capacity should be key features of the implementation of work programmes' (p. 36).

On the other hand, the guidelines predefined the desirable areas and aims of innovation: innovation should bear on 'policy delivery' and *its aim should be to increase the effectiveness of existing policies*, rather than being a source of inspiration for new policies (EQUAL Guidelines par. 28). Such instrumentality of innovation was not necessarily expressed in this way in the CIPs. For example, in the GR CIP, the choice was made, rather, to highlight the necessary *usefulness* of innovation, which, in principle, allows for both innovation in the goals and innovation in delivery of policies: 'The abstract reference to the modern character of a proposed method or a product would not be adequate for its characterisation as innovative. To be innovative, it should be accompanied by an increase in effectiveness or the solution of concrete problems regarding the obstacles in the access to the labour market of disadvantaged groups...' (p.37). This usefulness requirement was taken quite far in the GR CIP, since it was

required that the added value of any innovative element ‘should be evident’. Such concern with the usefulness of innovation also informed the NL CIP for the 2nd round. The following questions were put to applicants: ‘What is the added value of your approach compared to existing approaches? Do you know whether there is a need for new approaches and how have you established this need? Is the proposed innovative approach transferable? What are the expected policy effects of the innovative approach?’ (p. 42).

Finally, taking up the typology proposed by the evaluators of the previous Community Initiatives, the EQUAL guidelines suggested that innovation could consist in:

- ‘*New goals*’ (e.g. new target groups, new qualifications);
- ‘*New processes*’ (e.g. new methods, new tools);
- Or that it could seek to modify ‘*contexts*’ (i.e. changing political and institutional structures).

This typology of innovation was often taken up in the R1 CIPs.

Consistently with the EQUAL framework for innovation just presented, the Terms of Reference for the EU-wide evaluation of EQUAL present innovation as being the overall objective of EQUAL. Effectiveness is to be evaluated under its two components, i.e. effectiveness of implementation of the innovation principle (in other words, has the aim of the initiative of promoting innovation been achieved), and effectiveness of the new solutions found to combat discrimination (are they more effective than former approaches).

The ToR evaluation questions aimed at:

- *Assessing the extent to which innovation has been produced, as well as facilitating factors and obstacles*: How effective has EQUAL been in developing new methods, new tools or approaches to the delivery of employment policies combating discrimination and inequality? What mechanisms have been used to identify and assess the innovative element of the activity? How effective has this been? What are the main institutional obstacles and barriers on the labour market in exploiting new forms of social inclusion and labour market integration? How has EQUAL managed to tackle them? Are there common reasons for the failure of activities? If so, what can we learn from these failures?
- *Characterising innovation*: What are the main new approaches identified? Have new objectives been identified and which thematic innovations have opened up new areas of employment in the labour market?
- *Assessing the added value of these innovations in terms of effectiveness of employment policies*: Are the new approaches developed more effective than initiatives delivered through the ESF or other EU programmes or national provision? What evidence is available to demonstrate the efficiency of EQUAL compared to traditional methods?

This chapter broadly follows the three questions asked in the ToR: section 5.2 below presents the main results of the implementation of the principle, and, by the same token, provides an analysis of the criteria and methodologies used by the evaluators for assessing innovation and its added value (or, more broadly, quality). A characterisation of the innovation produced can be found in sub-section 5.2.4. Section 5.3 assesses the take up of experimental approaches and highlights the factors which have favoured the emergence of innovation as well as the obstacles. Conclusions are provided in section 5.4.

5.2. RESULTS AND ADDED VALUE OF THE PRINCIPLE

Innovation has been an important focus of evaluation in the 2005 evaluation reports. Most national evaluators have sought to provide an assessment of the innovation produced in EQUAL, whereas in the Mid-term and 2nd Interim reports, the effort had been mainly typological (classifying innovation). However, the purposes, scopes, levels and bases for these assessments differ and are more or less explicit in the evaluation reports (see table 5.1 below). We will therefore organise the presentation of results according to the various assessment purposes adopted by evaluators: we distinguish assessments of:

- The incidence of innovation (has there been innovation?);
- The intensity of innovation (how radical, how high is the innovation developed?);
- The scope of innovation (does it concern processes, goals, contexts, other areas?); and
- The quality of innovation (relevance, effectiveness, added value etc.).

We then present the main areas of innovation put forward by the national evaluators and a brief description of those which are presented as the most significant.

5.2.1 Incidence and intensity of innovation

As already said in our 2nd Interim Report, assessments of the extent to which the programmes have been innovative are not often carried out. Evaluators usually prefer to take innovation for granted since it was a pre-requisite of the community initiative, and to assess its intensity. Only two evaluators (BEfrg, DK) sought to provide an assessment of the incidence of innovation.

The DK evaluators asked DPs to indicate where they thought they had been most innovative (several responses being possible): (1) in their purpose? (2) in their target group? (3) in the tools developed? (4) in their way to involve the target group? (6) in their use of information and communication technology? (7) in the composition of their partnership? (8) in their mode of management? and/or (9) in the distribution of roles among managers, employees and participants?

They then aggregated the results, counting the number of ‘innovative elements’. The evaluators conclude that DPs have fully complied with the innovation requirement, and that they present a broad range of innovative elements. The majority is found in the areas of the integration of refugees/immigrants and equality (the other 2 themes being addressed in DK being the inclusion of marginalised persons and asylum seekers). However, given the methodology adopted, it would be safer to conclude, in our view, that *DPs think that they have been able to produce much innovation, at many different levels.*

The BEfrg evaluators asked DPs where they thought they had made ‘a major contribution with regard to existing practices’, a question which thus included an assessment criterion for DPs to take into account (added value with regard to existing practices). More than 70% DPs judged that this had been the case for tools of information and awareness raising and almost 70% for new networking between partners. Other possible areas of innovation received much lower grades. The evaluators did not take these results literally and rather interpreted these two types of contributions as *improvements of existing practices*, since, for example, new bonds with new partners allows for more consistency in the actions developed. Between 40 and 50% DPs responded that they had made a major contribution through ‘new models of labour market integration’ (*insertion*) or new training models. However, the in-depth review of these models by the evaluators shows that they are essentially new techniques improving the integration or training process, rather than really new ‘models’. The few cases of real experimentation – such as the creation of a ‘coaching role’ for +45 workers, temping for low educated people, support to business creation by vulnerable individuals, or the introduction of positive discrimination

approaches – raise questions, as DPs have found it difficult to go beyond the experimentation phase. Thus, by asking DPs various sets of questions, concerning the phase of innovation they were in, or asking them to describe more precisely the ‘new practices’ developed, the evaluators were able to triangulate the information and interpret responses with nuances.

Some evaluators directly sought to measure the **intensity** of innovation, either by distinguishing between ‘radical’ and incremental innovation (in other words, testing and development of new practices as opposed to improvements of existing practices), or by rating the innovation produced, from low to high.

The methods for such assessments are quite varied: from self-assessment by DPs (NL, Ukni), to overall judgements by national evaluators on the basis of all the material gathered and of their own knowledge of the fields (DE, ES, FI, IT).

As could be expected, when DPs are asked to rate the innovative character of their projects in a global way, they find a high level of innovation. Thus, on average, 31% NL DPs score the innovation in their projects as ‘very high’ and 55% as ‘relatively high’. The only slightly discordant view comes from 3 DPs of the Entrepreneurship pillar (out of 11), which only recognise ‘medium innovation’ (the proportion of DPs recognising medium or low innovation is much lower in the other pillars)⁶⁷. In the Ukni 5 DPs out of 6 rate innovation in their projects with a grade of 3 or 4 (on a scale from 1 to 4).

When the judgement is based on the evaluators’ overall knowledge of the programmes, the finding, common to all, is similar to that of the BEfrg evaluators: innovation has mainly been incremental, i.e. bringing about improvements of former practices⁶⁸ for example by combining existing methods, by establishing co-operations between actors operating in the same field or with the same target group etc. Nevertheless, as will be seen below, innovation has been more ‘radical’ in some themes in some countries as prior policy and practice was not developed.

In addition, evaluators in ES, FR, IT and the UKgb have found that the level of reference for the innovation was often local, which both means that the practices developed could exist elsewhere but not in the DP area and that the area of application for DPs’ innovations tended to be confined to their local area. The UKgb evaluators’ DP survey showed that 62% of R1 DP impact has been at the local level against 3% at the European level.

⁶⁷ Since these assessments are based on closed questions in the survey, there are no illustrations of what is meant by very high, high, medium or low innovation.

⁶⁸ Of course, measuring the level of innovation, as in the NL and Ukni surveys, and deciding whether it is incremental or radical is not exactly the same thing – DPs rating themselves highly could also be innovating only incrementally, but on many aspects of their projects and project management at the same time.

Table 5.1. – Evaluation approaches to the assessment of innovation

	Purpose of assessment	Scope of assessment	Level of analysis	Who makes the assessment?	Sources
AT	Scope	All DPs	Programme Themes	Evaluators on the basis of all the material gathered.	Mostly 2004 DP survey (1/3 responses) and documentary analysis
BEfrg	Intensity Scope Usefulness	All DPs	Programme Themes	Self-assessment by DPs complemented by evaluators' view (knowledge of DPs and of policy context)	Survey
DE	Quality Dynamics of experimentation	All DPs and their operations	Programme Themes DP focus	Evaluators on the basis of complex list of criteria applied to all the material gathered	All DP reports and evaluation reports NTN publications Survey to DP evaluators and DP co-ordinators 10 case studies
DK	Incidence Scope	All DPs	Programme Themes	Self-assessment by DPs, complemented by evaluators' analysis of project descriptions	Survey, project descriptions
ES	Intensity Usefulness Scope	All DPs	Programme Themes	Evaluators on the basis of criteria applied to all the material gathered	DP Survey Case studies (40 round 1 DPs, 25%) and interviews with Action 3 project coordinators
FI	Intensity Scope	All DPs	Programme Themes	Evaluators on the basis of criteria applied to all the material gathered	DP documentation, Interviews with all DPs (coordinators, partners), surveys
FR	Quality Level of reference	About 1/3 DPs	Programme Themes DPs and operations	Experts of the fields (initial selection of the DPs selected for assessment made by regional programme actors and NTN)	'screening fiches' established by the evaluators.
GR (2004)	Quality Origin Scope	All DPs	Themes	Evaluators on the basis of criteria applied to all the material gathered (which includes the opinion of DP evaluators and NTN experts)	DP workplans Questionnaire to DP evaluators and NTN experts Interviews with all DPs
IE	Conditions of emergence	All DPs	Programme	Evaluators on the basis of all gathered material	DP reports 3 case studies + group discussion with 6 DPs
IT	Intensity Quality	Programme	Programme	Evaluators on the basis of criteria applied to all the material gathered	DP monitoring reports + 77 final reports Interviews. Regional and provincial workshops.
LU	Incidence and quality	All DPs (3)	Individual DPs	Evaluators on the basis of their knowledge of DPs and of the fields	Interviews and meetings with 1 DP. Information on other DPs probably based on earlier contacts (2004)
NL	Intensity	All DPs	Programme Pillars	Self-assessment by DPs However 33% of the DPs rely on external expertise to base their response to the survey.	DP Survey
PT	Scope Intensity Quality	24 case study DPs and their operations (23.5% of all DPs)	Programme Single operations	Evaluators on the basis of complex list of criteria applied to all the material gathered	DP documents and evaluations DP interviews (case studies)
SE	Scope	All DPs	Programme	Self-assessment by DPs	DP survey
UKgb	Scope Level of reference	All DPs	Programme Themes	Evaluators on the basis of criteria applied to all the material gathered	Telephone survey of all DPs 27 case studies (36% of DPs) with interviews with coordinators, partners, beneficiaries, stakeholders, potential users, transnational partners.
UKni	Intensity	All DPs (6)	Programme	DP's self assessment	DP Survey

A number of evaluators compare the **intensity of innovation across themes**. Although their assessment is based on different methodologies, it is often accompanied by more comments and explanations which make it possible to derive some general lessons.

The table below provides an approximation of the intensity of innovation by theme, in the Member States where the evaluators have made such comparative assessments. Ratings are either based directly on quantitative ratings by evaluators or are our translation (for which we take full responsibility) of their more ‘literary’ analyses: we have indicated where the rating is ours with an (*). Other evaluators have made evaluative comments on the intensity of innovation in different areas of the programme, which could not however be included in this table but are mentioned in the developments below⁶⁹. The table has to be taken as indicative only given the differences in the criteria and methods used by evaluators.

⁶⁹ The PT and SE evaluators refer to other areas of innovation than just themes (e.g. type of intervention, target group). The FI evaluators describe the types of innovation by theme without aiming at assessing their intensity. The BEfig evaluators asked the DPs of each theme to indicate where they had contributed innovations (several answers possible) but this does not give rise to an assessment of the intensity of innovation since high marks everywhere could be more indicative of a dispersed effort than of more significant innovation: in fact this is an important possible methodological flaw of ratings through counts of innovative elements. Finally the IT and IE evaluators do not distinguish between themes (with regard to the assessment of innovation) and the LU and UKni evaluators rather describe individual DPs as is normal in such small programmes.

Table 5.2 – Intensity of innovation by theme

	Type of assessment	Source	1A	1B	2C	2D	3E	3F	4G	4H	5I
AT (*)	Themes with more radical innovation	Experts ⁷⁰	+/-	++		+++	+/-			-	+++
DE	Share of high quality of innovation by theme	Rating on basis of DP reports and products	++	0	+++	+++	0	+	0	++	++
DK	Themes with highest incidence of innovative elements	DP survey	+++				+			+++	+
ES	Compliance with innovation principle ⁷¹	Rating on the basis of DP reports and case studies	++	++	+++			+/-	++	++	+/-
FR	Themes where most innovation identified	Experts on the basis of various DP material	++	+++	-	+/-	++	+++	+++		N/A
GR	Themes with highest incidence of innovative elements	Rating on the basis of DP workplans, survey of DP evaluators, survey of NTN experts	+/-	++	+/-	++	+/-	++		+++	+/-
NL	Share of ‘very high’ innovation by pillar	DP survey	++		+		+++		+++		N/A
UKgb (*)	Characteristics of innovation in each theme ⁷²	Evaluators on the basis of all material gathered (DP surveys, case studies)	+/-	+/-	+	++	+/-	+/-		?	+++

Source: National evaluation reports. The AT and UKgb evaluators do not provide ratings. The ratings indicated are our interpretation of their findings by theme. The meaning of the ratings given in this table has to be understood in relation to the type of assessment carried out by each evaluation team, which is indicated in the 2nd column: for example, in DE, it refers to the share of ‘high quality innovation’: thus indicating ‘0’ means that no high quality innovation has been identified. Themes appearing with ‘+++’ are those where the highest share of high quality innovation has been found. Ratings are thus always relative in each country (i.e. based on the comparison of the performance of the various themes).

The following lessons can be derived from these assessments:

- *The choice of thematic priorities in the CIPs has set a first basis for the development of innovation:* in some CIPs the choice was made to define some thematic priorities in areas where policy support had so far been limited and/or where professional practices were dispersed and lacked a systematic character. Although it might have been feared that this would lead to a lack of operators for lack of institutional/organisational capacity, this decision, made in some CIPs, has in fact turned out to be an important stimulus to innovation, and, as will be seen in chapter 10, it has contributed to raising the profile of certain issues, steering more public debate and even policy initiatives. The more or less new character of thematic priorities naturally depended on the countries, but 4 themes were more likely than others to be mentioned as relatively new areas of policy/practice developments: the social economy; conciliation between work and private lives; fight against racism and xenophobia; and the integration of asylum seekers:

⁷⁰ Source: 2nd Interim report.

⁷¹ We rely on the global assessment of compliance with the key principles, presented by theme, in table 9.1 p. 151. Compliance with the innovation principle is rated as satisfactory for themes 1A (facilitating access and return to the labour market), 1B (combating racism), 2C (business creation), 4G (reconciling family & professional life) and 4H (reducing gender gaps). However in the more qualitative assessments of the principle, theme 2C emerges as the theme where innovation has been clearest, which is why we reintroduce this difference here.

⁷² As the evaluators have sought to describe the areas of innovation under each theme, they prefer not to provide an assessment of the more or less innovative character of each theme, except in the case of theme 5I (asylum seekers), of which they say that it has been the most innovative. However we have intended to provide an overall judgement by theme on the basis of the indications they provide. The responsibility is of course ours.

- Thus, the choice of the AT programme to focus priority 2D (*social economy*) on ‘quality in social services jobs’ has stimulated important institutional and organisational innovation in the social economy and social services sector which have contributed to the structuring and professionalisation of the sector (see below)⁷³. The attention given to the social economy in GR and FI was also relatively new.
 - In ES, DPs highlighted that the very theme of *reconciling private and working lives* was new.
 - The FI evaluators highlight that initiatives *combating racism* are fairly new, as FI has only been a country of immigration for about 15 years.
 - In FR, the choice to take up priorities or to define actions where experience had so far been limited or dispersed (*fight against racism and xenophobia; reconciling private and professional life*) has been validated, *a posteriori*, by the fact that these are the areas where most innovation seems to have taken place. Conversely, themes which had already given rise to important public support (business creation, the social economy) stimulated less innovation, although important progress was made on other fronts, in particular the networking between all the relevant actors on a given territory.
- Limited prior experience is also the reason why the *asylum seekers* theme has been considered by several evaluators (AT, DE, SE, PT⁷⁴, UKgb) as one of the themes where innovation has been clearest, although the experience of ES and GR shows that the newness of the theme has not been a sufficient condition for stimulating innovation.
 - When themes are relatively new for a Member State, one could expect that transnational co-operation could be especially important as a source of innovation, as practices in ‘more experienced’ countries can be capitalised upon. Unfortunately the contribution of transnational co-operation to innovation is not frequently assessed by theme in the evaluation reports, and this question can not be answered. Only the GR evaluator states that initiatives in the social economy have very much relied on foreign experience. Other evaluators provide single examples of DPs where this has been the case: for example in FR, 1 DP in theme 2B (combating racism), 1 DP in theme 3E (the DP focused on age management) and 2 DPs in theme 4G (reconciling family and professional life) were both rated as innovative and as having a strong transnational dimension (but we are not told about relationships between the two).
 - However, identifying themes which are ‘newer’ than others can lead to some undue generalisations, as the content of some themes varies significantly from one CIP to the other, and as the frontiers between themes may be blurred, particularly in some Member States. It may thus be more profitable to look at the **types of intervention or actions**. Thus, it seems to be more difficult to innovate in training interventions, given the extent and continuity of public support for training in the last two decades, especially in the context of public employment policies. The PT evaluators, who have sought to establish a ‘repertoire of good practices and innovative products’⁷⁵, assessed 16 pedagogic materials and 6 training methodologies and pathways amongst the 71 practices and products they looked at. Only 2 of the former and none of the latter were selected for the repertoire (whereas, in the area of support to self-employment, 4 were selected out of 9). In theme 3E (Lifelong learning), the

⁷³ The phrasing of the thematic priority in the EQUAL guidelines also insists on ‘improving the quality of jobs’ but it seems that this has been given more or less prominence in the CIPs.

⁷⁴ 2 out of the 24 products selected for the repertoire of good practices and innovative products were developed in theme 5I.

⁷⁵ See below for more explanations on their approach.

practices judged innovative by the AT and FR evaluators concerned the introduction of new concepts and tools in companies ('diversity management' in AT; 'age management' in FR) rather than training interventions. The ES evaluators question the innovative character of part of the projects developed under theme 3F (adaptability), especially 'e-learning' projects, which tend to privilege technologically driven innovation to the detriment of a more global understanding of needs and lacks.

- Innovation seems to have been clearer, especially in theme 1A (facilitating access and return to the labour market), when it was developed for well identified and specific target groups, which not only suffer from discrimination and inequalities in the labour market and at work but were also (and this is of course related) not accessing support measures. When themes were defined, already at CIP level, with a focus on a specific target group, this seems to have facilitated the production of innovation – for example in DK theme 1A was exclusively focused on refugees and migrants. This is also another explanation for the rather high degree of innovation stated by a number of evaluators in the asylum seekers theme.
- More generally, the innovative attempt of DPs has often been directed to the tailoring and adaptation of existing approaches to reach out to new target groups – for which access to existing measures had been denied: thus, as pointed out by the UKgb evaluators, in themes where the intensity of innovation has been variable (e.g. Theme 1A - Facilitating access and return to the labour market), DPs focusing on specific target groups have been more innovative than others which, for example, focused on a local area as a whole: *'It is more difficult for these DPs to be innovative because of the small-scale targeted nature of many of the actions. They tend to be generic and, in some cases, come close to replicating mainstream delivery'* (UKgb report, p. 50). Territorial projects would thus be very suitable for empowerment of small organisations and the consolidation of networking, but less so for innovation: this echoes the findings of the FR evaluators. In AT theme 1A (Facilitating access and return to the labour market) was not found to be particularly innovative, except with regard to integration pathways for people with disabilities.
- However, it is also true that the introduction of relatively new concepts and methodologies such as 'diversity management' (e.g. in AT and in SE) or 'age management' (a relatively new concept in FR) has also given rise to important innovation, which, precisely, is not linked to specific targeting. On the contrary, through these concepts, DPs have sought to promote new approaches to Human Resources Management, especially recruitment methods, career planning, and the organisation of continuous training, i.e. organisational change in a way which does not focus on specific groups but rather on staff as a whole. Thus age management does not concentrate on older workers but on relationships between generations of workers in firms.

5.2.2 Scope of innovation

As already said in our 2nd Interim Report, many evaluators⁷⁶ have sought to classify the innovation produced according to the typology proposed in the EQUAL guidelines (goal-oriented, process-oriented and context-oriented innovation) or have proposed alternative typologies⁷⁷.

As demonstrated in different ways by many evaluators, one of the specific contributions of EQUAL to the fight against discrimination and inequalities has been the pursuit of global strategies, targeting different kinds of actors at the same time and through different means

⁷⁶ in AT, BEfrg, ES, FI, IE, SE, UKgb and UKni.

⁷⁷ Over time, and with particular clarity in the 2005 reports, it has become obvious to us that, rather than 'types' of innovations, goals, processes and contexts are *areas* of innovation and this is how we deal with them here.

(awareness raising campaigns, guides, training, etc.). As appears with particular clarity in the evaluation reports by the evaluators in Nordic countries, as well as in BEfrg, in many cases ‘new practices’ concern goals, processes and contexts at the same time.

In addition, it is sometimes quite difficult to define the area of innovation according to this typology, as, for example, new quality standards can be considered as a new management method (innovation in processes), but if they become institutionalised and taken up in a whole sector, they modify the context of action (innovation in contexts). Similarly, tailoring existing actions/measures to cater for the needs of new target groups can both be considered as an innovation in the goals (new target groups) and in the processes (tailoring).

For these two reasons (the integrated character of many innovations in EQUAL, and the at times arbitrary distinction between the three areas of innovation), although this distinction between goals, processes and contexts may be useful from an analytical point of view, to bring DPs to describe what they do – once they have come to terms with it, the assessment of the dominant area of innovation does not teach much and is somewhat artificial. Nevertheless an attempt is made in the table below, which shows that process innovation has been confirmed by evaluators as the dominant type of evaluation, which is consistent with the fact that many innovations are improvements of existing practices. However this improvement of existing practices is often carried out to better address the needs of target groups insufficiently addressed in mainstream provision, so that, as argued above, in many cases process innovation goes together with goal innovation.

Table 5.3 – Dominant objects of innovation in some Member States

	Goals (new domains of intervention, new target groups)	Processes (new methods, techniques, tools)	Contexts (new systems, new networks)	Source
AT			X	Overall evaluator’s judgement
BEfrg		X		DP’s self assessment, confirmed by evaluators
ES			X	Overall evaluator’s judgement
FI		X	X	Overall evaluator’s judgement
FR		X		Overall evaluators’ judgement ⁷⁸
IE		X		DPs’ self assessment ⁷⁹
SE		X		DP reports
UKgb		X		N/A ⁸⁰
UKni		X		Overall evaluator’s judgement

Source: National evaluation reports.

⁷⁸ Although the FR evaluators adopt a slightly different classification of the areas of innovation, they still find that process innovation has been dominant.

⁷⁹ In a survey carried out for the Mid-term report (2003), 76% DPs said they produced innovation in processes, 62% innovation affecting contexts and 38% innovation in goals. There has been no update of this analysis in the 2005 report.

⁸⁰ The table provided in the report indicates process innovation for 54% DPs, context innovation for 28%, and goal innovation for 26%. However the source is not provided.

5.2.3 Quality of innovation

Five evaluators have proposed assessments of the quality of innovation, resorting to quite different approaches, but, as we shall see below, with some partly common criteria.

The FR evaluators organised an assessment of the more or less innovative character of these operations, *by reference to the state of the art in the field* concerned, on the basis, mainly, of expert knowledge. They thus mainly assimilate the quality of innovation with its ‘added value’. However it is unclear whether the assessment of added value was based on an analysis of the results produced by these innovations as compared with the results of existing practice.

The evaluators rightly point out that assessing the innovative character of an operation very much depends on who performs that assessment, even when very sophisticated criteria are elaborated. They thus opted for relying on the knowledge of the fields by recognised experts.

They first identified a ‘pool’ of 72 ‘operations’ (corresponding to 72 different DPs, i.e. about one third of round 1 DPs) selected as *potentially* innovative by the regional programme actors, NTN co-ordinators, or by themselves through case studies. They prepared screening fiches for each of these operations, on the basis of data from the ECDB, from the FR database, from DP documents and, in some cases, phone interviews with DP co-ordinators. They then asked experts, gathered in committees (so that debate could take place), to decide to what extent these potential innovations actually made a difference with existing practice.

The overall result was that, amongst the 72 operations, 20 were considered innovative. This represents 28% of the ‘potentially innovative’ operations/DPs, and thus 9% of the total number of R1 DPs. The evaluators point out that this has to be seen as the ‘floor rate’ of quality innovation, especially given the way in which the first stage of the selection was carried out⁸¹.

By theme, the results show that the share of potential innovation was particularly high in themes 1B (combating racism), 4G (reconciling family and professional life) and 2D (social economy). The themes in which a greater proportion of high quality innovation was found were again themes 1B and 4G, but theme 3F (adaptability) performed well as well⁸². The short description of the innovative practices detected do not allow us to draw conclusions by theme, all the more so in theme 3F, where the ‘operations’ considered appeared to be very varied.

Table 5.4 – Indicative rates of quality innovation by theme in FR

	1A	1B	2C	2D	3E	3F	4G	5I	Total
Number of DPs funded in R1	66	22	23	28	35	28	25	4	231
Number of ‘operations’ selected as potentially innovative by programme actors	15	10	4 + 1 Action 3	11	11	11	10	0	72 + 1
% of potentially innovative operations/ total funded DPs in R1	22.7%	45.5%	17.4%	39.3%	31.4%	39.3%	40%	0%	28%
Number of ‘operations’ selected for the quality of their innovation	4	5	1 (Action 3 project)	1	3	4	3	0	20 + 1
% of operations with quality innovation/ total funded DPs in R1	6.1%	22.7%	N/A	3.6%	8.6%	14.3%	12%	0%	9%

Source: Own elaboration on the basis of 2005 FR Evaluation report.

⁸¹ They then proceed to analyse the characteristics of these innovations: the results of this analysis appear in this chapter in different sections.

⁸² Theme 4H (Reducing gender gaps) has not been selected in FR. Surprisingly, DPs funded under theme 5I do not seem to have been taken into account for this assessment, even though in other parts of the report, the evaluators stress that the theme

The PT evaluators' criteria for assessing innovation are in fact in part criteria for assessing good practice. This is explicitly acknowledged by the evaluators, who constituted, on the basis of their assessment, a 'repertoire of good practice and innovative products'. They analysed 71 operations/practices developed by their 24 case study DPs⁸³. The assessment leads to a repertoire of 16 products and processes (22%), which can be considered as 'emblematic' of EQUAL in PT, in the sense that they are not only innovative and effective but also feature well in terms of implementation of the partnership, empowerment, equal opportunities, transnationality and mainstreaming principles (see box below).

The PT evaluators rather seek to assess the overall quality of the product or process developed, and its more or less innovative character is only one of the aspects looked at⁸⁴. There are two criteria which directly concern innovation:

- What we could call the '*pervasive*' character of innovation: Does it only concern the products delivered? Or the process of implementation? Or both? (Innovation is graded higher if it both concerns outcomes and processes);
- *Origin of innovation*: Is it innovation by creation? Or by adaptation? (innovation is graded higher if it is by creation).

The other criteria of good practice are mostly based on the other principles of EQUAL:

- *Partnership*: Participation of partners in the development of the product/process; involvement of external experts in the development of the product/process;
- *Empowerment*: Participation of the target-groups in the development of the product/process;
- *Transnationality*: Contribution of transnationality to the development of the product/process;
- *Equal Opportunities*: Importance of Equal Opportunities in the development of the product/process;
- *Mainstreaming*: Transparency; Transferability of the product/process;
- *Information society*: Use of ICT.

However the evaluators also look at:

- *Effectiveness*: Effective use of the product (external/internal); Contribution to the social integration of target-groups; Promotion of entrepreneurship/qualification of persons and/or organisations; Contribution to social responsibility/organisational development;
- *Impacts*: Diversity of areas of impact;
- *Wider societal goals*: activation of citizenship.

The 5 operations/practices which received the highest grades were:

- A computer application for the production of financial planning in self-employment creation processes. It is considered a product with high mainstreaming capabilities.
- Two asylum seekers projects, which produced an asylum seeker guide, an information centre, training programmes for interpreters, a pool of mediators, etc.
- A catalogue of socially and environmentally friendly activities in a region of the south of Portugal, with high mainstreaming potential.
- A process for using micro-credit in the promotion of self employment, found particularly innovative and a good platform for empowerment.

The IT evaluators also took into account two of the other EQUAL principles (partnership and empowerment) in their assessment of the quality of innovation: on the basis of various sources (regional/provincial workshops, database information) they sought to assess the 'experimental character' of the programme on the basis of the following criteria: relevance of the problem addressed (were the problems addressed well known, new, priorities for the territories concerned?); added value of the actions developed (i.e. the extent to which they 'add something' to mainstream policy and practice); quality of the partnership (were all partners involved in DP actions and how far was the partnership integrated?); and the quality of empowerment (extent of effective participation of beneficiaries). The evaluators thus considered that the effective

⁸³ The sample of case study DPs is representative and its elaboration has been based on a cluster analysis.

⁸⁴ It is, for that matter, slightly confusing that the repertoire is called repertoire of good practice and innovative products, since it could appear that the evaluators consider the criteria on partnership, empowerment etc. to be contributing to the assessment of innovation as well.

contribution of partners and beneficiaries was an indicator of an experimentation process taking place.

They found, overall, that many DPs addressed ‘significant’ problems, but failed to address structural ones (e.g. the lack of jobs) or emerging issues not yet on the policy agenda (which is not very surprising given the EQUAL framework). With regard to the actions developed, the evaluators found, at least in the provinces studied, that they were well conceived and well carried out, but with few links to existing policies, which meant that they ran the risk of remaining at a level of isolated experimentation. Added value is thus scarce due to poor communication with the policy sphere, a finding echoing the analysis of mainstreaming carried out by other evaluators. Partnerships were found to be extensive but not very participative, as 65-70% of resources were managed by only 20% of the partners. Finally the extent of participation of beneficiaries to DP actions was very unequal across DPs.

The GR evaluators adopted, in 2004 (previous report), a scoring method, as they sought to quantify both the incidence of innovation (number of innovative elements) and the intensity of innovation (innovation by creation or innovation by adaptation), by theme. The evaluators carried out this assessment for different elements: contents, goals, structures, processes, actions and products of the DPs.

However their criteria for assessing the innovative character of these elements seem to us to be more related to an assessment of the quality of innovation in EQUAL than to an assessment of innovation strictly speaking. Their main criteria included: social added value; feasibility of dissemination and mainstreaming; documented viability over time; ‘dynamic comparative advantage’ and effectiveness of interventions as compared with existing practices; responsiveness to the needs of target groups; functionality of actions; complementarity with other activities.

The basis for this assessment was their own review of DP workplans. The evaluators also relied on DP evaluators’ assessment (gathered through a questionnaire) and NTN expert opinion. The analysis gave rise to a scoring of themes, according to the incidence of innovation – we would rather say: the incidence of *quality* innovation – (number of workplans found innovative in the theme with respect to goals, structure, process etc./ number of workplans in the theme) and its intensity (creation/adaptation). However the origin of innovation serves an analytical purpose and is not, contrary to the PT approach, constitutive of the lower or higher quality of innovation. The results are provided in the table below. This scoring approach was accompanied by a more qualitative analysis of the innovations found in each theme.

Table 5.5 – Scoring by the GR evaluator of incidence and intensity of innovation

	Number of DPs	Content		Goal		Structure		Process		Action		Products	
		Creation	Transfer	Creation	Transfer	Creation	Transfer	Creation	Transfer	Creation	Transfer	Creation	Transfer
1A	11	0.54	0	0.27	0	0.18	0.27	0	0.18	0.18	0.27	0.27	0.27
1B	3	1	0	0.66	0	0	1	0.33	0	0.5	0.5	1	0
2C	6	0.83	0	0.33	0	0.33	0.16	0	0	0	0	0.66	0.16
2D	5	0.4	0.4	1	0	0.6	0.4	0	0.4	0.8	0.2	0.6	0.2
3E	5	1	0	0.4	0.2	0	0.4	0	0.6	0.4	0.2	0.4	0.2
3F	5	0.6	0	0.8	1	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.4	0.4
4H	4	1	0	0.75	0	0.25	0.75	0.25	0.25	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.5
5I	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1

Source. National evaluation report. GR. (2004 and 2005).

Overall the evaluators found that ‘the programme as a whole presented a satisfactory degree of innovation, of a mainly ‘endogenous’ character’ (in other words, mainly by own creation than

by take up of practices developed elsewhere). According to our own calculations⁸⁵, the average score is 32%. The method is interesting although it has the drawback of relying on a count of individual innovations, thus omitting their more or less integrated character. Thus a DP scoring high in all areas of innovation could both be a highly innovative DP or a DP characterised by a great dispersion, and therefore potentially by lower effectiveness. However the account taken of ‘complementarity’ between operations may have offset this drawback.

The evaluation approach proposed by the DE evaluators deserves further attention. They analysed the 850 individual operations presented as innovative by the 109 DPs in their reports and in the DP survey, as well as the integration of these innovations at DP level. Their assessment criteria are presented in the box below.

Assessment criteria for the quality of innovation in the DE evaluators’ approach

On the basis of 4 overarching criteria for the assessment of the quality of innovation (relevance, effectiveness, feasibility, transferability), the DE evaluators have elaborated more specific criteria, which are the ones applied to the rating of single and innovations:

- *Breaking the specific cause and effect relation* underpinning the targeted labour market or social problem (criterion applied to single innovations);
- *Contribution to problem solving* (criterion applied to single innovations and to the integration of these single operations at DP level);
- *Level of innovation*: how important is the difference made with existing solutions? (criterion applied at the level of the DP);
- *Mainstreaming capacity* and capacity to raise interest amongst non-involved actors (criterion applied at the level of the DP);
- *Contribution to reducing inequalities and discrimination* (criterion applied at the level of the DP).

The DE evaluators’ approach appears as particularly interesting for the attention paid to the initial diagnosis made by the DPs (is there an analysis of the causes of inequalities and a clear explanation of how the innovation can contribute to break the cause-effect relationship) and to the actual capacity of the innovations developed to solve the identified problems, again, addressing their causes and not only the effects⁸⁶. In a way, this is also what the GR evaluators sought to capture with their criteria of ‘responsiveness to the needs of the target groups’ and compared effectiveness.

The results of this assessment are presented in a very aggregated manner (see table below). It would have been interesting to also have an analysis of how each of the criteria had contributed to this overall result⁸⁷. The evaluators found that 11.8% of the operations presented by DPs as innovative were of a high or very high quality. The share of high quality innovation is higher for DPs as a whole than for single projects: the integration of several single innovations may be rated better than the innovations taken individually, as is consistent with the logic of the programme. Overall, the performance is considered by the evaluators as ‘impressive’, for the single projects developed as well as for the DPs as a whole. However it is interesting to note that 40% of the innovations presented by DPs could not be assessed, either because of a lack of sufficient data (for 150 of them) or because they could not be considered as innovations ‘in the sense of the programme’, according to the evaluators (190 cases).

⁸⁵ Taking into account the weight of each theme (number of DPs) and giving equal weight to all innovative elements, whether they occur by creation or by transfer.

⁸⁶ In order to answer these questions, the evaluators have triangulated many different sources of data (though all coming from the DPs) to which they have applied their rigorous definition of criteria, their external stance as evaluators and probably also their knowledge of labour market policy.

⁸⁷ This was done, but only on the basis of DP workplans, i.e. at the level of intentions. The capacity for breaking the cause-effect relationship was found to be high in 37% of the cases, and the potential effectiveness was rated as high in 24% of the cases.

Table 5.6 – Quality ranking of innovation in DE

Quality Rank	Numbers (operations)	%	Numbers (DPs)	%
Very high	40	4.7%		
High	60	7.1%	24	22%
Medium	330	38.8%	69	63%
Low	80	9.4%	16	15%
Not assessed	340	40%		
Total	850	100,0%	109	100%

Source: National evaluation report for DE.

Overall, as can be seen, the evaluators have resorted to one or several of 6 basic criteria: relevance; effectiveness; added value; sustainability; mainstreaming; and integrated character or complementarity. The PT evaluators have included the origin of innovation, the contribution of the EQUAL principles to the production of good practice as well as the diversity of impacts as additional criteria, whilst for other evaluators these are separate assessments. Other evaluators have used some of these criteria in their assessment of innovation, although in a less systematic fashion.

Table 5.7 – Criteria used for the assessment of the quality of innovation

	DE	FR	GR	IT	PT
Relevance	<i>Innovations oriented to breaking the specific cause and effect relation</i>	N/A	<i>Responsiveness to needs of target group</i>	<i>Significance of the problem addressed</i>	N/A
Effectiveness	<i>Contribution to problem solving and Contribution to reducing inequalities and discrimination</i>	N/A	<i>Compared effectiveness</i>	N/A	<i>Effective use of the product; Contribution to the social integration of target-groups; etc.</i>
Added value	<i>How important is the difference made with existing solutions?</i>	<i>More or less innovative character by reference to state of the art</i>	<i>Compared effectiveness with existing practice. Social added value</i>	<i>Capacity to improve existing policies</i>	<i>Contribution to wider societal goals</i>
Sustainability	N/A	N/A	<i>Viability over time</i>	N/A	N/A
Mainstreaming capacity	<i>Mainstreaming capacity</i>	N/A	<i>Dissemination and mainstreaming capacity</i>	<i>Link developed with policy community</i>	<i>Transparency; Transferability of the product/process</i>
Integrated character/ complementarity	<i>Assessment of innovation for single and combinations of operations</i>	N/A	<i>Complementarity with other actions</i>	N/A	<i>Innovation in products or processes, or in both</i>
Contribution of the principles	(separate assessment)	(separate assessment)	(separate assessment)	<i>Partnership and empowerment considered as components of experimentation</i>	<i>Contribution of the principles to the production of good practice</i>
Origin (by creation or adaptation)	N/A	N/A	(assessed, but does not count for the quality of innovation)		<i>Innovation by creation rated higher</i>

Source: National evaluation reports.

Other evaluators have looked at the *relevance* of the innovations developed, although in a less systematic fashion than the DE evaluators. For example, the BEfrg and ES evaluators do this by looking at the composition of target groups and by highlighting that in some cases the groups

reached were not particularly the most disadvantaged or discriminated against, or that the low take up of some innovations could be an indicator of an ill-suited design in the first place (e.g. this is the case of the technologically driven innovation in the ‘e-learning platforms’ developed by DPs in theme 3E in ES). However the DE evaluators’ specific contribution is, as said, that they have studied the capacity of the innovations developed to break the cause-effect cycle of discrimination, both through an analysis of the plausible character of the diagnosis carried out and through an analysis of the links between the innovation developed and this diagnosis.

Effectiveness tends to have been assessed by other evaluators at the level of the programme (often by theme), through an analysis of the short-term effects of DP actions for beneficiaries. This has been done through beneficiary surveys, through the analysis of DP reports or through focus groups and beneficiary interviews⁸⁸. Results are usually at an aggregate level by theme and do not allow for an assessment of the effectiveness of specific innovations.

However the BEfrg evaluators directly assessed, through their DP survey, the contribution of the innovations developed to reaching the programme objectives and to reducing inequalities and discrimination. Globally, the objective to which DPs think they have most contributed has been the ‘improved access to labour market integration for people excluded from the labour market’ (60% of the DPs think they have made a significant or high contribution). Furthermore, according to the DP co-ordinators, 49% of the new practices developed have a high potential for reducing discrimination; 41% refer to ‘interesting practices but which require adaptation’. 10% of the identified new practices have only limited or no potential at all. However, more than these global results, what is interesting in this approach is that each individual innovation is assessed in this way by the DPs.

The analysis of *added value* with regard to existing practices usually takes the form of comments on the ‘incremental’ character of the innovations developed, except in the cases where support services (for labour market integration, business creation etc.) have become accessible to new groups of users, not or insufficiently catered for before. Both the FR and the IT evaluators have pointed out that the difference with mainstream ESF projects was not always clear, which points, possibly, to insufficiencies at the selection stage. Two evaluators went further and pointed out that, whilst innovation could bring added value, it could also be detrimental to existing provision. Thus the AT evaluators found that the implementation of the principle had sometimes led to abandoning existing practices which ‘were working’ in order to explore uncertain new ways (in a context of limited funding). For the same reason, the BEfrg evaluators explicitly asked the question: ‘innovate, certainly, but up to where and at what cost?’.

The *transfer and mainstreaming potential* has been analysed by more evaluators (e.g. in the BEfrg, ES, FI, IT and UKgb reports) as a means to qualify the scope of innovation. These evaluators have also looked at the sustainability of innovation, i.e. their sustained capacity to address the problem targeted: this is also an important quality criterion, which is apparently not taken up by the DE evaluators (unless it is included in their assessment of mainstreaming).

Finally, the *contribution of other principles to innovation* has been looked at by some evaluators, but is not usually considered as constitutive of the quality of innovation (and rightly so in our opinion): rather it is included in the analysis of the factors facilitating the emergence and development of innovation (see section 5.3 below).

⁸⁸ The AT, ES, NL and UKni evaluators carried out a survey of beneficiaries. The FI evaluators carried out a survey of participants to the adaptability measures, the PT evaluators surveyed the participants who had completed EQUAL training courses. The BEfrg evaluators analysed the beneficiary data in DP reports. Other evaluators interviewed beneficiaries individually or through focus groups in the context of case studies (in LU, PT, UKgb).

5.2.4. Results and elements of added value of the innovations produced

In this section, we seek to provide an overview of the innovations discussed by national evaluators and elements of added value, although, once again, the exercises carried out by national evaluators on which this presentation is based are of a different nature⁸⁹. Results are organised in an empirical way, based on what have emerged to be as key areas of innovation in EQUAL, which mainly correspond to the thematic priorities, but also highlight specific sectors, types of intervention and target groups. Due to the different methodologies adopted by evaluators, our account sometimes provides broad trends and sometimes single DP examples. Given the lack of systematic assessment of the quality of innovation, as explained above, the added value of innovative trends and outputs is often presented in a cursory way and the basis for assessments can remain implicit. However, given the thorough knowledge of EQUAL acquired by evaluators – most of whom have been appointed at the beginning of the implementation of the programme, their selection of innovative practices has a good, if sometimes too implicit, basis.

New approaches to labour market integration pathways

Labour market integration pathways have been on the agenda for a long time now; however, methodologies and networking have progressed under EQUAL.

In ES, some DPs were successful in setting up labour market integration pathways targeting individuals suffering from ‘multiple disadvantage’ (whereas it has been generally difficult for DPs to reach out to people suffering severe disadvantage) and more care was put in ‘preparatory actions’ so as to motivate individuals to participate in own integration. In what may be seen perhaps as a newer development, monitoring of employment (especially employment stability) and support of the person once employed were strengthened. Specific training courses were designed targeting sectors with recruitment needs, which is said by evaluators to have widened the occupational choice of beneficiaries. In GR, a nationwide network of one-stop-shop to deliver holistic services of career advice and guidance has been created.

In BEfrg, the DP survey showed that the development of more individualised pathways has been by far the objective of the programme to which DPs think they have made the greatest contribution. 84% DPs think they have contributed to the objective and 28% in a very significant manner.

Similarly, in FI, new trade-specific pathways have been developed with high involvement from employers (the evaluators see this as the most important result of theme 1A - Facilitating access and return to the labour market). This has also been the case in the construction sector in UKgb, where one London-based DP is singled out as having secured employer commitment for the training, placement and eventually employment of people facing severe difficulties in the labour market⁹⁰. Although generally speaking the UKgb evaluators raised doubts as to the

⁸⁹ Two evaluators have sought to single out projects, following a process of assessment and selection (in FR, ‘truly innovative’ projects; in PT good and innovative practices). A number of evaluators (AT, BEfrg, ES, FI, GR, UKgb) have presented innovations by theme and therefore have an analysis of innovation trends in each theme, rather than a selection of best practices. The BEfrg evaluators are particularly careful in their presentation of innovative practices to say that these remain to be validated. In any case, as was mentioned above, none of the evaluators, except in DE, has assessed the overall quality of these innovations, but partial assessments are sometimes provided. The DE evaluators have presented innovations in DPs targeting specific groups, DPs targeting sectors, DPs targeting specific territories and in DPs oriented to method development. However the assessment of quality which has been carried out does not seem to be taken up there. The UKni and LU evaluators logically describe the innovation in all DPs, given the size of the programme in these countries. Finally a few evaluators (IE, IT, SE) have made assessments of innovation from a programme perspective – though the IE evaluators provide specific DP illustrations – and two evaluators (DK, NL) have opted mainly for a quantitative perspective, with less room for thematic or single illustrations.

⁹⁰ This DP has also been selected as EQUAL ‘success story’ at the European level.

sustainability of the employer involvement obtained by EQUAL theme 1A DPs, in this case they saw it as relatively secure, given the strong recruitment needs in the sector.

Gateways to employment have also been diversified, for example through the creation of new temping arrangements for specific groups (low qualified people in BEfrg, people with disabilities in AT), through the promotion of self-employment (for people with disabilities in AT), or through the promotion of telework (for people with disabilities in DE).

Finally initiatives have also taken place to improve the interface between the unemployed and the institutions and agencies in charge of delivering employment policy and benefits. The IE evaluator puts forward a particularly innovative (and effective) example, involving all relevant institutions in a 'multi-agency approach' to engagement with their client group (mainly older long term unemployed and the 'hidden' unemployed), which has resulted in a co-ordinated strategy and a joint interview process. Placement rates have improved.

Integrated approaches to tackling labour market discrimination and discrimination at work: tackling prejudice through employer mobilisation and the definition of new mediation roles

Labour market discrimination has not only been tackled by supply-side measures, as could have been feared from the importance of the 'employability pillar'. Mentoring and coaching of the beneficiaries has often only been one of the measures developed by DPs, alongside awareness raising campaigns, advice and support to employers, etc. Multi-level and multifaceted approaches have thus been developed.

Thus the FR evaluators have found that one of the key areas of innovation in the FR programme had been the awareness raising of actors not usually targeted, in order to change their representations and attitudes towards discriminated groups (e.g. through the parallel training of public services officials, social workers, company managers, employees and their representatives, and final beneficiaries).

Similarly the AT evaluators found that DPs working for the integration of people with disabilities had involved company-based decision makers (works councils, heads of personnel departments) as active multipliers and promoters.

The ES evaluators assessed as innovative the implementation of awareness raising campaigns on the 'economic benefits of immigration' (recruiting immigrants and having an intercultural workforce). New roles of 'cultural mediators', acting as links between migrants and employers, are also mentioned by the evaluators, who add that these have been 'very effective'⁹¹, especially when the cultural mediators are migrants themselves. In a similar vein, the GR evaluators highlight the role of 'civic mediator' as an innovation in the combat against racism and discrimination, the AT evaluators mention initiatives for the qualification of skilled 'intercultural consultants' and the DE evaluators refer to the qualification of 'on the job advisers'. A UKni DP has trained 'guest facilitators', themselves from ethnic minorities, to give sessions on equality issues at the workplace.

The same kind of multi-faceted approaches and similar tools can be found in awareness raising concerning **gender equality**, with:

- Actions towards employers, essentially through guides – an 'Equality and Diversity Healthcheck' in IE; a Guide for the application of 'Equality plans' in GR; guides on equal

⁹¹ However the basis for this assessment is unclear.

- pay in the UKgb – and through the creation of new roles – of ‘gender equality consultants’ in GR and ‘equal opportunities agents’ in ES;
- Actions in the education and training system – introduction of ‘gender sensitive’ teaching models in FI, elaboration of ‘gender packs’ for children and youth in AT;
- Actions amongst professionals of social and labour market integration – e.g. a training programme on ‘Gender, stereotypes and argumentation’ in BEfrg; and
- Actions in the community in general – e.g. community workshops to address gender roles in AT, public media campaign in the NL.

The FR evaluators have found that the holistic way in which women issues had been tackled in FR was one of the most innovative features of the programme – for example, women at work were involved together, whatever their position in the targeted company; and addressing gender issues in some communities (e.g. the Chinese and Gypsy communities) was done by involving men as well as women, beyond the specific role divides that exist in these communities whilst taking them into account.

The media/creative sector has attracted particular attention from DPs engaged in combating racism and discrimination. Two different kinds of innovations have been noted there, which are inter-related in part: initiatives aiming at combating discrimination in the media, as this is a strategic sector through the way in which ethnic minorities and migrants are portrayed; and initiatives for the access of members of ethnic minorities and migrants to media production.

In GR, most of the innovations put forward by the evaluators in the field of combating racial discrimination have taken place in the media: a code of conduct for the implementation of anti-discrimination policies was adopted, and an equality audit was developed, aiming at combating the reproduction of racism and xenophobia in the media.

In the UKgb, one DP is said by the evaluators to have had considerable success in committing major television companies to produce ‘diverse programming’ and counting with the contribution of people coming from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME). The DP also provided a platform using broadband technology to support BME groups wanting to enter the media. Another DP developed industry standard panels for the provision of business support, learning and marketing of cultural and creative products created by BME artists.

Innovations in the care sector

The care sector has been given particular attention under EQUAL, especially as it is well suited for the opening up of new training, accreditation and employment pathways for people who face difficulties entering the labour market at the same time as it provides services which help with balancing working and private lives. It is also a sector which still needs structuring in many countries – both in terms of qualifications and careers and in terms of quality of employment and work conditions, as precarious employment is frequent.

Developments in this sector have been highlighted by the AT, BEfrg, DE, LU and UKgb evaluators. In DE, new possibilities of training and qualifications have been opened up in the sector of care for the elderly. Some of the schemes have targeted specific groups which could benefit from the recruitment needs in the sector, including migrants, and un- or low- qualified individuals.

In BEfrg, a new partnership between complementary actors in the childcare sector was set up for enhancing the consistency of provision; new strategic management tools were created for the greater accessibility and quality of the services, at the same time as information tools (such as a web-based resource on childcare) were developed. The evaluators consider that the synergies created between partners could be intended between more operators and thus contribute to the

greater consistency of the implementation of childcare policies in BEfrg. In LU, 2 childcare facilities have been set up in the north of the country where there is almost no offer in this respect. Flexible opening hours have been introduced, which is also an innovation stressed by the evaluators, and qualification trajectories were developed for non-qualified unemployed people, which is also unusual in the sector in LU.

But developments for the structuring of the sector have been particularly notable in AT and in UKgb due to the number of DPs involved or to the scale of the innovation developed. In AT, the phrasing of priority 2D in the CIP as a priority for the improvement of ‘quality in social services jobs’ was certainly an important stimulus to innovations in that sector. As a result, the sector has benefited from what could be called ‘structural’ innovations: a pilot collective agreement in the health and social care sector; provision for the harmonisation of skill requirements in care work, and the promotion of care vouchers. New services were also created, such as a ‘virtual old age nursing home’, which provides professional help on a mobile basis and systems of visual communication between professionals and the dependent elderly who wish to remain in their homes.

In the UKgb, new qualification and employment opportunities have been opened up to people who so far acted as voluntary carers. A theme 1A⁹² DP developed a ‘Learning for Living on-line learning resource’ for carers, which can be considered an innovation at the European level, since it is, according to the evaluators, the ‘first qualification in the EU for unpaid carers and on-line learning for this target group’. 30 centres have already been set up around the UK and the prospects for consolidation and further extension are very good⁹³.

Innovations in the social economy

The strengthening of the social economy advocated in the EQUAL guidelines has given rise to important innovations and developments at the national level, especially, as we have seen, in countries in which the sector was relatively new and/or unstructured. The social economy is typically spread over a variety of sectors, but what was at stake there was the structuring and professionalisation of the sector, and, according to the EQUAL guidelines, the improvement of the quality of jobs.

New support structures were developed: for example, in FI, for the channelling and organisation of ‘civic activities’⁹⁴ which so far had been carried out on a more informal basis; in GR, offices of social entrepreneurship and social franchising systems have been set up. ‘Social co-operatives’, which did not exist before, were introduced and they also received an impulse in SE.

In countries with a more established tradition of social enterprises, the focus was more on professionalisation: in the UKgb, the national evaluator mentions the development of good practice models, of new national occupational standards for social enterprises managers and advisers. In Scotland an important innovation has been the creation of a ‘social economy zone’ model, which has brought together operators and agencies and has led to the design of a new public procurement plan for the promotion of community businesses.

One of the purposes pursued for the reinforcement of the social economy was also the creation of new employment opportunities for people facing difficulties in the labour market: the already mentioned creation of social co-operatives in GR and SE was meant to respond to this challenge. However the UKgb evaluators raise doubts as to the sustainability of the jobs created

⁹² Facilitating access and return to the labour market

⁹³ This DP has also been selected as a ‘success story’ at the European level.

⁹⁴ By which we suppose is meant activities of community interest.

and they highlight the ‘considerable risk’ associated with such initiatives. This type of assessment, which introduces criteria of sustainability and effectiveness to qualify the innovations developed, was not available in the other reports.

Support to business creation

The objective set out by the EQUAL guidelines to DPs operating in this field (which here corresponds to a thematic field, 2C) was to ‘open up the business creation process to all’.

Removing barriers to business creation and self-employment was thus the main purpose of innovations developed in that area. As indicated for the labour market integration pathways, innovations pointed out by evaluators in services of support to business creation have sometimes consisted in paying more attention to the preliminary steps of the schemes (‘profiling’) as well as to advice for ‘consolidation’ once the business has been created, with individualised coaching and mentoring throughout. Such ‘integrated’ services are considered as amongst the most successful innovations in the ES EQUAL programme, and also feature high in the DE report.

The formation of new support networks (rather than single structures) has been important. The DE evaluators particularly emphasise the formation of a regional network of one stop shops gathering all relevant actors. Consolidation and attention to the viability of small businesses has been highlighted by the UKgb evaluators through the example of one DP in the retail sector, which has created a support network.

Innovation has also consisted in detecting new sectors for business creation and in supporting entrepreneurs in these new fields. The EQUAL programmes of two Southern countries (GR and PT) seem to have been particularly good at this: in GR, a park of biological and traditional products was set up, which hosts new enterprises, a business support centre, and a control office for the certification of biological products. A network of one-stop-shops was created for the provision of support to business creation in the sports sector. In PT, one of the products rated highest by the evaluators is a Catalogue of ‘socially and environmentally friendly activities’ in the south of the country.

The capacity of these innovations to effectively open business creation ‘to all’ remains, however, at issue. The creation of new business incubators specially targeting women is highlighted in BEfrg, and new support services were set up specifically for entrepreneurs in the travellers’ community in IE; in ES, new integrated advice services were intended to cater for target groups who could not access such services before – such as young people who had failed at university, or without any qualifications, or women in rural areas. These examples demonstrate the usefulness of some of these innovations to actually address the existing ‘inequalities’ in accessing support schemes for business creation.

However both the BEfrg and ES evaluators also remark that this has not been the general case and that actions in this field have tended to cater for groups which were not at a particular disadvantage (e.g. qualified people): this points to a general lack of effectiveness of theme 2C with some exceptions which are the innovations pointed out. Unfortunately, as far as we are aware, this has not been explored by other evaluators.

New learning facilities and arrangements

Several evaluators mention innovations in this field especially in relation to the use of NTIC (training using NTIC, e-learning, distance training). NTIC based systems of access to training have been developed in ES, both for facilitating access to training to workers usually not taking

part and to improve IT skills. However the evaluators have also shown that DPs in the adaptability pillar had not been very successful at targeting workers at risk. Similarly, the BEfrg evaluators highlight the development of ‘e-learning’ whereby training contents become accessible on-line; however they stress that effectiveness remains to be assessed. In GR distance learning and teleworking systems have been set up for example with a view to support access to training for people living in remote areas. In DE a ‘learning platform’, set up to facilitate access to training for prisoners, is one of the key innovations highlighted by the evaluators for people in jail, and one which is said to have significantly improved their employability. The UKgb evaluator provides examples of enhanced access to learning for people with severe disabilities, thanks to the tools developed by one DP (virtual learning environment and switch technology). The UKni evaluators provide the example of one DP which has successfully engaged young people in learning through familiarisation with information technology.

The assessment of the effectiveness of this type of innovations is thus mixed – or pending. The DE, UKgb and UKni examples seem to show that technology can be a powerful tool, when used for the customisation of training to the needs of well-defined, specific and homogenous group (at least in some respects). Conversely the idea that the flexibility of technology could be sufficient for overcoming the barriers to training experienced by some workers seems indicative of an inadequate starting diagnosis.

Accompanying restructuring processes

Although the adaptability priority in the EQUAL guidelines specifically highlighted the need for innovation in accompanying structural economic change, not many evaluators have identified innovations in that area.

The BEfrg evaluators put forward the creation of an ‘integrated resource centre on restructuring (*reconversions*)’⁹⁵ as well as of a new tool for the anticipation of skill requirements, which they assess as very useful for the awareness raising of employers on the need to develop continuous training. Both the FI and the GR evaluators highlight the innovative character of projects carried out in the shipbuilding industry, especially for the development and re-qualification of an aged workforce. It has to be noted that the FI and GR DPs in this sector were part of a transnational partnership which we studied (see chapter 6) and which was found to be particularly successful at informing the work at the national level as well as in terms of joint development of tools.

Introducing ‘work/life balance’ policies and instruments at employer level

Not many evaluators have highlighted innovations in that area either, as many DPs involved in theme 4G (reconciling family and professional life) rather offered training to women, or focused on improving the care provision (see above). However, in IE, the evaluator puts forward a DP which ‘has developed a toolkit for firms to address information deficits/awareness of Work Life Balance and to assist organisations to adapt policies and adopt new approaches. The tool has been piloted in some semi-state companies which are part of the DP’. In ES a DP led by a regional government was able to introduce work-life balance provisions in all the collective agreements at the regional level. And in FR, one of the 21 initiatives selected by the evaluators as quality innovation is that of a local authority which has engaged in a comprehensive reflection and negotiation process for the better organisation of working time for its female employees, from executives to cleaning staff. It is very significant that full-time jobs are being provided to cleaning staff (rather than part time jobs resulting in very low income) but that working time is concentrated so as to allow women staff to face their family responsibilities. Career structures have also been reviewed.

⁹⁵ This initiative has also been selected as ‘success story’ at the European level.

Support to the integration of asylum seekers

There has been a wealth of innovations in that area, both aimed at equipping the providers and professionals working with this target group, thus reinforcing the infrastructure, so to speak; at changing asylum seekers' position in society by addressing prejudice; and new actions, methodologies and tools directly aimed at the target group.

Amongst the first group of innovations, the AT evaluators point out the creation of a supra-regional network between asylum and refugee consultants to promote exchange of know-how especially on help to asylum seekers to set up their own business/ become self employed. In PT, a whole array of resources was created: an information centre, a 'pool' of mediators, training programmes for interpreters etc. In FI, the practices of reception centres were reviewed and changed. A significant example of increased and enhanced capacity is provided by the UKgb evaluator, who mentions the initiative of a Scottish DP which works with volunteers for the reception and support to asylum seekers, and has succeeded in attracting asylum seekers themselves for this role (where they prove more 'reliable' than other volunteers), which has meant an increased capacity, an increased number of languages spoken and a better service.

Actions aiming at changing the image of asylum seekers in the communities where they live, e.g. through the organisation of product fairs and exhibitions, have been mentioned by the AT and FI evaluators. In ES, the awareness raising campaigns led by the only DP in that field above all targeted potential employers.

Tools and actions targeting asylum seekers themselves (welcome handbooks, skills audits, language training, integration pathways) are not innovative in themselves but the evaluators (e.g. in AT, ES, UKgb) stress that their adaptation to this specific group is.

Support to groups insufficiently addressed by mainstream provision

More generally, all evaluators mention innovations related with the adaptation and tailoring of existing approaches to support individuals and groups suffering from severe discrimination and/or marginalisation, or simply not sufficiently addressed by mainstream provision.

- Thus, in AT, the attention paid to some highly marginalised groups, such as the Roma, people suffering from drug addiction, or prostitutes, has been reinforced in EQUAL;
- In BEfrg, tailoring of existing 'insertion'/ training provision has taken place for 6 specific target groups not targeted or insufficiently targeted so far by these measures (people in jail, workers with low literacy, asylum seekers, Sub-Saharan people, +45 and people with disabilities);
- In ES, women in rural areas were much more taken into account, especially by business creation support schemes;
- In FI, the evaluators highlight the outreach of adaptability projects in particular to new quite specific groups – e.g. disabled artists – and to types of organisations insufficiently targeted so far (e.g. SMEs in remote areas);
- In IE, employability support services were developed so as to attract the older unemployed and the 'hidden' unemployed;
- In the UKgb, the specific situations and needs of groups as diverse as ex offenders, people suffering from HIV/Aids, or people suffering from severe disability were the starting point of several projects.

Although migrants have been a frequent target group for EQUAL DPs, national evaluators have not reported on many innovations targeting this group in particular. New methods and initiatives of language training as well as new language testing methods have been developed for migrants in AT and DE. However the dominant mode of intervention with regard to this target group has been through the already mentioned multi-level and multifaceted strategies for combating racial

discrimination. As already stated in chapter 2 (appropriateness of strategies), initiatives have tended to address problems of labour market access and integration, more than of employment conditions, whereas this is really the main issue in some countries.

In some cases the evaluators have highlighted that the way in which these specific target groups were reached and involved was itself innovative. In FR, as already mentioned, the situation of women in the Chinese or Gypsy communities was addressed in a global way, which meant involving men as well and taking into account the specific distribution of roles in these communities. In the UKni, one DP sought to address unemployed households, rather than unemployed individuals; and another one sought to bring together marginalised young women of very different backgrounds and characteristics (from the travellers' community, lesbians, young women with disabilities etc.). In these two cases reaching out to these groups has proved very demanding and has required the development of new approaches such as the mobilisation of peers. In IE, the Asylum Seekers DP decided to recruit and train outreach workers to engage with asylum seekers at an early stage, after research had shown (understandable) distrust amongst the target group towards the authorities.

5.3. IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES: THE DYNAMICS OF EXPERIMENTATION, FACILITATING FACTORS AND OBSTACLES

Whereas national evaluators had reported, in the first years of the programme, a difficulty of DPs to come to terms with the innovation principle, a few national evaluators have provided indications that a 'dynamics' of experimentation had taken place, which seems to be a true added value to project management. Thus the DE evaluators found that a large proportion of DPs had developed the tools to be able not only to readjust their projects, but sometimes to abandon some of them and design new ones in order to be responsive to changes in their environment or target groups: they found that DPs implemented 16 % more innovative projects than initially planned. The increase could be observed in all thematic areas, but was strongest in the areas of business creation and the social economy. 70 % of the DPs initiated additional innovative projects. Similarly, although without such a systematic analysis, the evaluator for UKgb highlighted the importance of 'un-anticipated' innovation in EQUAL. The SE evaluators found that DPs had often started with 'traditional' methods of project work, and had evolved towards more participation and the setting up of new procedures favouring 'learning processes' within DPs.

Other evaluators provide more anecdotal or limited evidence. The FR evaluators selected 2 of their 24 innovative practices on the grounds of a particularly well thought-out experimentation processes. One DP, operating in the childcare sector, organised multi-site experimentation which it then capitalised upon to derive a common methodology which was transferable. The evaluators also single out one collective Action 3 project (in the business creation theme), in which the DPs could organise the joint capitalisation of their various experiences. It is likely that this experience reverted into their practices at DP level. And the UKni evaluators, referring to the difficulties faced by some DPs to reach out to their target groups, mentioned that new outreach channels had been sought for, and found to a certain extent (e.g. mobilising peers).

However there are also indications in some countries that this dynamics of experimentation has been difficult to implement in R1. The ES evaluators remark that the initially planned target groups had sometimes not been reached (in fact, the EQUAL programme in ES has not been very successful at reaching the most disadvantaged), which echoes the finding of their predecessors concerning the lack of adequate starting diagnosis. The final profile of the beneficiaries taking part in DP actions seems to indicate that little corrective action was taken, and thus the innovative character of DP actions may have somewhat been lost. Similarly in LU,

one of the 3 DPs aimed to develop a network with volunteers for the integration of marginalised groups. However, it turned out that it was difficult to find volunteers and this component of the project seems to have simply been dropped.

Thus, and although our basis for this assessment is admittedly scarce, there are indications that it has sometimes been difficult for DPs to draw the lessons of their failures and to design alternative strategies, which is proper of an experimental approach. This points to the need of reinforced programme guidance in some Member States (see below).

What are the evaluators' main findings concerning the **factors which have favoured the emergence of innovation?**

First, and as already hinted at, some evaluators (especially in FR and UKgb) found that DPs with a target-group orientation, with partners chosen for their complementary knowledge of and practices with the target group(s) could be more prone to innovation than, for example, partnerships aimed at territories as a whole, possibly because gathering all the actors of a given territory could absorb all the energies.

The IE evaluator found that innovation was more likely to emerge when the DP was focused on producing a tangible product. However, no other evaluator has arrived at this conclusion. One could even say that the fact that evaluators have highlighted the innovative character of multi-faceted, multi-level approaches rather points in the direction of innovation stemming, in EQUAL, from the design of concerted, integrated action strategies, rather than from the testing and development of single products.

The link between innovation and the partnership principle is to be taken with caution: many evaluators have highlighted the positive contribution of the partnership principle to the development of innovation, especially due to:

- The exchange of know-how and confrontation of views between complementary, specialised, partners (as highlighted especially in the DE and IE reports);
- The role of associated grass-roots NGOs for the better knowledge of target groups;
- The role of DP evaluators for distance taking and readjustments (although this was only pointed out in the DE report),
- Etc.

However, as we have seen, in some cases this positive appreciation of the partnership principle as a factor of innovation was somewhat tautological, especially in the approaches rating the quality of innovation partly on the basis of compliance with the partnership principle.

On the other hand, some evaluators found that the partnership principle should be considered a favouring but by no means a sufficient factor: the ES evaluators remarked, for example, that NGOs' participation was not in itself a guarantee of knowledge of and access to the target group: rigorous diagnoses and careful outreach actions (finding ways to contact people and gain their trust) were also required. In that sense adequate partnership composition was not enough, specific project management and research tools were also needed.

There could also be a tension, as said above, between the partnership and innovation principles, as the operation of complex, comprehensive, partnerships may have absorbed much of DPs' efforts.

The link with the other principles was not systematically explored, but when it was, was not found to be tangible. For example, the FR evaluators looked simultaneously at the innovative character of 72 'operations' (projects), as well as at the quality of their transnational co-operation and of their implementation of gender equality. Only a small minority of projects (5)

featured high on all three principles. The DP survey in DK showed that very few DPs identified transnationality as a source of innovation, although this could also be due to the difficulty to trace back one's sources of learning.

However the IE evaluators found that the participation of beneficiaries in the development of the products had increased the innovation capacity of DPs.

Other very important facilitating factors included proactive support by the national support structures and, particularly, the participation of DPs in thematic networks, where they could take some distance from their practice, and be inspired by others, as noted e.g. by the DE, ES and FR evaluators.

NSS and other programme actors' support seems to have improved in R2: thus the DK evaluators note that there seems to be a better understanding of innovation amongst R2 DPs, due to the introduction of the definition in the guide for applicants. The ES evaluators report on the major effort dedicated by the NSS, following the recommendations of the Mid-Term evaluation, to ensure that 2nd round DPs gave more attention to the principle and especially conceived it more as 'experimentation' (a continuous process) rather than producing something new at all cost.

As to the **limits to innovation**, we have highlighted above that there may have been, in some cases, a lack of attention or preparation of DPs to experimentation methods, in particular with regard to starting diagnoses and the reflection on the basis of the difficulties faced in order to react and identify ways out.

But the BEfrg, FI and IE evaluators point to structural limits in the EQUAL programme which may also have hampered the adoption of an experimental approach. They both stress that the short timeframe of projects, as well as the lack of further funding perspectives, had been an important explanatory factor of the type of innovations developed, i.e. improvement of existing practices rather than testing new practices. The BEfrg evaluators refer to this as 'risk management' (higher ambitions would be too risky for operators and for targeted beneficiaries). The AT evaluator remarked that the obligation to present a workplan for 2 or 3 years could be a barrier to subsequent changes. The IE evaluators have also pointed out that the dispersion of the thematic focus of EQUAL across '5 pillars' could also have led to a trivialisation effect, whereas innovation is not necessarily required across all themes.

Financial issues were sometimes a constraint: not only financial control, but also the demands of co-funding partners and the uncertainty of funding after EQUAL were sometimes mentioned by DPs as factors limiting their will and capacity to innovate. Finally the complexity of EQUAL, and in particular the fact that there were so many key principles to implement, as well as DPs' own objectives, meant that attention was not always focused on innovation.

5.4. CONCLUSIONS

Effectiveness in the development of new methods, new tools or approaches to the delivery of employment policies combating discrimination and inequality

Overall, EQUAL has been effective at producing innovations aiming at improving existing practices or adapting them to reach out to new groups, which is in line with the stated aim of the Initiative to improve the effectiveness of existing policies.

In addition, in a few Member States, EQUAL was used as a strategic instrument to explore or further structure fields of intervention where policy was not developed and/or there was not

much practical experience. The more or less new character of thematic priorities naturally depended on the countries, but 4 thematic priorities were particularly mentioned by evaluators across Member States as relatively new areas of policy/practice developments: the fight against racism and xenophobia (theme 1B); the social economy (theme 2D); conciliation between work and private lives (theme 4G); and the integration of asylum seekers (theme 5I). Conversely, some areas of intervention, such as training in general, have been less prone to innovation, given the long experience in these fields, including the experience derived from previous Community Initiatives.

Obstacles to innovation

The short time frame for the evaluation of the projects and the lack of clear further funding perspectives have sometimes been brakes to innovation, as DPs hesitated to take risks and ‘experiment’, *especially with particularly vulnerable groups*. This is also an explanation for the ‘incremental’ character of innovation: it appears safer to reform existing schemes, which will continue to attract mainstream funding, than to create new solutions which may then have to be dropped.

Over-meticulous financial controls are also putting a brake on innovation, as is particularly clear already in the New Member States.

Conversely, guidance by the national support structures (for the implementation of experimental methods) and networking between DPs (e.g. through national thematic networks) have proved to enhance the quality of innovation. In that sense it is perhaps useful not to have too broad a programme, and to focus on a few well defined themes on which DPs can exchange.

Added value

The requirement made to Development Partnerships to innovate has progressively led to a greater awareness of, and interest for, *innovation as experimentation*, i.e. for innovation as a concept which can steer project management and procedures. In some MS, an experimentation dynamics has clearly taken place, in the sense that the monitoring of project results led to abandoning some projects and setting up new ones. More attention has indeed been paid by programme actors to experimental approaches, in the last year or year and a half, as National Thematic Networks developed and provided a forum of exchange and capitalisation of experience for DPs and as new guidance was provided to R2 applicants. The importance of initial research and diagnosis on the situation of the target groups, the careful design of outreach activities, the reliance on complementary expertise of partners, and the introduction of monitoring and self-assessment procedures seem to be increasingly recognised both amongst DPs and amongst programme actors. This is important as problems in starting diagnoses and outreach activities had been mentioned in R1 and had led in some cases to a lack of capacity of the programme to reach out to the most disadvantaged or discriminated against.

On the other hand, *only a share of operations or DPs can be considered as having produced innovation with clear added value, relevance, effectiveness, sustainability and/or mainstreaming possibilities*. This, to a certain extent, is intrinsic to any experimental programme. However, this may also be due to what could be called a ‘trivialising effect’, derived from the ‘obligation to innovate’ extended to a whole programme: indeed, evaluators looking at the quality of innovation sometimes found that some projects could have been funded under objective 3, or that they were purely and simply not innovative. Thus, whilst acknowledging that there has to be room for failure or limited results, it also seems appropriate, as will be the case in the future programmes, not to extend the obligation to innovate to all projects and rather to allocate a ‘bonus’ to clearly innovative projects.

6. EFFECTIVENESS AND ADDED VALUE OF THE TRANSNATIONALITY PRINCIPLE

In this chapter, we provide an analysis of the implementation of transnationality in R1 and R2 of the initiative, as well as an analysis of results, benefits and emerging added value for R 1 DPs. In the first section, we briefly remind the reader of the frame of reference for transnationality in EQUAL. We also present the evaluation questions asked in the terms of reference of the EU-wide evaluation, as well as the methodology and sources used for this analysis. In section 6.2, we review the various phases of implementation (preparation of the partnership, drafting of the TCA, validation) and the means of implementation at project and programme level (governance arrangements, NSS guidance), activities and their results and obstacles to implementation. In section 6.3 we analyse the added value of transnationality. Conclusions are provided in section 6.4.

6.1. INITIAL OBJECTIVES AND GUIDELINES

6.1.1 Initial frame of reference

The 2 communications of the European Commission on EQUAL (i.e. the EQUAL guidelines for R 1 and R2) and the guide on transnationality, which was elaborated by a group of Member States and the Commission, have set the frame of reference for transnationality in the EQUAL community initiative.

The main expected outcome of transnationality was to add value to DP actions. In addition TN cooperation was also to contribute to European and national policy developments.

With regard to the composition of transnational partnerships, apart from the requirement to have at least one partner, the frame of reference was mostly indicative: recommendations, but no obligations, were made concerning the size (preferably at least two TN partners), thematic consistency (preferably one common theme), access to TN for the various DP members (which should be as inclusive as possible) and the geographical scope (wide). Associated partners were to remain the exception.

The structure of the Transnational Co-operation Agreement was defined so as not to leave out any crucial aspect of the transnational co-operation. It was clearly expected from transnational partners that they would start from a common diagnosis, focus on common objectives and each DP was to try and identify the added value of the transnational co-operation for themselves. With regard to budgets, the principle of reciprocity was clearly favoured. And evaluation was to be both on-going and impact related.

Other dimensions were left much more open: the products could be common or complementary, and partners were free to opt for one or several of the five indicative models of co-operation: exchange of information, parallel development, import/export, joint development and the exchange of trainers and trainees. It was advised that TN partnerships should not limit their activities to model 1 (exchange of ideas) or 2 (parallel development) as it was assumed by programme designers that these activities were generating less added value than in particular model 3 (export / import) and joint development of products.

Partners were also free to opt for a more centralised or decentralised organisation, as long as a TN co-ordinator was appointed. Finally recommendations regarding the size of the budget were left for Member States to decide and as a matter for desirable co-ordination.

The validation procedure recognised the difficulty of parallel validation processes in the Member States and tried to organise the harmonisation and convergence of these processes, through agreements on broad deadlines, on the elements to look at in the assessment, through the principle that most TCAs should ‘pass’ etc. Nevertheless, it still left a lot of room of manoeuvre/uncertainty and margin of interpretation to Member States (such as effective deadlines for TCA submission, extent of selection for entry into Action 2, duration of Action 2 etc.).

Technical assistance was clearly defined through a set of tasks as proactive and on-going. The concrete resources and methods to carry it out were left for Member States to decide.

Finally, the co-operation between Member States and with the European Commission was highly stressed, although the concrete content of this co-operation mainly referred to the ECDB and ETCIM. The Horizontal Group was also to play a role in this co-ordination, but no systematic networking was planned for all Member States in R 1, although this did take place in R 2.

To conclude, the frame of reference was quite consistent with the key idea that TN was constructed as an input into DP actions, although some of the uncertainties resulting from the fact that a lot of the implementation was dependent on tight co-ordination between Member States could actually give rise to significant obstacles.

In addition to the key reference documents mentioned above, from the beginning of the programme, the European Commission and the Member States sought to co-ordinate their approach to transnationality, which meant in particular reaching agreements on the concrete implications of the initial guidelines. This was done through:

- The MA meetings, in particular the Brussels meeting of 24/4/2001 and the Stockholm meeting of 14/5/2001 where initial *briefs* on transnationality were discussed. These briefs would eventually form the basis for the transnationality guide.
- The setting up of a ‘Transnationality Group’ including staff from the European Commission and volunteering Member States, which was the first ‘horizontal group’ set up (though initially this terminology was not used). The first meeting of the group took place on 31/5/2001. Its mandate was essentially to draft the *Transnationality guide*, but was also seen as ‘a forum for reflection and discussion on planning and implementation issues with regards to the transnational dimension of EQUAL, focusing on collaboration between DPs and NSSs, and as a reference point for NSSs and DPs to which practical questions of general interest will be addressed’⁹⁶.

In both fora, the European Commission and the Member States built upon the main lessons from the implementation of transnationality in the former Community Initiatives and on the recommendations made by the Court of Auditors on the basis of their review of these Initiatives.

The framework for implementation of the transnationality principles evolved in R 2 on the basis of the difficulties identified in R 1⁹⁷. The main changes included:

- The introduction of a ‘TN window’ (a common period for partner search, opening on 1 January 2005 when information on all DPs would be in the ECDB and ending on 30 April 2005, by which time TCAs should have been drafted and validated in ETCIM by all the DPs);
- The creation of a network of transnationality co-ordinators from all Member States, and organisation of seminars and conferences at European level, which was also intended to create a better basis of cooperation between MS⁹⁸;

⁹⁶ Mandate of the working group on transnationality.

⁹⁷ These were stressed, for example, in the Transnationality Handbook: DPs’ slowness in identifying and negotiating with prospective partners, delays in securing ETCIM approval of TCAs and the insufficient communication between some MAs/NSSs with their counterparts in other Member States.

- The organisation of a Clearing House in order to help DPs that had found no partners at the end of the commonly agreed searching period ('orphans') to find a TN partner;
- Advice to MAs/NSSs to provide more active guidance and to support DPs in their search for partners, to check the quality of the data entered in the ECDB, to encourage new DPs to cooperate with R 1 DPs in order to benefit from their experience, and to encourage DPs to meet in order to prepare the TCA document; and
- Advice to MAs on TCA validation, encouraging them to use common criteria, and not to block TN cooperation by rejecting TCAs (although at the same time a more thorough drafting of TCAs was advocated).

6.1.2. Evaluation questions and methodology

Three types of **questions** were asked in the terms of reference of the EU-wide evaluation:

The reality of the transnational co-operation: development and co-operation patterns

- How is transnationality implemented? What models of transnationality can be observed on the ground?
- Have the transnational co-operation agreements been set up between DPs working on the same thematic fields?
- Did the transnational co-operation agreements clearly define the role of each partner, the common methods of decision-making and the organisational arrangements for implementing the common work programmes?
- Have geographical co-operation patterns emerged and what is the outcome?
- What means (communication, budgets, human resources etc.) were used?
- What kind of activities is carried out in the frame of transnationality?
- What is their importance for the DPs?
- What types of co-operation were established in the TNP work programmes?

Appropriateness and effectiveness of the resources mobilised for transnationality, obstacles to transnationality

- Were budgets for the implementation of the transnational work programmes realistic and appropriate?
- What barriers emerged in relation to budgets, language and cultural differences? How were these tackled?
- How effective are the methodologies for monitoring and assessing joint activities?
- What use was made of advice and support from the National Support Structure (NSS), EC-produced information and the ECDB, and the Commission's guide on transnationality?

Impact and added-value of the implementation of transnationality on DPs, at national and at EU level

- If transnational cooperation agreements worked in different fields, what was the impact?
- What was the spread of the transnational activity? Can lessons be learnt about how the different types of TNP worked?
- How have DPs ensured that transnational activities provide added value to their strategy?
- How effective has the contribution of the TNP been to the design, implementation process and outcome of an action? Are the outcomes positive or negative? How and to what extent has the TNP contributed to the development of innovation?
- Has the outcome of activities been documented in a systematic and suitable form to facilitate dissemination and mainstreaming at European level?
- Is the TN partnership sustainable?

⁹⁸ An assessment by Managing Authorities of the New Member States of the usefulness of these mechanisms at EU-level can be found in chapter 9, which bears on European networking.

In order to answer these questions, we have:

- Carried out an analysis of partnership building, of the drafting of Transnational Cooperation Agreements, of the TCA validation process, of the governance models implemented in the TNPs and of the guidance provided by national technical assistance;
- Analysed the dynamics in the implementation of transnationality;
- Identified TN partnership activities and results; and
- Identified impacts and added value.

The **methodology and sources** used have been as follows:

- Analysis of the 2005 national evaluation reports (16 reports for the OMS, bearing mainly on R 1, 9 reports for the NMS, bearing on R 2);
- Case studies of Transnational Partnerships (TNPs) (see below);
- Interviews with MAs / NSSs in all 27 CIPs;
- Analysis of ECDB data⁹⁹;
- Documentary analysis: the ‘Analysis of case studies on Transnational Co-operation between EQUAL Development Partnerships’ prepared by ECOTEC (November 2005); EQUAL Guide on Transnationality (2001-2004); EQUAL guide on transnational co-operation (2004-2008); Transnationality handbook.

Case studies concerned R1 and R 2 TNPs, with a different scope in each case.

In Spring 2004, 34 case studies of R1 TN partnerships were carried out, involving 84 interviewed DPs.

The sample of TN partnerships was selected from the ECDB on the basis of the number of partners, thematic focus and geographical scope. We have presented the results of these case studies in more detail in our second interim report.

Among these 34 TN partnerships, 15 TN partnerships were to be revisited after one year. We conducted interviews with 40 DP members belonging to 15 TN partnerships during May and July 2005. This second wave of visits aimed at following up the TN activities developed, their results and impact on the work of the DP at national level as well as the implementation dynamics observed at TN partnership level. This included also the analysis of the dynamism of the partnership itself: changes in partnership structure, changes in governance issues, impact of models of governance on results; approaches to overcome difficulties and barriers, sustainability, budget management and its influence on transnational work. The evolution of commitment and interest in transnational activities and the reasons for this type of dynamism were looked at. The selection of 15 TN partnerships out of the 34 case studies was based on different constellations of TNPs identified in our 2nd Interim Report on the basis of the first wave of visits¹⁰⁰ as well as on size.

⁹⁹ ECDB data has been used whenever possible. However in some cases, this was not possible due to errors and gaps.

¹⁰⁰ In our Second Interim Report we presented a typology of four types of transnational partnerships on the basis of their initial motivation and commitment in transnational activities: (1) ‘Transnationality as a key and shared motivation for EQUAL’, (2) ‘Transnationality as a general requirement’, (3) Transnationality as expertise’ and (4) ‘Transnationality as a field of negotiation’. All these categories of partnerships were analysed in the second round, although not proportionally. We included examples of model 2, 3 and 4, but clearly set a focus on model 1. The argument for having category 1

In the context of R2, 10 additional case studies were carried out. The main selection criteria were that DPs from each of the 10 NMS should be represented in at least 1 TN partnership, so that in the final sample DPs from all NMS were represented. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 10 NMS DPs as well as telephone interviews with some further members of the TN partnerships based in OMS. The focus of these case studies was set on the building up phase.

The case studies allow us to have an in-depth view especially of the building up phase of TN partnerships (44 case studies in all for both rounds) as well as on implementation dynamics and emerging impacts and added value (15 case studies for R 1).

	Round 1	Round 2
1 st wave of visits	34	10
2 nd wave of visits (revisits)	15	--

6.2. IMPLEMENTATION, FACILITATING FACTORS AND OBSTACLES

6.2.1. Preparing the transnational partnership

6.2.1.1. Search for TN partners

a) The ECDB, an effective and relevant resource

According to the large majority of MAs/NSSs in both OMS and NMS, the ECDB is a valuable evolution by comparison with the methods/tools used in previous initiatives and its relevance shows in the fact that it has largely been used by DPs for partner search.

We had found that R1 DPs used discriminating criteria to make their search on the ECDB, and in some cases even elaborated partner ‘profiles’, as the example in the box below demonstrates.

One DP of a R1 TN partnership explained to us that they had ‘screened’ the ECDB on the basis of two main criteria, in addition to the theme: target group (older unemployed) and local context (deprived former industrial areas). The screening led to the identification of 5 or 6 potential partners. The TCA was finally concluded with 2 of them. The whole process took about 2 months.

overrepresented was derived from the assumption that probably more could be learnt in terms of impacts and conditions of success.

Such an approach was promoted further, in the TN handbook for R2, designed for the MAs/NSSs. Although we have only carried out a small number of case studies for R2, we could observe that this recommendation was taken up by DPs. Examples of selection criteria used by DPs for identifying and selecting TN partners included: coincidence in target groups, in types of promoting and partner organisations, and in activities. When asked to put forward preferred Member States, DPs sometimes indicated Member States in which they knew that there was a body of knowledge and experience in their area of interest. Some DPs attached importance to language and cultural proximity. Following the advice provided at European level, NMS DPs also looked for DPs that already gained experience in R1.

The ECDB was used both for active search and, when DPs received an offer of co-operation, for obtaining information on the 'proposing' DP. The example below illustrates these uses of the ECDB by a R2 DP.

A LT DP received about 30 requests for cooperation from 30 TN partners on the grounds of the information the LT DP introduced in the ECDB database. The LT DP selected 10 of them on the basis of similarity of structures and activities (organised childcare sector as opposed to home childcare). They talked individually to all of them on the phone and by mail. Some of the partners did not constitute an option anymore: they had a contact with a potential ES partner, but the ES DP was approved too late. They also had a good possibility in FR, but the DP was finally not approved. They ended up with 2 TN partnerships. In the TN partnership studied, they contacted a DE DP which figured among the 10 pre-selected. With a bilateral contact it was clear to them that they should collaborate. The DE DP on their side had contacted LU, BE, IT partners.

Difficulties for partner search through the ECDB during R1 were linked to incomplete information entered in the database as well as to delays in communicating DP descriptions, which occurred in some Member States, with the consequence that in some cases, DPs had a reduced basis of partners to choose from, especially if they had very specific criteria. This problem was largely resolved by the introduction of a 'Transnationality Window' in R2.

b) The use of others channels

Although the ECDB was extensively used, other channels for finding partners potential partners were also used, mainly built on previous experience and networking.

Most interviewed DPs during the first wave of visits during R1 had previous TN experience¹⁰¹. In several cases, the DP member in charge of building up transnationality had their own networks and files of possible partners, even though they did not necessarily use them. The extent of TN experience was logically less pronounced for NMS DPs, although we have indications through the evaluation reports and some case studies that a number of DPs in some NMS were experienced in transnational programmes (e.g. SI, some cases in CZ and EE, and 5% of DPs in HU, according to the evaluator).

Another resource for partner search has been, in the case of DPs with no or little experience of transnationality, to hire an external consultant. This has proved to be effective, and some TN partnerships were built thanks to this support. However, there was a risk of loss of ownership over the TN project, when this support was extended beyond partner search and actually consisted in designing the TCA. As will be seen below, the phase of the TCA construction is crucial for the later commitment of partners to TN work, and it is important, in case this task is externalised, to set up the mechanisms to ensure that there is sufficient debate with DP partners on the various dimensions of the TCA.

A further channel used by some NMS DPs involved in our R2 case studies was cooperation between MS. NMS MAs/NSSs representatives confirmed that the organisation of seminars and conferences at the European level including the Birmingham conference in January 2005, the 2 seminars of the

¹⁰¹ 73 out of the 85 DPs interviewed. See for more details 2nd Interim Report.

network of transnationality co-ordinators and, in the last instance, the clearing house in Prague, had been helpful for partner search.

c) Organising face-to face meetings

As we have seen, using the ECDB for identifying the ‘right partner’ constitutes only the first step: direct communication was felt to be necessary and visits were often organised. Interviewed DPs were aware that only in-depth talks – in general first on the phone and by e-mail, and at a later stage possibly face-to-face – could help decide whether a potential partner was ‘suitable’ or not. As stated by one of the R1 DPs interviewed, this had been a ‘laborious’ process, especially when transnationality co-ordinators sought to involve other DP partners in the decision over suitable transnational partners. The box below provides an illustration of this process.

The initiative for this R2 TN partnership came from a DE DP. This DP hired a consultant to give guidance for the building up of a TNP. This consultant identified potential partners and organised a seminar in DE by inviting 8 DPs. At this meeting it was decided to form two TN partnerships. The DE partner identified two NMS DPs (from LT and SI), so that, when it was decided to create two TNPs it was also decided to have one NMS DP in each of these. The SI DP had regular consultations with its DP members on which TN partner to choose including during the seminar in DE, so that DP members were involved in the final decision.

6.2.1.2. Composition of TN cooperation partnerships

a) Mono-thematic and pluri-thematic TNPs

As said above, DPs were encouraged to form TN partnerships with DPs working ‘preferably’ in the same theme, so as to maximise the opportunities for exchange, learning and joint outcomes. As was shown in the second interim report of the EU-wide evaluation, in R1 there were slightly more pluri-thematic than monothematic TN partnerships. This was in part due to the fact that the types of actions promoted under each thematic priority can differ strongly from one Member State to the other. It therefore seems more important that DPs check whether they have enough in common so as to construct an effective TN partnership with clear potential benefits for each side, rather than sticking to the predefined thematic categories, although sufficient thematic common ground naturally has to be ensured between Member States.

b) Geographical scope

DPs were encouraged to form TN partnerships with partners all throughout the EU. However, in most MS, links are much stronger with 2 or 3 MS than with the rest. As IT has a very high number of DPs, representing 21% of all DPs in R1, IT DPs are members in a great number of TN partnerships. But ‘natural’ links, with Member States with which there is a tradition of exchange, are frequent – a clear example in R1 was that of the group formed by ES, FR, IT and PT. DE was a preferred partner in AT and CZ and to a lesser extent in DK and SE. However there was a substantial minority of Member States whose links to other countries are spread: FI, GR, IE, NL, SE, UKgb and UKni¹⁰².

For R2 we have looked for the preferred partners of DPs from NMS. Some OMS are over-represented in partnerships with NMS DPs.¹⁰³ DE DPs, for example, are frequent partners for DPs from LV, LT,

¹⁰² Source: ‘Number of links in the TCAs between national DPs and those in other Member States’. 25/03/2005. ECDB.

¹⁰³ Both in relation with the share of TN partners coming from the specific MS and taking into account the share of DPs of this specific MS in the total number of DPs.

PL and CZ. This is probably due to a ‘neighbouring country effect’ and to existing links and contacts with organisations of these MS, also visible with AT. In the case of LV, where UKgb partners were the first option, but where DE partners also featured high, the tight co-ordination established between the LV and DE Managing Authorities may also have played a role. IT DPs are frequent partners of DPs from SI, SK and PL. In the case of SI, there is certainly a ‘neighbouring country effect’ and in the case of SK we would assume that the importance given to the social economy can be an explanatory factor. The share of UKgb partners has also been notable in some NMS. This, as in the case of FR, may in part be due to bilateral co-operation between Managing Authorities.

NMS partners have been very ‘popular’ with OMS DPs. The reported motivations of OMS DPs for contacting partners in the NMS were manifold: transfer of knowledge, expectation to learn from NMS experience (e.g. in the Equal Opportunities themes), learning about the New Members and contributing to constructing the enlarged Europe.

NMS DPs have also been interested in partners from other NMS (in particular among former communist countries – due to similarities in language and some common historical background). Anticipating such a development, the CZ MA/NSS recommended to DPs not to focus their choice only on SK and PL.

In both rounds the geographical composition of TN partnerships does not necessarily reflect the first choice of DPs. This became clear when we compared the indicated preferred countries on the ECDB at the beginning of the search process and the eventual composition of the partnership.

6.2.1.3. Drafting the Transnational Co-operation Agreement

a) Preparing the TCA

The preparation of a good TCA has been widely acknowledged as a key basis for the formation of the TN partnership and for the definition of the content and modes of collaboration¹⁰⁴. However, DPs have experienced this as a rather complex process in R1, due to the inherent difficulties of reaching agreements with often unknown foreign partners, but also due to some specific aspects of the framework for transnationality in EQUAL R1 (such as differences in time schedules between Member States, differences in the thematic content of programme priorities, differences in budget sizes etc.).

However, the attitude of DPs to TCA drafting, and their organisation to do this, have also had crucial implications for the quality of TCAs. Thus, in order to facilitate the drafting of the TCA and to gain time, it has sometimes occurred in R1 that a smaller group of partners in the TN partnership took the lead for the elaboration of the TCA. This happened, in particular, when these partners knew each other before. The result was that partners who had not been associated in TCA drafting could feel less party to the partnership, and consequently that commitment could be uneven, which has indeed been the case as far as we could see in our R1 fieldwork. The most ‘successful’ partnerships in our sample, i.e. partnerships with a high rate of completion of the planned activities and significant results, had almost always organised at least one (often two) meetings between partners in order to agree the TCA. This problem was addressed in the Guide on Transnational Co-operation for DPs in R2, and it was recommended, that TN partners should meet at least once in order to agree the main issues of the TN partnership. As far as we could see in our small number of R2 case studies as well as in some national evaluation reports of NMS, TN meetings in order to prepare the TN partnerships did take place.

R2 TCAs were drafted more rapidly thanks to previous experience of R1 DPs. Nevertheless, quality remained uneven as far as we could judge from the analysis of the TCAs for the TNPs studied.

¹⁰⁴ See e.g. the report of the Barcelona seminar on transnationality, 4-5.03.2004.

Meetings and building on R1 experience were clearly a facilitating factor for the drawing-up of the TCA, but not necessarily for its quality.

b) Validating the TCA

As has been mentioned in the section on the frame of reference, the validation of TCAs had to be carried out jointly by the MAs of all the DP partners concerned. For this, mutual consultation between MAs was recommended, MAs were to synchronise their time schedules, to apply common validation criteria – notably the coherence with the DPAs of the DPs concerned, and to try and minimise the number of drop-outs.

The TCA validation process during R1 was rather difficult for MAs as well and, in total, took 9 months. Despite the common criteria agreed for the validation of TCAs, it seems that, in R1, MAs/NSSs were not always ‘strict enough about the minimum effort required and what each section should contain¹⁰⁵’. In part, this may have been due to different approaches by MAs/NSSs as to the role of transnationality in the initiative, or to the idea that TN co-operation could be improved with time (which is correct, to a certain extent). According to the same source, dialogue on what they were looking at in the TCA seems to have lacked between MAs/NSSs in R1. This may explain in part the vagueness and lack of focus of some of the TCAs analysed in our case studies.

According to our interviews with MAs/NSSs in the NMS, the validation process was less lengthy in R2. However, the lack of common criteria remained a problem as far as we can judge from our case studies, from national evaluation reports and from our interviews with MAs/NSSs. This is certainly linked to the fact that MAs/NSSs were very much concerned with not delaying validation and not hindering TN cooperation work. Some MAs/NSSs interviewed in the NMS (and thus R2) recognised that much more care had been given to checking DPAs than TCAs. This means that monitoring and guidance may have to be reinforced during the implementation phase in order to improve TN workplans.

6.2.2. Implementing TN partnerships: work organisation, TN activities and dissemination

6.2.2.1. Patterns of Work organisation

As much as the drafting of the TCA, appropriate governance mechanisms are crucial to ensure ownership of the transnational strategy and activities by all partners, as recalled in the two successive versions of the Transnationality Guide. In this section we examine the various dimensions of this governance: models of co-ordination and decision-making; organisation of TN work¹⁰⁶; specific roles and forms of DP partners’ involvement in TN work; budgetary and financial issues; and evaluation.

a) Decision making processes

Amongst our case studies, we have found that, whatever the mechanisms chosen for decision-making and TN partnership steering, they tend to ensure, at least formally, the participation of all transnational partners on an equal basis and their voice in the steering of the TN partnership. The most frequent models include:

¹⁰⁵ Source: UKgb NSS representative, at the Barcelona seminar on transnationality. March 2004.

¹⁰⁶ Analytically it seems important to distinguish between decision-making and involvement in work, which is not possible in the two models presented in the two Transnationality Guides (consortium model and hub and spoke model).

- Rotating secretariat or co-ordination, supplemented by co-ordination meetings (or even steering groups). Decisions are often made by consensus.
- Lead partner with steering/management/monitoring group. Here again, decisions are usually made by consensus (even though there may be, formally, 'voting rights'). The lead partner does not necessarily always assume all secretariat functions. In several TN Partnerships, it is the host partner of steering group meetings, for example, who drafts the agenda and ensures follow-up.

Both models have their advantages and disadvantages and we cannot conclude from our case studies to more efficiency of this or that model. Much depends on the management capacities of the partners and the distribution of the budget. The advantage of opting for a rotating secretariat is that the burden of running the secretariat can be spread and the risk of having bad management is minimised. In any case, our case studies show that the role of the secretariat is in many cases confined to administrative and some organisational issues. However, shared responsibility in the organisation of the work (see below) and in decision making have proved to be inherent elements of good partnerships as they promote a shared motivation and a shared commitment to the TN project. In the NMS, DPs were in most cases advised by Managing Authorities or National Support Structures not to take the lead of a TN partnership, as MAs/NSSs felt they would lack experience. Many DPs have followed these recommendations.

b) Work organisation

The way in which partners organise the work and distribute the roles seems more important than who assumes the secretariat for the nature of transnational co-operation and for the type of outcomes which can be expected. We have found 3 main models:

- *Working groups led by each partner in their area of competencies, and involving all partners:*

The working group leader may contribute more, but all partners take part in the delivery of the specific work programme for the working group. Working Groups are autonomous with regard to their work programme and sometimes budget as well.

In principle, the model favours maximum co-operation, as all partners take part in all activities, sometimes more in a position of contributor, sometimes more in a position of receiver, sometimes (more rarely) as co-developers. However, we have found examples of TN partnerships which were thinking at first in such a model have found that this was not feasible economically as the budget of some partners was too limited to allow them to take part in all working groups.

- *Working groups led by each partner in their area of competencies, in which other partners participate if they are interested:*

This model is similar to the first one but less demanding, and perhaps better adapted to specific partner constraints (budget and human resources). It may also be better suited than the first model for large partnerships, as sustaining multilateral work in all areas of work has been found to be very difficult when there is a high number of TN partners.

The re-visits of R1 DPs showed that the organisation of TN activities around working groups proved to be quite efficient. This helped to work in smaller groups with intensified discussions with DP member organisations that have the same objectives, and allowed for structured feedback or the joined development of a product.

- *Division of labour between partners:*

Each partner is responsible for a specific product or activity, and there is not much work in common. This division of labour is found in partnerships where TN work tends to be limited to periodic

exchange on the DPs' activities, and concerns the distribution of management and communication tasks.

One danger of this form of organisation, as shown in our case studies, is that it only provides for limited exchange of experience. However, when common objectives are clear and when partners find ways to ensure a good mutual understanding, this way of working can be very effective, especially if the 'products' developed by each partner are then subjected to constructive feed-back by other partners. Combinations between the three above mentioned models are possible and were observed among our case studies.

c) Involvement of DP members

Guidance to TN partnerships (e.g. in the Transnationality Guides) strongly encouraged the participation of all DP partners in transnational co-operation, at different levels. How has this been in practice?

In most cases the co-ordinator of the DP was at the same time in charge of transnationality (often the same person and / or somebody else from the same organisation). Our revisits to R1 case studies confirm that it is important for the TN coordinator to have a key function within the DP, e.g. as DP leader which was mostly the case. The DP leader is best placed to involve other DP members and ensure a high or at least some commitment to transnational activities.

In cases in which the DP co-ordinator was not in charge of transnationality (which was not frequent), a DP member had been specifically appointed for transnationality issues. This can be positive if the organisation/person in charge brings specific expertise in the facilitation of transnationality, but it tends to make participation of other DP members more difficult than when the co-ordinator is in charge, and the appointed DP member may not be fully aware of what other partners are doing: the choice, then, which may be only partly conscious, is to build a separate transnational project.

There were strong variations in the actual involvement of other DP members: among our case studies, there were (1) examples of TN partnerships in which almost no other partner than the TN coordinator was involved and (2) other examples with a high involvement of all DP members. A crucial factor for the involvement of DP members is whether the TCA has been designed on the basis of the DPs' projects, or at least of some of them, or whether the TN partnership has been designed as a stand-alone, separate project. Although, in principle, this second option is not considered in EQUAL (as MAs and NSSs were supposed to check the link between the DPAs and the TCA), in practice it has happened and indeed can be highly effective. However in that case other DP partners are very unlikely to be interested in the TN project.

Furthermore, the case studies show the benefits of involving 'strategic partners', i.e. associated stakeholders who are not directly involved as formal partners. This was especially helpful for mainstreaming TN results.

Mechanisms of partner involvement include:

- Direct participation in transnational working groups, according to areas of competence and interest;
- Participation in transnational meetings;
- Visits in the frame of structured exchanges;
- Hosting visits;
- Participation in conferences.

The intensity of participation is of course quite different in one mode of involvement or another, and the nature of the benefits for DP partners consequently as well. However, there is evidence in our case studies that less ambitious levels of involvement such as the participation in conferences, especially if

they are hosted by the DP, are an effective (and relatively cheap and not too demanding on time, which is an issue) way for partners to become interested in what is being done by the transnational partnership, and to become more involved subsequently. A subsequent step can be to organise structured visits, which allow local DP partners to understand in a very pragmatic way how professionals abroad proceed and implement activities in their field. Indeed our second visits to R1 case study partnerships testified to an increased participation of DP members in a number of cases. Study visits and seminars had particularly helped to raise interest in TN activities.

d) Budgets for transnational activities

TN partners had to agree on the budget and on their respective contribution to the TN partnership on the basis of the share of their DP resources dedicated to transnationality.

In some cases there were important differences, in part due to different guidance in different MS, and in part due to the fact that the overall budgets allocated to DPs varied substantially from one MS to the other.

The analysis of the ECDB database showed important differences in the budget amounts at DP level as well as the concrete budget share dedicated by DPs to transnationality in R1. DP budget shares for transnationality varied between 5% and 15% of total DP budgets. But even 15% of a small overall budget of a DP can represent a significantly smaller TN budget than 5% of a large budget.¹⁰⁷

In most R1 case studies differences between TN budgets of transnational partners were extremely significant, with highest budgets of R1 DPs being often twice but up to 7 times the amounts dedicated by DPs with the lowest budget in the partnership. Differences in budgets represent an obstacle to the implementation of TN activities, as partners with low budgets can not fully participate in TN activities.

Budget differences tended to be particularly important in R 2 TNPs involving NMS DPs. As shown by the national evaluation reports and the R2 case studies, the budgets of DPs in NMS are sometimes significantly lower than those of their TN partners. An additional problem arising in TN partnerships which include DPs from some of the NMS (e.g. Baltic States, PL, CZ and SK) is related to the large differences in purchasing power. This problem, however, was solved by organising TN activities to some extent in accordance with purchasing power differences (e.g. with the NMS partner taking over printing jobs as printing costs are lower in most NMS).

In slightly more than half of the cases, R1 DPs interviewed in our first visits considered their TN budget to be appropriate. Conversely, slightly less than half of the DPs considered their budget to be either too low (a small majority) or too high. When budgets were found to be too high, this was often due to a lower rate of implementation than what had been planned. But there were also problems in computing planned costs.

Interestingly, our revisit to R1 case study DPs revealed that they were more confronted with (slight) under-spending than with overspending, for three reasons:

- Travel expenses and other costs had been over-estimated. Travel expenses have mainly been overestimated in case of geographical proximity;
- Caution taken to avoid overspending resulted in under-spending;
- Activities that were initially planned had not been carried out because partners could finally not reach agreement or delays and problems in time management occurred. This was more of an exception.

¹⁰⁷ See the second interim evaluation report for more details on budget distribution.

TN coordinators often do not know whether their partners have spent their budgets and thus have often no overview of the whole budget structure. This is due to the fact that, in general, agreement is reached at the beginning about the division of tasks and the financing. We understand that DPs might not want other partners to have a control over their spending especially as they also finance part of the TN activities through the resources of the national project (as is the case with the personnel costs). Nevertheless, a lack of financial overview leads to inefficiencies. Especially in view of the fact that budget volumes differ substantially between TNP partners, a reallocation of costs might be useful.

Two models were adopted with regard to the distribution of costs:

- There is a common budget for at least some TN activities like evaluation, project management or even the joint development of a product. We found only few examples corresponding to this model.
- Each partner pays for the activities they are in charge of and there is no common budget. We found that the recommendation made to DPs to opt for reciprocal arrangements was followed in most cases.

Partners agreed, mostly at the beginning, for solutions to overcome budget differences. Quite a common solution was to organise large events in the country with the lowest budget so that the DP concerned could save travel costs. Furthermore, some activities were paid only by some partners.

e) Self-evaluation

Three main models of organisation of evaluation of transnationality can be distinguished on the basis of case study evidence:

- An external evaluator is contracted for the evaluation of the whole TN partnership;
- The evaluation of the TNP is organised internally;
- The TN partners assess transnationality through their self-evaluation at DP level.

Combinations of these models are possible, by:

- Supplementing the external evaluation with internal evaluations of the meetings and the TN activities by TNP partners themselves. The outcomes of this exercise are then sometimes included in the external evaluation.
- Supplementing the external evaluation with assessments of transnationality carried out in the framework of DPs' own evaluation. There are examples of TN partnerships with all TN partners following this logic. However the results of DPs' evaluation are not always synthesised at TN partnership level.

Despite the methodological difficulties which can emerge, the combination of a TN partnership level and of a DP level of evaluation seems to us to be particularly rich in itself and consistent with the orientation of transnationality in EQUAL.

In most case studies self-evaluation reports were delivered at the end of the TN project. Of course, this is of little use for the TNP and its members. At best, TNP members will learn to be more efficient in future TN projects.

There were some cases in which ongoing self-evaluation was organised and results were used in order to improve the management of transnationality.

Our case studies also show that, when self-evaluation is part of the common TN activities, but is organised by one DP, it is advisable that transnational partners agreed on the methodology and the content of the evaluation in order to avoid the risk of seeing the evaluation as the 'project' of the DP in charge.

6.2.2.2. TN activities

Our case study analysis shows that the exchange of information and experience has been the main TN activity. National evaluators who had looked at the spread of activities across the 5 models put forward in the Transnationality Guides¹⁰⁸ in their 2004 evaluation reports generally showed the prevalence of exchange of experience (e.g. in AT, BEfrg, FI, NL, SE, UKni) but this included exchange of staff (BEfrg, FI) and ‘mutual transfer of knowledge’ (NL). Our evaluation activities in the context of the implementation of R2 in the NMS confirmed this predominance of exchange of information.

The exchange of information and experience was organised in different ways and could in some cases lead to the transfer of tools and methods. As such, ‘import/export’ is a result, which might be derived from the testing and piloting of an approach, or which might come out of thematic workshops, or which might occur as a result of visits to partners. Exchange of staff and beneficiaries has been in many cases an integral part of exchange of information and experience. The realisation of joint development of methods and tools has been less frequent. Most importantly, this form of cooperation is based on a prior intense exchange of information and experience. Indeed, approaching the end of their TN activities, some of our case study respondents argued that DPs would now be ready for joint development.

In what follows, we provide a more concrete overview of what TN activities consisted in.

Structured exchange of expertise

In a few TN partnerships, this was actually the main real activity, whereas in many TN partnerships it was one activity amongst others.

Structured exchange takes place through workshops, seminar and conferences on a specific issue (a problem, a method, a theme), in which partners present their experience for debate or, when all have expertise on the issue addressed, share this expertise. Depending on the depth of presentation and duration/continuity of the work, this can be a very effective way to stimulate interest for the practices of others and for direct and ‘traceable’ inspiration for one’s own practices (more rarely, of straight ‘import’ as there are of course many barriers due to the differences of institutional and legal contexts). The exchange of information and experience was often organised in the frame of working groups (see above). Viewed in this way, even those TN partnerships which chose to mainly focus on this type of activities were sometimes highly successful, and led to a widening of the scope of activity of each partner, to increased professional skills, and to the adoption of new methods.

Testing and adaptation of methods

As already argued import/export and adaptation tend to take place more as a result of meetings and workshops rather than to be a concretely planned activity. The testing and adaptation by a DP of a method developed in a foreign DP is already a step beyond this: there is a clear interest for a method, a decision has been made to pilot it with local beneficiaries (which entails a whole process of preparation with them), etc. In the few cases in which this activity was implemented, the outcomes were clear: dissemination and improvement of the method for the transferer, adoption of the method as such or adaptation for the transferee. It is important to stress that the transfer and adoption of methods was closely linked with the exchange of experience and /or the development of joint products, and was not always planned at the beginning of the TNP (see below). In many case studies the transfer of methods and tools was more a result of other TN activities.

¹⁰⁸ The UKgb evaluators do not use these models. The DE and IT evaluators use them but the data they use (On-line monitoring questionnaire in IT, survey to DP co-ordinators in DE) address the level of priority (DE) and benefits derived from each model (IT). The BEnl evaluators only report on 4 case study DPs. The LU evaluators report on outcomes.

Parallel development

We understand that parallel development takes place when partners address a common issue by carrying out activities in their own territory (or sector) but without common work with TN partners. In a way these activities are carried out as separate projects by each DP. There may be joint dissemination of events afterwards to present the results, but the work of the partners is independent. In such cases, transnational co-operation is quite limited (to mutual information on the results of the activity), and what is really happening is a further development of domestic activity. We did not find that this was occurring frequently in our case studies.

However we found examples of parallel development of products, where other partners provided feedback on the product developed, which therefore entailed more co-operation. This type of activity may be called 'iterative parallel development'. In particular we found, in a number of cases, that what partners had announced in the TCA as joint development was actually carried out in this way, less ambitious in terms of TN exposure and interaction, but certainly effective in terms of production. Thus partners can choose to distribute the work amongst each other and each develop a 'European' product which will be used by all, and by a wider audience. Partnerships which have adopted this way of working already displayed significant results, in terms of 'European products'. Examples include a CD-rom on the profile of competencies of the 'ideal entrepreneur'; a training guide for technical staff working on de-segregation issues (counsellors, HR managers, unionists etc.); etc.

Joint design and development of 'public' products

Joint development, as the name indicates, requires common work by partners – even if, at some stage of course, partners elaborate their own contribution in parallel. For example, a TCA announced a computer literacy manual as 'joint development'. In practice, it was developed by the ES DP and commented upon by the AT DP, which is closer to the model of 'parallel development with feed-back' outlined above.

Defined in this way, only few case studies of TN partnerships had activities which could be qualified as joint development. But they were already having significant results, with the development of European products in their sector of activity, which are of immediate benefit to the operators involved but have a much wider potential or actual audience.

Examples of 'European' products include e.g. an observatory on occupations and safety guides within the shipbuilding sector (see box below); training tools for a specific target group (e.g. people with disabilities); a European e-learning platform including three joint training modules for professionals working on the labour market integration of low-skilled unemployed people and for people with learning difficulties; a software system aiming at evaluating the perceptions and attitudes toward ICT and the prospects of working with ICT, a tool used to plan training programmes, e.g. to decide whether self-learning is appropriate; professional profiles for trainers and support workers working with people with disabilities.

The example below is an illustration of how joint product development, structured exchange of experience and the adaptation of new methods at DP level can be tightly inter-related.

In this TCP of 3 DPs (FI, GR, IT) with all partners working in the shipbuilding industry, the main activity (except for the design of a European observatory) was the organisation of workshops of three working groups, each one led by the partner who had most expertise on the issue tackled (FI: older workers and health and safety issues; IT methods for certification of competencies in the sector; and GR: relationships with subcontractors and qualification of their staff). This exchange (over the whole life of the partnership) led each partner to pilot new methods with their own local partners and to provide feed-back on these methods to their transnational partners. A common skills certification methodology for the sector was also going to be developed on the basis of the IT method (joint development), but, at the time of our case study, this had not materialised yet.

The results of the TN activities were manifold and most importantly new resources were designed and used:

- E-Forum on Industrial Relations, designed with the aim of allowing European shipbuilding industry workers the possibility to debate and exchange experiences.
- Development of an Industrial Relation system among all the local institutions (Port Authority, City Council, District Council, Employers' Associations and Unions) for the management of crisis situations and for devising policies supporting Human Resources development in the port, shipbuilding, ship-repair and leisure port sectors;
- Final reports of national and transnational working groups on issues such as safety & health, certification, industrial relations, production processes in the port, shipbuilding, ship-repair and leisure port sectors;
- Certification and accreditation systems for worker skills especially in view of mobility;
- Guides on Safety at work.

These results testify to a European added value of the project. In addition, according to our interviewees, the domestic impact was important and consisted mainly in the import and transfer of methods and tools. The GR DP 'imported' and applied methods and tools for Human Resources management with an aged workforce in the shipbuilding industry. The Guide for safety at work is also being used. Transnational activities also fed into the development of an accreditation system.

The example below also shows a mix of different activities, of which the development of joint products is an integral part.

This TNP of 6 DPs is concerned with the labour market integration of vulnerable groups. The work was organised in 3 working groups: 'drug users', 'job rotation' and 'social marketing'.

Guidelines for the consultation process with drug users were one of the products of the working groups. A further product was a 'toolkit' for people planning a Job Rotation project. This toolkit contains a presentation of Job Rotation as a six-stage process, information on Job Rotation in different countries, guidelines on undertaking a Job Rotation, case studies on successful and unsuccessful Job Rotation examples.

One working group of this TNP produced a training module on skills in social marketing. For the finalisation of this product a pilot training course was organised with the TNP partners. The training module is aimed at national employment services, employment support units, employment and recruitment agents, the prison service and the DP organisations belonging to this TNP. Implementation of this module may require some modifications for delivery in different countries.

The last example shows another type of joint development which is a comparative study on gender segregation in R2. Here again we can see that joint development can be regarded as a further step to the structured exchange of experience.

In one of our R2 case studies, in the area of gender segregation, the LV DP is responsible for carrying out a survey of 1000 women in science, engineering and technology professions, but the questions of the survey are to be elaborated jointly by the UKgb and LV partners, so as to inform a comparative study which the UKgb partner plans to carry out. The ES partner will contribute by providing a mapping of issues faced by women in these professions and the final seminar to share results will take place in ES.

Exchange of beneficiaries

Not many TN partnerships had planned this type of activity, as TN co-operation tends to be regarded more as 'a laboratory within the laboratory', and thus as having R&D functions of a conceptual nature. Thus, when methods are piloted, it is with the beneficiaries of each DP locally. The results of these activities have been appreciated differently depending on the type of beneficiaries. This type of activity can in some cases be regarded as an integral part of DPs activity at national level and the benefits may be more evident at the individual level rather than at the level of the DP. However, the experience gained through the exchange of beneficiaries can also feed back in the activities developed at DP level.

The following example shows how the effectiveness can be enhanced of DPs activities can be enhanced in the case of the exchange of beneficiaries and the nature of the possible benefits at the individual level.

In this TCP of 2 partners, 8 of the 12 trainees of the UKgb (Welsh) DP were taken to Italy for 1 week. The Welsh trainees come from very deprived backgrounds, and the visit provided them with the opportunity to share their experience and set up networks, although the difference in the profile of the IT trainees was an obstacle to communication at the beginning. This is due to a typical difference of the meaning of the notion of 'disadvantage' (both the IT and the UKgb DPs are supposed to be working with disadvantaged young people). The Welsh trainees were of a much more deprived background than the Italian trainees (who were young unemployed but qualified people, selected also for their English speaking capacity). In addition the young Italians were employed by the IT DP (and the objective is to provide them with sustained employment) whereas the Welsh trainees were there on a voluntary basis. But all this was capitalised upon to reflect upon differences in Europe and make each one reflect upon their own situation. It is (partly) difficult to disentangle the impacts of the transnational dimension from other aspects of the UKgb DP's project but certainly trainees have gained a capacity to locate their own experience in a wider picture. Some of them have started and maintained networks with other people in Europe, and more generally they seem to have changed their self-perception and the perception of their environment.

Exchange of staff, trainers etc.

Unilateral and multilateral visits deepen the exchange of experiences. The implementation of the exchanges was generally a source of high satisfaction amongst TNP partners and for the DP partners concerned, both for the visitors and for the hosts. Structured visits have been an opportunity to see concretely other professional practices, and to reflect back upon one's own. On the basis of our case studies, there are grounds to think that staff exchange, when it takes place between similar structures operating in different countries, can be a very direct way of enhancing innovation in the local DP activities.

TN activities have thus resulted in the elaboration of a wide range of products. This has led the ES evaluators to state that TN partnerships were generally highly productive. However, in the Es evaluators' view, these products tend to be too 'theoretical' in the sense that too many diagnosis, reports and profiles have been established. The DE evaluator has drawn a list of the type of products including brochures and documentation, movies, handbooks, concepts. We seek to assess the usefulness of these products either for the DPs' own work or for a wider public in section 6.3 below.

6.2.2.3. Dissemination

Our 2nd case study visits to R1 TN partnerships show that dissemination activities had generally taken place. The main dissemination activities and products consisted in:

- Conferences,
- Publications and leaflets,
- Web sites,
- Diffusion of common products such as guides, training modules etc.
- Dissemination events at national level.

The local media were also sometimes mobilised: in one of our case studies, one DP communicated on the transnational results through local newspapers, a parliamentary newspaper, and a programme in a regional TV.

Although all TN partnerships carried out some dissemination activities, some TN partners complained during the interviews that no dissemination strategy was developed. Dissemination has in many cases

occurred ‘naturally’ through the implementation of TN activities, such as through the organisation of conferences and web sites, which were not only set up for dissemination purposes.

6.2.3 Guidance

6.2.3.1. Technical assistance at the national level

a) Organisation of guidance

Transnationality guidance and monitoring are organised differently across MS. On the basis of our interviews with MAs/NSSs, we found, in particular, that different choices had been made concerning the distribution of roles amongst NSS staff : whilst in PT, FI and MT transnationality is assigned to dedicated staff members (‘internal expert model’), in BEfrg, BEnl, ES, GR, IT, NL, SE, UKgb, PL, SI, SK, transnationality guidance is included in the wider guidance provided to DPs and all staff deal with both levels in their relationships with DPs (‘global guidance model’). There is also a combination of both (former CZ NSS, LV). In this case one person has a specific knowledge (e.g. on the use of ETCIM), but all staff members have basic knowledge to provide guidance.

Each model has its advantages: expertise and a comprehensive knowledge of TN issues are developed in the first model. In the second model staff has an overall view of the DPs and can understand better the role played by TN for each DP, which is probably more consistent with the approach to TN in EQUAL. Nevertheless, this model is dependent on the possibility for staff to exchange on TN issues and build a common understanding. There is also a risk that not enough attention and resources are devoted to TN issues.

Although we do not have a general overview on NSSs, lack of HR seemed to be a serious issue in several Member States and especially in the NMS. It needs to be noted that the guidance capacity of the MA/NSS during the preparation phase (former Action 1) has been assessed very critically by the PL and SI evaluators. Our own interviews have shown that the guidance capacity in a number of NMS was weak for two reasons: understaffing and, in the implementation phase, a systematic lack of time due to the very high burden of checking monitoring reports and treating financial requests.

b) Nature of guidance and monitoring

Although all MAs (or NSSs) are carrying out some activities of guidance and assistance to DPs, there seems to be large differences among MAs and NSS as to whether they perceive their role as actively pushing DPs to efficiently implement transnationality or whether they merely give help on request.

The activities developed by NSSs in order to promote and support transnational co-operation can be grouped in the following categories:

- Basic collective guidance

This includes, for all NSSs:

- Guides on transnationality: design of specific guides (e.g. BEnl, FR), translation of the EC guide (as in many NMS), or adaptation of the EC Guide (BEfrg, IT, UKgb)
- Budgetary guidance
- Organisation of information seminars with DPs by the NSS. These seminars usually address all issues related to the preparation of transnational partnerships and the drafting of TCAs.

- Individualised support to each DP

Such support, also provided by all NSSs (this is part of their mandate) takes various forms:

- Bilateral contacts to solve difficulties on demand, through ‘help-desks’, in particular in the context of partner search;
- Monitoring visits, with the aim to get an overview of the DP. Various NSS said that they were trying to raise the level of transnational co-operation;
- Participation in TN meetings for providing advice in situ, even helping DPs in the co-ordination of TN meetings, monitoring what is done in the TN projects;
- Monitoring through DP activity reports (although their formal character means that this is far from being the preferred way to understand what is happening at DP level).
- Other, more specific, forms of support, especially during the preparation phase, were also mentioned, e.g. the IE NSS offered feed-back on TCA drafts, the NSSs of several New Member States made the promotion of ‘their’ DPs in the various European fora provided. The CZ and MT NSSs followed DPs at every stage of the preparation phase.

In some MS, this kind of individualised guidance was mostly provided in the preparation phase, and transnationality lost somewhat of its urgency in the implementation phase. In other Member States (e.g. ES, IE, NL), NSS representatives insisted that transnationality was, systematically and throughout the DP lifecycle, an important issue on the agenda of monitoring visits. In UKgb, two NSS staff take part in monitoring visits to DPs, which makes it more feasible to address transnational issues systematically. Clearly, the resource implications of such models of systematic monitoring are such that not all NSSs are in a position to adopt them.

6.2.3.2. Guidance at European level and cooperation between MS

Overall, the guidance provided at European level was regarded as useful in both rounds¹⁰⁹.

- The guides and handbooks on TN were generally received positively by DPs and MAs and NSSs. There were of particular interest for NMS DPs and NSSs.
- The ECDB was regarded as a helpful tool for partner search, although the quality and reliability of the information was criticised in both rounds of EQUAL. Our own cross-checking of data confirms this. This means that the ECDB could be used to make a pre-selection of TN partners or to get some information on potential TN partners which contacted the NMS DP. Then, personal contacts were necessary to figure out if a potential DP could really be an interesting partner.
- Cooperation between MS was intensified in R2 as it had been found to be insufficient in R1. A network of transnationality co-ordinators was set up and a series of seminars and conferences took place, which were assessed very positively by programme actors in the NMS. Half of the NMS also had one or several bilateral cooperation agreements with NSSs of OMS. These proved to be very useful for supporting the guidance at national level as NMS got practical advice. In SK, learning seminars for DPs were organised with the French NSS.

6.2.4 Implementation dynamics: changing expectations and motivation for TN over time

In our second interim report we had identified four main configurations¹¹⁰ of transnational partnerships depending on the initial attitudes, mainly expectations and motivations, of TN partners. These configurations were the following:

¹⁰⁹ For more details on the assessment of this guidance in the NMS, see chapter 9.

- (1) Transnationality as a key and shared motivation for EQUAL (12 cases out of 34 R1 case studies). In this configuration, partners have initially applied to EQUAL in part for its transnational dimension and have high and clear expectations regarding transnationality. Accordingly activities are planned and designed to fulfil these expectations.
- (2) Transnationality as a requirement (8 cases): In this configuration, partners initially had low expectations of transnationality, and viewed their DP work as a priority.
- (3) Transnationality as expertise (4 cases): In this configuration, partners consider transnationality as a requirement rather than as a motivation for joining EQUAL, but they (or at least part of them) consider that they have to comply with this requirement ‘professionally’ and seriously. Partner search and the construction of the TCA have in these cases been carried out with care (screening profiles, preliminary meetings to agree the content of the TCA).
- (4) Transnationality as a field of negotiation (10 cases): In these partnerships, the motivation for transnationality is contrasted amongst partners. Some know exactly what they want out of it and have high or at least clear expectations, but others are less committed (seeing their domestic work as a priority). This situation creates long negotiations which may end up in frustration or more positively.

On the basis of these empirical configurations, we sought to analyse the dynamism in the partnerships during the revisits of R1 DPs and investigate whether specific configurations had brought about different results. As already stated, the selection of case studies to be revisited was partly based on this typology.

DPs belonging to the first configuration appeared to be successful in the majority of cases. DP members were in general satisfied with the results of TN activities and stated the TN activities were helpful for their activities at national level. The design of activities was in general quite ambitious and the level of implementation high.

For all other 3 configurations case studies reveal a mixed appreciation: across all these categories we both found TN partnerships with an increasing interest and commitment of DPs as well as TN partnerships which were affected by a decreasing interest of their members. In addition, in the fourth configuration (TN as a field of negotiation) the appreciation of TN activities made by DP members within one TNP still vary considerably. This is strongly linked to the different impacts of the TN activities at DP level.

Overall, therefore, initial commitment and motivation for transnationality cannot account, of themselves, for the evolution of the partnership over time: we therefore sought to identify what factors could explain increasing, or decreasing, commitment and participation of TNP partners. In particular, it seems that the change of attitude depends on the extent of learning through TN activities. The two waves of visits which we realised in the context of R1 case studies as well as the national evaluation reports indicate the following main forms of dynamisms over time:

(a) High and continuous motivation

In several of the case study TN partnerships, DPs had a high motivation from the beginning of the transnational project and it was possible to maintain this motivation.

¹¹⁰ A fifth one had been identified but concerned only 2 cases: in that configuration (which we called ‘transnationality as a general aspiration’) partners seem to be enthusiastic about – or at least open to– transnationality in general, but their level of ambition is extremely low. Accordingly their rate of achievement is high, but the nature of these achievements is rather limited.

Several factors helped to maintain this high commitment to TN. High starting commitment usually stems from a high congruency of objectives, target groups and fields of intervention. In addition a well worked out workplan is certainly a facilitating factor.

The members of this TN partnership of 3 operated within the shipbuilding industry and shared the motivation to find ways to address the crisis in the sector. These shared interests secured the high commitment of all partners from the beginning, and its sustainability. This TN partnership finally succeeded in the joint development of products and produced European added value (see box above).

However, specific partnership forms may also secure continued commitment:

In a TNP of 3 DPs, the decision was made from the beginning to involve all DP partners. The workplan was designed so that each DP would benefit in their work from the transnational activities: as this materialised over time, the motivation of DP partners for work at the transnational level was reinforced, in a sort of virtuous circle.

(b) Displacement of transnationality due to increasing focus on the national projects

Among our case studies, we could observe that some DPs were motivated at the beginning to pursue TN activities, but both TN and national activities appeared to be quite time consuming. As a result, DPs felt that they had to make a choice as to how to allocate scarce resources and DP-level activities constituted the priority.

This, in some cases, appears to have been a national pattern: the ES evaluator shows that for R1 DPs, TN has clearly remained a ‘secondary’ priority for the ‘immense majority’. This has made it difficult to maintain motivation for TN projects.

(c) Overcoming early ‘disappointment’ with the transnational dimension thanks to the concrete benefits derived from ongoing transnational learning

In some of our case studies, DPs had high and perhaps unrealistic expectations at the beginning. When difficulties in the implementation of TN occurred, which were linked to a number of reasons, including differing commitment between the TN partners, and a time consuming process to get TN activities started, frustration tended to develop. However, as TN activities were effectively implemented and benefits for the DP became evident, motivation rose again.

This, again, has been a national pattern in one MS. The DK evaluators state that generally, DK DPs had experienced the establishment of TN partnerships as somewhat of a burden in the beginning of the projects. As the projects progressed, this view changed, and in the implementation phase the majority of DPs experienced transnational partnerships as a plus.

Conversely, in cases where initial motivation for transnationality had been low, we found examples of TNPs where interest had grown over the course of the project, as DP members realised that TN activities had some added value. A precondition for this to happen is some extent of congruency between the objectives, the fields of intervention and the target groups so that benefits of TN activities can become evident for DP members. A clear work plan also helps to lead the TN partnership to success despite a low commitment of the partners at the beginning. As already shown the involvement of DP members in TN activities also can lead to an increasing motivation for TN of these members. The following box provides examples from our case studies.

- (1) This TN partnership of 3 members was characterised by a low motivation of TN partners to develop TN activities from the beginning. But the BEfrg DP respondent stated that during the implementation phase of TN activities, the added value became clearer to the DP members. Furthermore, according to that respondent, without EC-funding, organisations would not start such a project from an EU-perspective

and would therefore have been more limited in scope and output. The FR DP respondent shared the view that the added value of TN activities had become more concrete in the course of the project.

- (2) Our UKgb interviewees of a TN partnership of 4 members felt that on the whole, the interest of the DP members had increased. This was because at the beginning, there were only discussions over the phone and video-conferences but once people started attending conferences and meetings, the interest started to grow. For the DE partner, the involvement of ‘strategic partners’ was highly important. These strategic partners (representatives of public institutions, companies and associations) were highly interested in learning and using new approaches. They participated in conferences, site-visits and information exchange. The interest shown by associated ‘strategic partners’ was motivating for the other DP members.

Again we found confirmation of such a pattern in the national evaluation reports. The UKgb evaluators, for example, observed that those DPs which benefited most from TN work were not necessarily those showing an early commitment to transnationality. Similarly, the SE evaluators identified unexpected benefits of transnationality, including for partners’ activities outside EQUAL, which helped raise interest in transnationality.

6.2.5 Difficulties of implementation

Our case studies as well as the national evaluation reports show persistent difficulties in the implementation of TN, limiting its efficiency and effectiveness. The difficulties faced are either linked to the specific design of EQUAL or can be regarded as general difficulties inherent in TN work.

6.2.5.1. Difficulties linked to the EQUAL framework

Problems to identify the ‘right partner’ among the EQUAL DPs.

The first set of difficulties is linked with the identification of the ‘right’ TN partner¹¹¹. This can be regarded as EQUAL specific, as potential partners can only be drawn from EQUAL DPs, which limits the possibilities for finding a suitable partner. Furthermore, the way partnerships were formed within EQUAL also led to TN partnerships where one or two partners might be adequate, but not all, as each DP brings in new partners¹¹². Thus the final partnership composition was often the result of a series of compromises. Difficulties were particularly pronounced when DPs waited to be contacted rather than taking a proactive attitude. Furthermore, the lack of clear objectives and expected added value at the beginning of partner search has caused difficulties in identifying the ‘right’ partners. This problem, however, is not specific to EQUAL. As we have already stated, improvements were made in R2 with regard to the optimisation of the partner search process (including face-to-face meetings in order to define common objectives). However, the more structural constraints – the limited pool of partners and by the fact that transnationality is a requirement – remained unchanged.

Differences in the content of thematic priorities

The definition of the TCA requires the identification of common problems and common objectives. However, this, in itself a difficult task, was sometimes made more difficult by the already mentioned differences in the concrete content of thematic priorities. Thus for example, the generic focus of thematic priority 3E (lifelong learning) in R1 in FR was on ‘older workers’, which was not the case in

¹¹¹ This had clearly been a concern, as shown above, amongst our interviewees. These difficulties were also pointed out by several evaluators (in ES, FR, IE, IT).

¹¹² Thus, DP A can find commonalities with the DP B based on their work programmes. DP A involves DP C with which they have other common interest but the commonalities between DP C and DP B remain limited.

most other CIPs. According to the FR MA, only 20 to 30% of FR DPs finally found partners working on similar problems as those they were addressing.

Our case study evidence shows that differences in target groups can be more problematic than thematic differences. In one of our R2 case studies the target groups consisted of young university graduates, disadvantaged young people with poor qualification level, people with disabilities and unemployed in a deprived area, whilst all DPs were funded under Theme 1A. In such cases the definition of clear common objectives and the setting-up of a precise work plan that potentially adds value for all involved DPs is a long and difficult process.

Differences in time schedules in Round 1

A specific problem consisted in differences in time schedules, in particular in R1, as was shown in our 2nd Interim Report. The launch of TN and the time period for approvals varied quite significantly.

This problem has been addressed through the creation of a ‘transnationality window’ for R2 as well as through the co-ordinated publication, by each MA, of their specific requirements and schedules (the ‘country briefs’). On the grounds of our analysis of R2 in NMS we can confirm that differences in timing did not represent anymore a major problem (although some problems persisted, e.g. delays in the start of the preparation phase, as mentioned by the GR evaluator).

But problems of timing differences did not only occur during the building-up phase of TN partnerships, but also in the course of the implementation of the TN activities during R1: differences in the official completion dates of DPs automatically affected the TN partnership. These differences were known since the beginning. This type of problem is aggravated in cases where a DP obtained an extension, but not the others (this happened in several of our case studies).

Vulnerability of the TN partnership when a TN partner faces serious implementation problems at national level

Problems arose when one TNP partner faced domestic difficulties and delayed the TN work as a whole. Reasons for these difficulties could be linked to the precedence of domestic activities but could also stem from payment delays linked to failures at programme management level. Payment delays caused major problems to DPs, in particular for NGOs in NMS, which has led to delays of TN activities or to a restrained implementation of TN activities. The evaluators found that this had been a problem in PL. We have seen this problem also among CZ and SK case studies.

Difficulties of interpretation and use of the 5 models of co-operation

Transnational partners had to agree on activities. The TCA format provided them with a typology of 5 models of TN cooperation, which sometimes could mask differences in the understanding by TN partners, especially if they did not go much beyond this classification and did not make a detailed description of activities. As it turned out, interviewed DPs members of one and the same TNP often did not agree in the description of what they were planning to do and had done, when they were asked to phrase it in terms of the 5 models (disagreements concerned, above all, activities done under ‘parallel development’ and ‘joint development’). Interviewed Managing Authorities and National Support Structures were often critical of this typology, which they found could be confusing and not operational enough for guiding the planning of activities.

Differences in budgetary guidance and in the size of DP budgets

As suggested above, TN budgets represent a difficult issue: TN budgets must allow to participate fully to TN activities and therefore should not be too divergent within the partnership. Different levels of priority for TN activities might be one factor accounting for important budget differences within

transnational partnerships; participation in several TN partnerships was another factor. But budget differences were also due to different guidelines concerning TN budgets in the different Member States, as well as different DP budget sizes between Member States. The budget differences are thus to a large extent a consequence of the specific EQUAL framework.

Under-estimating the time required to build up and implement TN partnerships

This difficulty was mentioned by some of our case study DPs as well as pointed out by some national evaluators (e.g., AT, FR, IE, UKni). Although this would be the case of any transnational partnership in any programme, in EQUAL the time required to establish the transnational partnership came on top of the time required for constituting and consolidating the DPs themselves.

6.2.5.2. General difficulties for implementing TN

The following difficulties can be regarded as typical of TN work.

Differences in institutional settings

Differences in institutional settings have been perceived in some cases as causing difficulties as a common understanding is more difficult to achieve as when the partners are operating in the same context, and transferability might be hindered. This has been pointed out by some evaluators (e.g. DE, AT evaluators). But, in our view, this should rather be seen as a source of learning rather than as an implementation difficulty. Moreover, institutional differences can be inspiring, if they are well understood and if the aim of the DPs is precisely institutional change. Thus, in one of our R2 case studies, one TN partner sought to learn from the (potential) advantages of legislation in another Member State, in order to promote legal changes in their own country.

The realisation by partners that a same problem is understood and approached differently in the national contexts sometimes takes time to occur and has sometimes made TN cooperation more difficult than initially thought (as pointed out by the ES evaluator). These differences become clear in the different use of notions, for example with regard to racial discrimination. For some DPs it was very helpful to debate about different concepts (for example, the notions of disadvantage or of ethnic minority), but we found also examples of DPs which were unable to overcome these misunderstandings.

Cultural differences

Interviewed DPs often mentioned ‘cultural differences’ as a main barrier (and the SE, NL, UKgb, DK evaluators have already referred to this in their Mid-term and 2nd Interim reports). This is also something on which the Transnationality Guides alert DPs. However, we think this difficulty has largely been magnified, as it is very convenient for partners to invoke cultural problems when TN cooperation is not working up to their expectations. DPs which would not have engaged in TN cooperation if it had not been an obligation might from the beginning perceive cultural differences as hindering work.

Differences in the types of organisations involved are also mistaken for cultural differences – whereas clearly one finds these differences in one’s own country.

Language differences

Although solutions have been found to overcome language differences, lack of language skills slowed down communication. Language is obviously an objective difficulty and some evaluators have stated that it was a general problem (ES, AT, DK, NL, CZ evaluators). Difficulties are heightened in

telephone communication, as the use of an interpreter is not frequent. In a few cases, DPs had chosen to send people with good language skills to TN meetings but these did not necessarily have a good knowledge of the issues addressed by the DP, and this was more of a problem than a solution.

DP Size

The second round of interviews confirmed that partnerships of 2 are especially vulnerable, for example if one DP faces problems at national level or shows only a small interest in TN activities. Partnerships of at least 3 partners are less dependent on the risk of partner withdrawal. On the other hand, as we have seen in our previous report, too large partnerships are not easily manageable although the opportunities to learn from other countries are enhanced.

6.3. IMPACT AND ADDED-VALUE OF THE PRINCIPLE

6.3.1 Impact on DPs

In this section we analyse the impact of TN on DP activities and in particular the extent to which TN has contributed to the implementation of the other principles of EQUAL.

In many cases, the impact on DP activities is difficult to trace as the learning derived from transnational work is one influence amongst others, and the learning process is not linear.

The distinction between 2 types of learning proposed by the UKgb evaluator is useful to capture this intangible impact. They argue that the impact of TN is mainly felt by the actors (DP staff and beneficiaries) in terms of ‘experimental learning’ and a feeling of being ‘more European’ as a result of the process. TN has also provided contextual learning, i.e. a better understanding of the domestic policy context thanks to the comparison with other MS.

However, there were also more ‘tangible’ impacts, in the way in which TN contributed directly or indirectly to the implementation of the other EQUAL principles.

6.3.1.1. Contribution to innovation

Several respondents of our R1 case studies highlighted that the transnational project had been a laboratory (or even, in the words of one respondent, an ‘accelerator of innovation’): new concepts, models and approaches have been a resource to their DPs. Furthermore, the contribution of TN to innovation is direct and visible in the context of the development of joint products – examples were already provided above.

<p>This TNP of 3 members is working on the supply of child care facilities. A study has been carried out on mobile childcare (a French experience), and one part was a study of feasibility to implement this type of structure in LU and BEfrg. The FR DP has, in the national project, used the experience of transnational partners (e.g. for developing relationships with firms, with local and national authorities in the field of labour market reintegration). For the LU partner the TN activities have led to changes in the supply of childcare and in legislation. The TN work gave legitimacy to the project. Institutional actors were more motivated for change. Through the project, representatives from the LU Ministry could assess the experience of other types of childcare providers and other solutions/possibilities which have influenced them in their design of the new childcare measures. Thus institutional actors were involved in the DP and participated in TN activities from the beginning, which helped considerably to mainstream the results.</p>

The following examples illustrate how TN activities can lead to improvements at DP level as well as further activities of DP members (outside EQUAL).

This TNP of 3 members is concerned with guidance and advice to new entrepreneurial projects and the creation of business creation support centres. One of the TN activities was the exchange of entrepreneurs among the different partners with the objective to know in situ different realities and experiences in the same professional area, and to develop co-operation. The GR entrepreneurs benefited considerably by seeing how tourist boarding houses in mountainous places were operating elsewhere. Development agencies in the GR region benefited from the transfer of experiences, approaches or methods. The ES partners 'imported' from PT a method for the training of trainers (of entrepreneurs).

This other TNP of 3 members is dealing with methods for the labour market integration of people with disabilities. The TN activities focused on the production of comparative, analytical material. Furthermore, an e-learning course in English was produced, which the partners regarded as a success. One of the 3 TCP partners stated that the TN cooperation made DP members aware of the modern tools and the new technologies for persons with disabilities and guided some partners to pilot some of the tools developed or imported through TN work. According to the GR partner, transfer of know-how in technology for people with disabilities has taken place. There were knock-on effects as the GR partner works not only with blind or deaf people (the target group for this technology), but also with people affected by other disabilities, and was able to adapt the products to these audiences. The GR partner was also interested in the tele-working arrangements in place in SE, and, although they faced difficulties for implementing telework in GR, they saw it as a future possible development. In this project, visits were very important for developing a concrete understanding of the achievements of each partner and for mutual inspiration.

In many cases the impact of TN activities on the activities of DPs could not be explained in such a concrete way. This is certainly linked to the fact that innovation is at the core of the activities at the national level and that in most cases TN activities only refer to some aspects of the national project or can even be regarded as a separate project.

National evaluators give a mixed appreciation of the contribution of TN to DP innovation. The FR evaluators carried out 12 case studies on TN and found out that for two thirds of them, TN was a source of innovation (creation of new products and transfer of experience). DPs explained that TN activities had led them to think about their own practices in a different way and to reflect upon their methodologies. The GR evaluators found that TN had led to new practices in particular in Theme 1B (combating racism), with the development of 'mentoring', the accreditation of the qualifications and skills of immigrants and refugees, and awareness raising tools. TN co-operation stimulated new research and evaluation of national policies in combating racial discrimination and lobbying. It is interesting to note that the PT evaluators, whilst assessing the overall added value of TN as low, nevertheless found that the influence of TN co-operation had been intense in the cases of best practices and products which they identified. Finally, 20% of DE DPs stated that TN co-operation had been an innovation factor.

6.3.1.2. Contribution to the partnership principle

Our interviews with R1 and R2 DPs showed that TN activities can foster partnerships at DP level. TN acts as a mirror and the understanding of DP partners of their own project is reinforced by locating it in a wider context and by the comparison with others. Communication structures at DP level might be improved through mutual learning and feedback from TN partners. Finally, partnerships can be widened as a result from learning about experiences abroad.

The following examples of the revisits of R1 DPs illustrate what effects TN activities have had on the partnership principle.

In a TN partnership of 2 members, the PT DP member stated that one important impact of TN activities was the inclusion of Trade Unions and Enterprise Associations in their local Social Network. This was a result from the observation by the Municipal Board of the way Social Economy is organised in Italy. Thus, the Portuguese DP has expanded the stakeholders involved in its national project.

In another TN partnership of 2 members, focused on gender equality, the AT DP learned from ES DP the usefulness of including trade-unions, while the Spanish DP learned from the AT way of working, i.e. mutual learning between strategic partners, government and women's institutions.

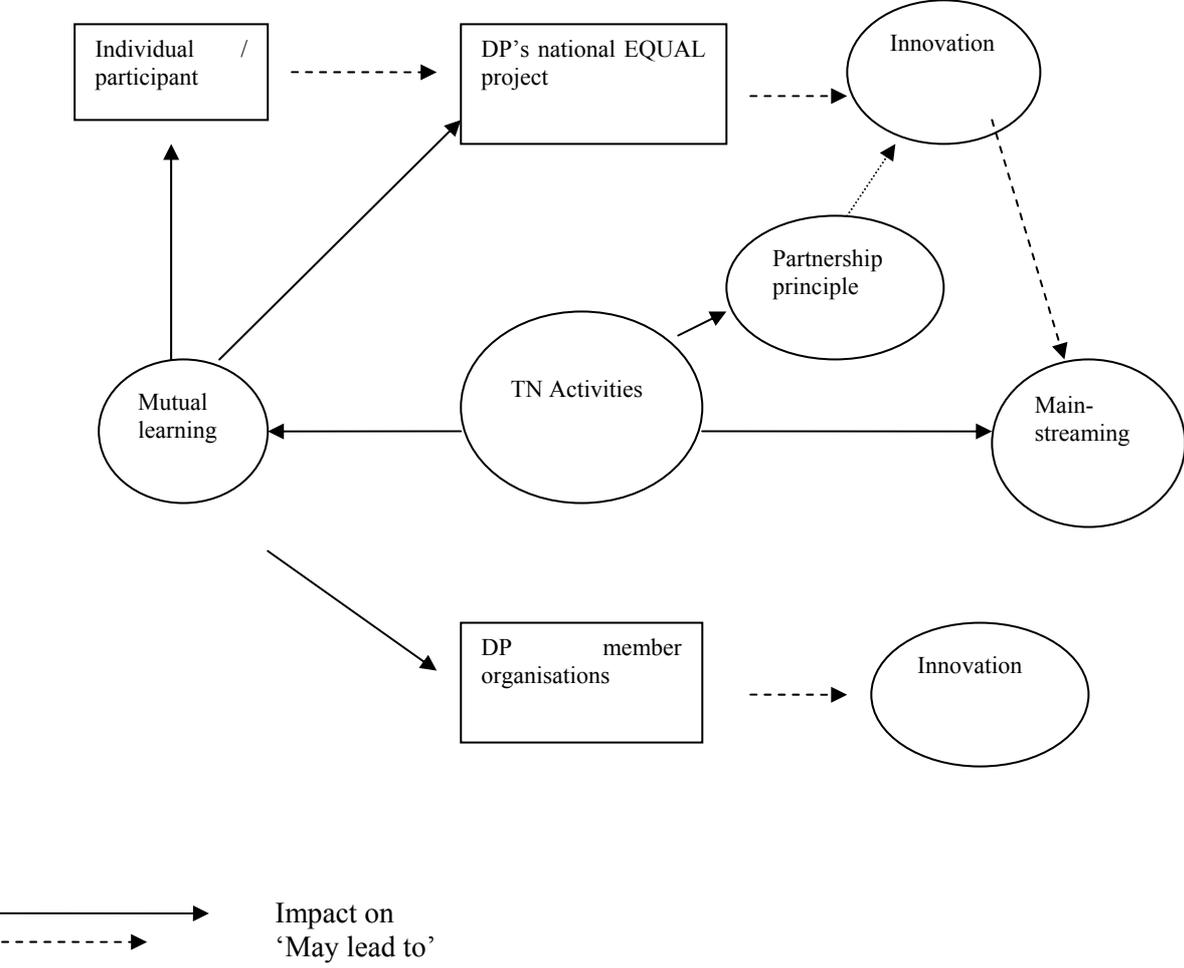
Similar observations were made by national evaluators, in particular in DK and IE.

6.3.1.3. Contribution to mainstreaming

A number of interviewed R1 and R2 DPs stressed that TN gave more credibility to the DP at the local level and served mainstreaming. This was confirmed by evaluators. Thus the FR evaluators pointed out that international conferences organised by the TN partnerships in the DP area attracted local or regional policy makers and multipliers who thus became more aware of the dimension of EQUAL projects. The UKgb evaluators found that the exchange of information and experience with TN partners had had some impact on the UKgb partner's mainstreaming strategy at home, for example on how to engage with policy actors such as trade unions.

The following graph is a representation of the different ways in which TN work can impact DP work.

Graph 6.1
Effects of TN activities and impact on other EQUAL principles



6.3.3. Added value of transnationality

As stated in section 6.1., the stated objective of the transnationality principle consisted in adding value to DP actions as well as in contributing to European policy development.

The nature of the added value of transnationality logically depends on the type of activities undertaken. ‘Joint development’, when successful, has led to new ‘European products’ (e.g. new tools, new methods which are of interest for users across Europe, e.g. in a specific sector). The added value of the exchange of information and experience and of the exchange of staff and beneficiaries has lied in the direct contribution to innovation – e.g. through ‘imports’ – or in its indirect contribution to the quality of DP projects. Our case studies have provided concrete evidence that this has happened. Evaluators differ in their assessments of this contribution, but these differences in assessments are also linked to the type of methodological tool used and the type of questions asked. In our experience, asking directly about the benefits of transnationality usually leads to very vague responses.

The contribution of TN co-operation to the fostering of a European identity, and in any case to a better mutual understanding, noted by the AT evaluators, should not be undervalued. The knowledge of EU policies has also improved (as emphasised by the BEfig evaluators on the basis of their DP survey).

There are both a mirror and benchmarking effects to TN work: for example, the ES evaluators’ case studies showed that TN co-operation had represented, for many actors involved, their first contact with the ‘European reality’, and that this had helped them to locate their own actions in a wider context. Other examples of these two effects were provided above.

We have also noted the added value stemming from unexpected effects of transnational co-operation on DP organisations, for example, the widening of their scope of activities.

Benefits have also emerged at the individual level, through increased professional and intercultural competencies, as noted for example by the DE, IE and UKgb evaluators, which confirms our case study findings (see our 2nd interim report). The PT evaluators are critical of the fact that in many cases this seemed to be the main type of benefits. However increased professional competence is likely to translate into new practices even though this process is difficult to describe in a linear way.

There has been some capacity building through the creation of stable networks. However this has mostly materialised in common applications in R2 by existing R1 partnerships. Case study respondents doubted that co-operation could be maintained in the absence of project-related funding.

6.4. CONCLUSIONS

Conditions for the preparation of an efficient and effective transnational cooperation

On the basis of our fieldwork, we found that the success factors in the formation of a transnational partnership (TNP) include: (a) choosing partners working on common issues and/or with similar target groups, and with comparable transnational (TN) budgets; (b) ensuring that there is a congruency or complementarity of interests and objectives; (c) drafting a precise workplan and involving all partners in this exercise; and (d) taking into account that transnationality requires time.

The process of *validation of the transnational co-operation agreements* by Managing Authorities has tended to be lenient and the quality of transnational co-operation agreements has therefore generally not been very good in both rounds. Such ‘leniency’ has been a conscious decision by Managing Authorities in R2, as there has been a will to avoid rejections so as not to delay transnational work. This decision makes it all the more necessary to provide substantial guidance and support to DPs for the implementation of their transnational activities.

The *guidance provided at the European level* was regarded as useful in both rounds. The guides and handbooks on transnationality were generally received positively by DPs, MAs and NSSs alike. The ECDB was regarded as a helpful tool for a first screening of potential partners, although the quality and reliability of the information available, which depended on the quality of data entry at DP and Member State level, has been criticised in both rounds of EQUAL.

The *cooperation between MS* was intensified in R2 as it had been found to be insufficient in R1. A network of transnationality co-ordinators was set up and a series of seminars and conferences took place, which has been of considerable help, especially for NMS Managing Authorities and National Support Structures.

Difficulties and barriers to the implementation of transnationality

The specific architecture of transnationality in EQUAL, i.e. combining systematically a national project with a transnational one, has both been interesting and demanding, as it brought about additional difficulties on top of the difficulties inherent in transnational work. In particular, this restricted the pool from which to select transnational partners. The construction of transnational partnerships was necessarily dependent on the time schedules for the selection of DPs in the Member States: as these were not sufficiently co-ordinated in R1, this led to a further restriction of the pool of potential partners. Differences in TN budgets were often important and directly stemmed from the different size of DPs in the different Member States and from different guidelines for TN budgets.

Geographical patterns of co-operation

DPs were encouraged to form TN partnerships all throughout the EU. However, in most MS, links are much stronger with 2 or 3 MS. For R2 some OMS are over-represented in partnerships with NMS DPs. On the other hand, NMS partners have been very 'popular' with OMS DPs as these foresaw the possibility of transfer of knowledge, expected to learn from NMS experience, and showed a desire to contribute to the construction of an enlarged Europe. NMS DPs have also been interested in partners from other NMS, due to similarities in language and some common historical background.

Type of TN cooperation established and lessons learned

Many TN partnerships, in R1 and R2, focused their activities on the *structured exchange of information and experience*. This type of activity, when it has had continuity over time, has been quite successful, as it led to a widening of the scope of activity of each partner, to increased professional skills, and to the transfer and adoption of methods. *Exchange of staff* has also generally been a source of high satisfaction, both for the visitors and for the hosts. Structured visits have been an opportunity to see concretely other professional practices, and to reflect back upon one's own.

As TN projects have been developed on the basis of national projects, joint development has been less frequent and more difficult. The testing and adaptation of methods and exchange of beneficiaries have not been frequent activities either.

There have been 3 *main models of internal work organisation*: (a) working groups led by each partner in their area of competencies, and involving all partners. In principle, the model favours maximum co-operation but it was hardly feasible economically as the budget of some partners was too limited to allow them to take part in all working groups; (b) working groups led by each partner in their area of competencies, in which other partners participate if they are interested. This organisation proved to be quite efficient and especially favourable for the involvement of DPs' domestic partners; (c) division of labour between partners: each TN partner is responsible for a specific product or activity. One risk of this organisation is that it only provides for limited exchange of experience. However, when common objectives are clear, this way of working can be very effective, especially if the 'products' developed by each partner are then subjected to constructive feed-back by other partners.

Monitoring and self-evaluation

Monitoring and self-evaluation have been weak points in the implementation of transnational partnerships as well. We identified three main formal models of self-evaluation: (a) an external evaluator is contracted for the evaluation of the whole TN partnership; (b) the evaluation of the TNP is organised internally; (c) the TN partners assess transnationality through their self-evaluation at DP level. The combination of a TNP level and of a DP level of evaluation is particularly interesting and consistent with the orientation of transnationality in EQUAL. However, in practice, self-evaluation reports were often delivered at the end of the TN projects, which is of little use for the TNP and its members.

Added value

Transnational learning has been capitalised upon by DPs to varying extents and added value has been uneven. In fact, DPs' expectations regarding the added value of transnationality, their motivation to implement TN activities, and their capacity to capitalise on learning varied quite significantly over the life-cycle of the projects.

The nature of the added value of transnationality logically depends on the type of activities undertaken. 'Joint development', when successful, has led to new 'European products' (e.g. new tools, new methods which are of interest for users across Europe, e.g. in a specific sector). The added value of the exchange of information and experience and of the exchange of staff and beneficiaries has lied in the direct contribution to innovation – e.g. through 'imports' – or, more frequently, in its indirect contribution to the quality of DP projects – e.g. through benchmarking and an increase in the professional competencies of staff. Increased professional competencies are also likely to lead to innovation, although this does not follow a linear process. Transnational co-operation has also sometimes led to more unexpected effects, such as the widening of the scope of activities of partner organisations.

The local organisation of transnational events has contributed to enhance the *credibility* of DPs at the local level and has improved mainstreaming opportunities. There has also been some *capacity building* through the creation of stable transnational networks. However this has mostly materialised in common applications in R2 by existing R1 partnerships. Case study respondents doubted that co-operation could be maintained in the absence of project-related funding.

Finally, the contribution of TN co-operation to the *fostering of a European identity*, and in any case to a better mutual understanding, should not be undervalued. The knowledge of EU policies has also improved. Study visits have helped actors locate their own experience against a wider context – it has to be stressed that there have been cases in which local staff had never travelled outside their frontiers, and had never been exposed to the 'European reality'.

7. EFFECTIVENESS AND ADDED VALUE OF THE HORIZONTAL APPROACH TO EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

7.1. INITIAL OBJECTIVES AND GUIDELINES AT THE EU LEVEL

Although the horizontal approach to Equal Opportunities is not a key principle of EQUAL, the terms of reference of the EU-wide evaluation require an evaluation of its implementation in the context of the evaluation of the effectiveness of the key principles. As EQUAL is taking a thematic approach and aims at combating all forms of discrimination and reduce inequalities, it is indeed crucial to assess how Equal Opportunities have been implemented horizontally.

The EQUAL Guidelines emphasise that EQUAL has to fit in the context of an integrated strategy to combat discrimination and social exclusion: *'At Community level there is an integrated strategy to combat discrimination (in particular that based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation) and social exclusion. Focusing on the labour market, EQUAL will form part of that strategy.'* (par. 8). EQUAL has a very broad scope as it is aimed *'as a testing ground to develop and disseminate new ways of delivering employment policies in order to combat all sorts of discrimination and inequality by those seeking access to the labour market and those already within it'* (par. 9).

In the context of the EQUAL thematic approach, 'Equal Opportunities for all' is meant as equal access of all discriminated groups to each thematic field. In addition to this it is specified that *'within this horizontal approach, the promotion of equality between women and men will be integral to thematic fields in all four pillars as well as being targeted through specific actions in the fourth pillar.'* (par. 14). The same thematic approach is still valid for R 2: *'...the second round of EQUAL continues the thematic approach established in the first round with the objective to benefiting those subject to the main forms of discrimination (based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation) and inequality. Each thematic field is accessible to all such groups... The promotion of equality between men and women is integral to all thematic fields as well as being targeted through specific actions'* (EQUAL guidelines R2, p.5).

In both rounds the horizontal approach to Equal Opportunities is combined with a thematic approach and with a target group approach: two forms of discrimination – discrimination on the basis of sex and discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin, as well as discrimination of asylum seekers are specifically targeted within the thematic approach of EQUAL (Theme 1B – combating racism, Themes 4G – reconciling family and professional life and 4H – reducing gender gaps, and Theme 5I – asylum seekers). Improving Equal Opportunities for men and women as well as combating racial discrimination requires specific action, but Equal Opportunities between men and women are also expected to be addressed horizontally by all DPs. By contrast, asylum seekers are a target group only in Theme 5I. Implicitly, this construction presupposes that a 'positive action approach' and a target group focus are needed, and that a transversal approach to discrimination is insufficient.

Except for the equal access of different groups to the actions carried out under the various thematic fields, there are no requirements and no guidance as to how the approach to Equal Opportunities 'for all' should be implemented horizontally.

But guidance has been provided for the implementation of Gender Mainstreaming, although it came rather late. It was prepared by the Gender Mainstreaming Working Group established at the European level and gave rise to a publication in 2005 (see Chapter 9). The guide was designed on the basis of the problems identified in R1 and builds upon the experience of R1 DPs. It is also based on the

learning seminar held in July 2004 in Budapest, which was organised by the EC and the Gender Mainstreaming Working Group.

As this guide was only published in 2005 (the manuscript was completed in 2004) it came late for the construction of the R2 DP workplans but can be helpful for the implementation and mainstreaming phases of R2 DPs as well as for future ESF programmes. The guide is targeted at the DPs, NSSs / MAs, national and DP-level evaluators as well as at the Monitoring and Selection Committees and has been translated in 17 languages.

Although we cannot assess the extent to which the Guide has been useful for R2 DPs (this could be done in the ex-post evaluation), we have used it to structure the evaluation results concerning the implementation of the Equal Opportunities approach.

This guide provides a relevant analysis of the sources of discrimination and inequalities (based on the societal structure, institutions, values and beliefs) and warns about limiting the gender perspective to a 'women's perspective' and about directing actions towards women only. Nevertheless '*specific/positive actions*' favouring '*particular groups of women or men, are required in addition to gender mainstreaming policies to remove inequalities which have been identified or address particular resistant problems*'. The Gender Mainstreaming approach itself is a wider concept and also covers 'policy design, decision-making, access to resources, procedures and practices, methodology, implementation, monitoring and evaluation'. The focus is shifted towards changing structures and systems themselves.

Some practical advice was given to DPs:

- *Capacity building at DP level*: training on gender issues should be provided and partnerships with equality bodies should be developed in order to increase knowledge and expertise about equality strategies.
- *Human resources management at DP level*: DPs should consider their own staff composition, implement Gender Mainstreaming at DP level, e.g. in recruitment, offer flexible work options for women and men staff and identify whether there is a gender pattern, ensure equal pay among own staff, evaluate skills and knowledge to determine training needs of own staff.
- *Adapting activities and services offered by DPs to different needs if necessary*: DPs should check whether it is relevant to analyse access to their measures by gender. Differences in patterns of access by gender should be analysed, methods should be developed in order to identify the needs of different target groups and gender equality issues should be taken into account when organising information and publicity campaigns and material as well as selection procedures. The guide contains special advice on how to organise the analysis in order to detect specific discrimination and inequality matters, identify specific needs, etc.
- *Budgeting*: DPs should ensure that an adequate share of the budget is dedicated to Gender Mainstreaming (e.g. for gender training, for the development of gender analysis tools).
- *Dissemination*: DPs should ensure that all dissemination activities respect, promote and contribute to gender equality and check whether the right audience is targeted in this respect.

The approach to Gender Mainstreaming taken in the guidelines implicitly assumes that the implementation of the Gender Mainstreaming approach within partner organisations is a precondition for implementing Gender Mainstreaming at project level.

The Terms of Reference of the EU-wide evaluation pay specific attention to the implementation of the horizontal approach to Equal Opportunities in the context of the evaluation of the key principles. Equal Opportunities are regarded there clearly as a guiding and transversal principle:

‘The evaluation of the equal opportunities principle should focus on whether or not groups which are subject to discrimination have access to all thematic fields and the promotion of equality between men and women. At the very least, the following issues should be examined:

- *What evidence is there of a gender perspective being applied horizontally in the implementation of work programmes and activities?*
- *To what extent have the activities been equality-neutral, equality-oriented or equality-positive?*
- *To what extent has EQUAL developed models for the reduction of the main forms of discrimination as regards gender, racial, ethnic, religious, disability, age and sexual, and inequality?*
- *Has each thematic field been fully accessible to all the above-mentioned groups?’*

Thus, the Terms of Reference address the horizontal implementation of Equal Opportunities for all discriminated groups and require the examination of models of implementation. A specific focus is set on gender issues, but not on racial discrimination. We will therefore address the approach to Equal Opportunities (in a broad sense) and the approach to gender equality separately.

A methodological difficulty arises here: it seems somewhat artificial to distinguish a ‘horizontal approach to Equal Opportunities’ from the overall aim of EQUAL which is, precisely, to combat all forms of discrimination. In a way, therefore, evaluating equal opportunities as a horizontal approach means evaluating the whole programme. This is why we have sought to focus more, in this chapter, on two issues:

- The access of target groups to DP actions and to thematic fields;
- The processes and procedures set up within the DPs themselves.

7.2. IMPLEMENTATION

7.2.1 Choices made at CIP level

7.2.1.1. Choices made ahead of R1

The notion ‘Equal Opportunities’ and ‘inequalities’ are perceived and approached in different ways across the EU. Social values about ‘equality’ have shaped the different national contexts of implementation. This is reflected in the Programming documents. Furthermore, there are differences in the scope of Equal Opportunities.

Three main approaches to Equal Opportunities have been put forward in the CIPs:

- *As ‘Equal opportunities for all’*

Only a few MS have conceived of equal opportunities as ‘Equal Opportunities for all’. This has been the case in the UKgb, in IE and in GR. The UKgb CIP reads: ‘Working towards equality of opportunity for all citizens is a core goal for policy-making.’ (p. 41). The CIP describes ‘the steps we are taking in regard to older workers, disability, minority ethnic groups and those at risk of becoming socially excluded’ (p.62). At the same time, the UKgb CIP takes up the conclusion from the previous ESF evaluation that a narrow target-group definition is needed in matters of gender equality, as women are not a homogeneous group.

Similarly, in IE the approach to Equal Opportunities was understood in a broad sense. As such the EQUAL initiative was perceived as encouraging a focus on accommodating diversity across all project activities. As for defining the sources of discrimination, the IE CIP relies on the Irish equality

legislation and enumerates gender, marital status, religion, disability, race, age, sexual orientation and membership of the travelling community.

- *As both 'Equal Opportunities for all' and 'Equal Opportunities between men and women'*

Interestingly in SE, both the concepts of 'gender equality' and 'diversity mainstreaming' are used in the CIP. The CIP stresses that a 'gender perspective' must be taken during the whole programme. It is also explained that sex, age, ethnical and social background, sexual orientation and functional disorder are all factors that can represent barriers for labour market integration and for career prospects. The evaluators explain that both concepts – gender equality as well as diversity mainstreaming are concepts which are quite difficult to distinguish clearly, especially as sex is one of the factors included in the sources of discrimination which should be addressed through 'diversity mainstreaming', it makes it even more difficult for DPs to understand the difference between the two concepts. Furthermore, the understanding of 'equality' in the SE society implies that positive action could be regarded as discriminatory.

The FI CIP encourages both actions aiming at gender equality and actions for 'ethnic equality'. The NL CIP addresses Gender Mainstreaming as well as 'equal treatment' in order to combat discrimination based on sex, age, race, ethnic origin, sexual orientation and disability.

- *As 'Equal Opportunities between men and women' only*

In a number of CIPs (e.g. DE, PT, AT, BEfrg, ES), the notion of 'Equal Opportunities' has been understood as gender equality only. This understanding does not mean, of course, that other forms of discrimination and inequalities were not the focus of the Programme, but rather that they were not addressed through a transversal principle.

Evaluators have also understood the principle in different ways, but their approach does not necessarily coincide with that of the CIP in their Member State. Most evaluators (e.g. DE, DK, ES, PT, FR, BEfrg, NL) analyse the horizontal approach to Equal Opportunities by looking at Equal Opportunities between men and women only. The actions targeting other forms of inequalities and discrimination are assessed in the evaluation of the different thematic fields. The UKgb evaluators assess the implementation of 'Equal Opportunities for all', in accord with the definition put forward in the CIP. Other evaluators have also dealt with this issue alongside Equal Opportunities between men and women in SE, UKni, GR, FI and AT, although to a varying extent.

7.2.1.2. Changes between R1 and R2

The first change to be noted in R2 concerns the stronger target group focus taken in some CIPs (e.g. UKgb, FR, BEfrg and IE), as quite specific target groups were named and defined (for more details see Chapter 2).

Secondly, in many MS (e.g. ES, DK, FR, UKni), more weight and attention has been given to Equal Opportunities between men and women in R2. This can be seen as a reaction to the Mid-Term evaluation reports, which often criticised implementation weaknesses. This criticism has been addressed by *reinforcing the horizontal approach* towards Equal Opportunities between men and women, and/or by *clarifying and reinforcing the attractiveness of themes 4G (reconciling family and professional life) and 4H (reducing gender gaps)*:

- In FR, programme actors reacted to the evaluators' criticism that Gender Mainstreaming was not sufficiently taken into account, by promoting it as an eligibility criteria for DPs to enter the implementation phase and by reinforcing the involvement of the Regional 'Delegations to Women's rights' (which depend on the Ministry of Labour) in the programme, especially in the

selection process. In ES, the evaluators stress that the Equal Opportunities principle has been 'raised to the category of EQUAL principle' in R2 and has been given more priority.

- In DK, theme 4H (Reducing gender gaps) was made more specific and encouraged actions aiming at improving: the number of female managers and/or the number of female entrepreneurs; the labour market participation of women from ethnic minorities; men's working life and choices with respect to job, career and paternity leave; and mainstreaming in the workplace. The evaluators view this more precise definition of the priority as a key factor in the much higher attractiveness of the theme in R2. In the UKni, the Equality Commission was associated more closely in the lead up to the second call and during the promotional campaign and more emphasis was placed on promoting and encouraging applications under the Equal Opportunities Theme: as a result more DPs are operating under Theme 4 H in R2 than in R1.

Guidance on Gender Mainstreaming has also been strengthened. This is taken up below.

7.2.2 MA/NSS guidance

A number of evaluators had observed, in their Mid-Term reports, that DPs faced difficulties in making the notion of Gender Mainstreaming operational. Since then, many MAs/NSSs have improved the guidance given to DPs:

- In PT, a new chapter has been dedicated to Equal Opportunities in the Users Guide.
- The AT NSS published guidance documents on its website.
- In addition to publishing a web-based guide, as in AT, the BEfrg NSS set up a help-desk for R2 DPs and ESF Agency staff received training on gender mainstreaming.
- In FR, as said above, guidance has been focused on the adequate preparation of R2 applicants. The guide for applicants was revised. Preparatory meetings were organised with the regional MAs, in which the Delegations to Women's rights were often present. Although regional programme actors consider that the level of DP awareness is still low, the evaluators provide indications that this more sustained guidance has led to better results so far.

In two cases, the National Thematic Networks were involved in providing guidance to DPs on Gender Mainstreaming issues:

- The NL MA provided all NTN with training on gender mainstreaming. The aim was to offer NTN the opportunity to help DPs implement GM. However, the evaluators found that, in practice, only the NTN on Equal Opportunities had paid attention to DP-level Gender Mainstreaming.
- In ES, the evaluators particularly highlighted the action of the NTN 'Insertion, fight against racism and asylum', a subgroup of which produced a 'practical implementation guide for the gender perspective in EQUAL insertion projects'. This guide has been very well assessed by all DPs, including by those preparing their 2nd call application.

7.2.3 Implementation at DP level

7.2.3.1. 'Equal Opportunities for all'

Several national evaluation reports (e.g. for UKgb, UKni, SE, GR, FI, AT) provide evidence of DPs' implementation of the 'equal opportunities for all' principle. However, the evaluation questions addressed by the evaluators are extremely varied and the concrete implementation mechanisms and effects are not systematically dealt with.

Difficulties of measurement: measuring what?

Evaluators have highlighted the difficulties they faced for the assessment of implementation in that area. Thus, the UKgb evaluators note that this principle has been difficult to isolate and mainstream. Indeed impacts in terms of Equal Opportunities have not necessarily come through conscious efforts to develop specific tools and instruments. The impact has often been intangible, for example raised awareness.

Similarly, the IE evaluators do not make any difference between the analysis of the results of this approach and the analysis of the results of EQUAL as a whole, since all projects sought to address equality issues. They do not provide any analysis of implementation of the approach, simply because this would amount to analysing the implementation of EQUAL as a whole, and this is of course done in many ways in other parts of the report. In brief, the difficulties experienced by the evaluators reveal the lack of operational character of this programme requirement.

Difficulties for DPs to operationalise an approach to 'Equal Opportunities for all'

Evaluators have confirmed that many DPs still had difficulties in their implementation of 'diversity approaches'. Thus the SE evaluators provide examples of DPs which vaguely intended to be as inclusive as possible with regard to beneficiaries without, however, showing how equal access could be ensured.

Similarly the UKgb evaluators had underlined in their Mid-term report that DPs had difficulties to translate the Equal Opportunity approach into concrete objectives and measures. However, the evaluators showed that some progress had been made throughout Action 2 as DPs recognised it as an area of weakness and DPs were becoming more explicit in their Equal opportunities approaches. According to the evaluators, the proactive guidance of the MAs/NSS seems to have had effects. R1 DPs which have applied for R2 have derived lessons of R1 and made much more concrete plans (e.g. Equal Opportunities Observatories). Although, as said above, there had been impacts in terms of Equal Opportunities for all in R1, which were to some extent unplanned, the planning of specific measures may bring about more results.

Methods, tools for the implementation of the Equal Opportunities approach at DP level

We only have little evidence of how this approach has been implemented at DP level. Nevertheless, it seems important to us to highlight some results of the national 2004 and 2005 Reports.

The UKgb evaluators have identified 3 main types of activities for the promotion of Equal Opportunities for all:

- (1) training/audits;
- (2) awareness raising;
- (3) empowerment of communities and groups.

More concrete examples were provided in their previous evaluation reports. These included the appointment of 'Equal Opportunity officers' or 'equality & diversity managers' within DPs. Their role is to assess the human resource management practices within partner organisations as well as to assess the projects and actions developed by the DPs in this light. They also point to three 'potentially powerful influences': establishing a common protocol; opening up new and more opportunities for target groups at the local level by influencing support structures; and inter-DP transfer of knowledge on equality training.

Other evaluators provide evidence of tools and methods which can be classified according to the above mentioned categories (Other examples of innovative approaches are provided in Chapter 5):

With regard to training, the UKni evaluators provide the example of a DP which tailored the time and nature of their training programmes for each of the different target groups (i.e. women, different religious communities, different ethnic minorities and age groups).

Awareness raising activities have been identified by the AT evaluators. They have shown that through the implementation of holistic approaches to reduce discrimination, companies' awareness of the needs of disadvantaged groups has increased. New management strategies have been developed and implemented such as 'diversity checks' and 'diversity management'.

The empowerment of communities or groups has been confirmed, although we mostly have the example of organisations representing women's rights in GR. In R2 such organisations are partners in all DPs except in Theme 5I.

Analysing the 'equal access' to EQUAL actions

As shown in our Mid-Term report already, DPs have tended to focus on specific groups: therefore each thematic field has *not* been fully accessible to all discriminated groups. Generally, the evaluators pointed out the 'compartmentalisation' of access. However, the thematic organisation of EQUAL implies that DPs under some themes have a strong target-group orientation while DPs under other themes are in some cases more sector-oriented.

Indeed, there are examples of very specific tailoring for very specific groups or sub-groups in some Member States: for example Sub-saharian people rather than migrants in general (BEfrg); potential women entrepreneurs in rural areas rather than women entrepreneurs in general (ES); disabled artists rather than people with disabilities in general (FI); the older unemployed rather than the unemployed in general (IE); Black and Ethnic Minority individuals aged more than 50 rather than BME in general (UKni) etc.

More generally, the Mid-Term Reports already showed that MS differ with regard to the target groups chosen. While in some countries a special focus has been set on highly marginalised social groups (e.g. DK, LU, UKni), the target groups are generally larger in other Member States, which in some cases has led to some criticism (e.g. AT, NL). There were indications that Theme 1A ((re)integration into the labour market) is particularly likely to include a wide variety of target groups. As we have already shown above, some MS have reinforced the target group approach in R2.

In any case, a clear target group orientation was generally assessed as positive and desirable by national evaluators.

7.2.3.2 Equal Opportunities between men and women

Evaluation design and indicators

Most evaluators have assessed the implementation of the approach to 'Equal Opportunities between men and women'. However, due to the variety of evaluation questions asked, and, consequently, to the variety of the methodologies and indicators chosen, it is difficult to form an overall judgement on the implementation of this approach across the MS. We have therefore preferred to give an account of some of the evaluation approaches taken as well as of the results.

The SE evaluators have rated DP activities against six different 'awareness levels', from the lowest awareness degree (activities falling into the first category) to the highest degree (activities falling within category 6): (1) Implementation of quantitative gender equality objectives; (2) Specific actions in the workplace; (3) Equal opportunity training (4) Awareness raising actions targeting men; (5)

Mainstreaming gender equality in the workplace (6) Challenging traditional gender patterns in order to change old structures.

The SE evaluators state that only a minority of DPs has implemented the highest level of activity. This assessment is made on the basis of interviews and yearly reports. Moreover, 1/3 of the DPs explain that they have not considered gender equality as a priority and that they have not included gender equality issues in their training programmes. The only generalised mechanism for addressing Equal Opportunities of men and women in DP activities has been the monitoring of the number of women recruited.

However a few DPs were very active in Gender Mainstreaming and considered Equal Opportunities in all their activities, organised training for capacity building on these issues, and formulated clear and measurable Equal Opportunity objectives.

The PT evaluators assessed the implementation of Gender Mainstreaming by seeking to identify whether DPs had engaged in one or several of the following activities: specific training modules (19 out of 102 DPs), awareness raising campaigns (8 cases), creation or reinforcement of support services (10 cases), or positive discrimination in the recruitment of beneficiaries (6 cases). The overall result is thus that only marginal attention has been paid to these issues in the programme except in pillar 4.

The DK evaluators sought to identify, through their DP survey, not only how Gender Mainstreaming was implemented, but also what had been the results and impacts of implementing the Gender Mainstreaming approach. In particular they asked whether Gender Mainstreaming activities had 'improved the labour market opportunities of women beneficiaries', 'increased the local focus on the gender mainstreaming issue' and 'promoted new practices in combating gender inequalities in the labour market'. However the measurement of the results of Gender Mainstreaming turned out to be a difficult task and the evaluators recommend, for the next ESF programming period, that the indicators for measuring the effects of Gender Mainstreaming activities were specified in advance. Their evaluation results are similar to the ones obtained by other evaluators: except in pillar 4 (Theme 4H-Reducing gender gaps), DPs have mostly addressed the principle by seeking to have an equal representation of men and women amongst their participants.

The NL evaluators asked DPs (in their DP survey) whether their projects aimed at providing equal access for women and for men. 57 out of 77 DPs answered this question affirmatively. However, the use of this indicator does not allow to identify whether equal access was actually achieved, nor does it provide any understanding as to how Gender Mainstreaming was addressed more globally.

In any case, whether the evaluation approach was sophisticated or limited, the results have often been similarly disappointing: a quantitative concern with equal representation is what seems to have prevailed in the approach of DPs to Equal Opportunities between men and women. However, there are exceptions: the ES evaluators, who sought to identify the practical EO oriented activities in which the DPs had engaged, found that the implementation of the horizontal approach had been satisfactory, even though it had been more pronounced in pillar 4 (see below). And the DE and FR evaluators observed significant improvements between the two rounds.

Although the 2005 Reports provide more evidence than the Mid-term and 2nd Interim reports on how Gender Mainstreaming was (at least) partially implemented, as will be shown in the next section, little is said about the effectiveness and the results of different measures and approaches.

Improvements made over the course of EQUAL

As already stated, as a reaction to the evaluators' and other criticism, programme actors have put more efforts in their guidance to DPs, and improvements have been reported by some evaluators.

Thus the FR evaluators show, on the basis of their DP surveys with R1 and R2 DPs, of their survey with regional support structures and the NSS, and of interviews with regional actors in 12 regions, that the implementation of gender equality had been limited to a quantitative approach in R1. R1 DPs made declarations of intentions but found it difficult to provide tangible evidence of implementation, whilst R2 DPs could illustrate their responses with various concrete actions. Half of the actors interviewed in R2 stressed that the principle is operative at DP level, but one third still consider that the principle is not taken into account in a sufficient way. Thus, whilst equality of opportunities had often been assimilated with parity of representation in R1, the evaluators stress that R2 DPs show a better understanding of the approach and integrate it to a higher extent in their activities.

The DE evaluators had formulated some criticism in their first evaluation reports showing that Gender Mainstreaming was not sufficiently included or made operational enough in the DP projects¹¹³. However progress was made throughout R1. Almost all DPs gave relevance to gender issues and half of them set them as a high priority. The activities have focused on consulting and training measures for women, awareness raising among consultants, trainers and social workers, changing the legal and institutional rules for a better combination of family and work, and increasing women's participation in the projects.

The implementation at DP level: processes and activities developed for Gender Mainstreaming

The evaluators provide evidence of the activities undertaken by DPs in terms of gender mainstreaming and equal opportunities between men and women: we have classified them taking into account the evaluators' typologies as well as the typology used in the Gender Mainstreaming Guide.

Equal Opportunities training:

- There are examples of SE DPs organising training sessions on gender equality targeted at men;
- The organisation of seminars, workshops and training on Gender Mainstreaming was widespread in AT. Furthermore, some DPs acting under Theme 4H (Reducing gender gaps) have drawn-up best practice models for the implementation of gender mainstreaming as well as a handbook. This guidance is considered by the evaluators to be most helpful for R2 DPs;
- In FR, 11% of R2 DPs have implemented internal training on Equal Opportunities and some DPs have created working groups on this subject;
- In ES, DPs have systematically included Equal Opportunities Modules in their training actions;
- In PT, as said above, the organisation of specific training modules has been the most frequent mechanism for implementing an EO approach.

Appointing Equal Opportunities specialists:

- In ES, the horizontal implementation of the Equal Opportunities approach has often materialised into the participation of specialised 'Equal Opportunities technicians' in DPs. The evaluators found evidence of high competence amongst these technicians. One of their contributions has been in the adoption of 'non-sexist language' by DPs.
- Similarly, the AT evaluators state that many DPs have contracted a Gender Mainstreaming specialist. However this could simply occur by nominating a DP person as the person in charge of co-ordinating the implementation and monitoring of gender mainstreaming.

Improving knowledge of the target groups:

¹¹³ They pointed out that gender budgeting instruments did not exist; the gender data for the managing staff did not define managing positions in an appropriate way; gender mainstreaming targets and the participation of women in DPs appeared to be insufficient; innovative approaches seemed to have been mainly developed by DPs operating in Themes 4 G (Reconciling family and professional life) and 4H (Reducing gender gaps) and finally the gender competencies of DPs were insufficiently developed.

- According to the SE evaluators, those DPs who have successfully implemented Equal Opportunity between men and women sought to improve their understanding of the specific needs of their women beneficiaries;
- The BEfrg evaluators provide evidence of Gender Mainstreaming leading to the development of innovative tools to identify needs in relation to continuous training and anticipation of change.

Organising support services:

The AT evaluators report that R1 DPs have sought to deliver their activities in locations easily accessible by public transport (as women are less often car drivers) as well as to organise child care facilities, so that potential participants with caring responsibilities were not excluded.

Awareness raising campaigns

- Awareness raising and information campaigns have been the main Equal Opportunities instrument used in BEfrg;
- The ES evaluators note that awareness raising campaigns have been organised, but this instrument has been less used than other Gender Mainstreaming instruments. In addition the campaigns have tended to be directed to women whereas awareness raising actions with men would have been important as well;
- The AT evaluators provide evidence of campaigns targeting the regional administration, aiming at changing employment structures and career paths.

Empowerment and inclusion of representatives of women's organisations:

In GR, the inclusion of agencies representing women in the DPs has been important. In R2 this has become a more widespread practice, across all themes.

Although DPs have implemented concrete activities and tools to some extent, evaluators point to several deficiencies and limits in the DPs' approaches towards Equal Opportunities, beyond the already mentioned tendency to be content with quantitative targets. As more generally in the programme, there has been a lack of in-depth diagnosis of the causes of the specific inequalities and discrimination faced by the women targeted by DPs. Secondly, the appointment of EO specialists or the nomination of one partner as the person in charge can lead other partners to consider that the implementation of the approach is not of their responsibility, which obviously is contrary to the meaning of Gender Mainstreaming. Finally, in this domain as more generally, there is a lack of monitoring and evaluation.

7.3. ADDED VALUE OF THE HORIZONTAL APPROACH TO EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

7.3.1 Equal Opportunities for all

Little is said in the evaluation reports about the added value of the horizontal approach of 'Equal Opportunities for all'. This is linked to the difficulties faced in measuring the effects of the implementation of this principle (see above) as well as in the clear preference for a target group approach in many MS. There is also a lack of identification of the object of evaluation. Evaluators have tended to analyse the results of EQUAL actions for target groups, rather than the results of the horizontal approach. Although a target group approach does not necessarily contradict the parallel implementation of a transversal approach to Equal Opportunities, overall the latter has retained little attention in many MS.

An additional difficulty lies in the fact that, in some Member States, such as IE, the EQUAL programme as a whole has been dedicated to the promotion of equality and diversity: it could thus be said that the added value of the principle is nil, since DPs intended to promote these concepts and associated practices anyway. As said in the IE report, 'developing an equality perspective and developing equality or diversity policy and practice in the workplace were the most prominent themes

of the DP outputs in Round 1' (IE report p.55). Indeed some of the most important outputs of EQUAL R1 have been 'practical developmental supports' for 'organisations providing labour market measures to encourage and further develop their capacity to prevent discrimination, accommodate diversity and promote equality to maximum effect' (ditto). The evaluators nevertheless advocate the continuation of projects targeting the specific needs of specific groups experiencing inequality alongside these broader diversity-oriented projects.

As shown above, the implementation of the empowerment principle has contributed to the implementation of a horizontal approach to Equal Opportunities.

In short, the added value of this requirement seems to have been very limited overall, although some evaluators have regarded it as useful in order to promote a diversity approach (e.g. AT, SE evaluators).

7.3.2 Equal Opportunities between men and women

7.3.2.1. Added value of the dual approach taken in the programme

The dual approach (horizontal and thematic) taken at Programme level has had the advantage that, as noted by the AT and BEfrg evaluators, Equal Opportunities between men and women have probably been more taken into account than if Gender Mainstreaming had only been implemented as a horizontal approach. On the other hand, a number of evaluators found that the horizontal approach to Equal Opportunities had given rather poor results except in the two themes of Pillar 4, which could point to the greater effectiveness of a thematic approach.

However, the thematic approach taken on its own has had mixed results with regard to Gender Mainstreaming. One criticism was that it is too much focused on women as a target group (see e.g. ES report, but this seems to apply in other MS as well). It seems that in many cases, projects under Theme 4G (reconciling family and professional life) and Theme 4H (reducing gender gaps) have been more 'women-oriented' than 'gender focused'. Men have only rarely been targeted.

As is explained in Chapter 9, this debate (between a horizontal and a thematic approach) has so far not been settled for the design of the next ESF programmes.

7.3.2.2 Type of added value

Unfortunately only few evaluators provided evidence of specific added value. However it can be said that the most important benefit has clearly been in terms of capacity building and increased awareness of DP stakeholders: this is highlighted by the AT evaluators who point out that for some DPs, gender mainstreaming was a new notion. Implementation was difficult, especially for the inexperienced partners, but some capacity building has taken place. The ES evaluators found that the implementation of the horizontal approach to Equal Opportunities had given rise to an increased awareness of gender issues among DP members, including policy decision makers, with positive potential long-term effects. One particularly striking illustration has been the contribution of an EQUAL DP to the creation of an Equal Opportunities Commission at the level of an Autonomous Community. The FR and UKni evaluators also report on similar benefits. In addition the FR evaluators stress that transnational work has sometimes helped to boost mobilisation on this issue. Finally, the SE evaluators point out that the reflexive process engaged in implementing GM has had positive consequences for the overall quality of the projects.

7.4. CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the *implementation* of the horizontal approach to Equal Opportunities between men and women has been disappointing, except in the themes of the equal opportunities ‘pillar’ where it has been more successful. However, even there, implementation has not been completely satisfactory, as DPs have tended to take a ‘women focused’ approach rather than a ‘gender approach’. However, in many cases, improvements have been made throughout R1 and between R1 and R2. Improved guidance by MAs/NSSs has certainly contributed to an important degree to this progress.

When DPs have implemented Gender Mainstreaming approaches, the *added value* has consisted in awareness raising, capacity building, improving the quality of the projects, tackling new target groups and identifying other sources of inequality and discrimination.

Despite this mixed assessment, it is clear that the *dual approach*, horizontal and thematic, taken in EQUAL has favoured learning in the implementation of gender equality and gender mainstreaming approaches more than would have been the case if the principle had only been implemented ‘horizontally’ or only in specific themes.

Only a few MS have conceived their programmes as addressing explicitly ‘Equal Opportunities for all’. In the other CIPs the notion of ‘Equal Opportunities’ has been used only in the context of ‘gender’. There are some examples of horizontal implementation of ‘Equal Opportunities for all’ (or, as the SE evaluators name it, ‘*Diversity Mainstreaming*’). The measures and processes set up by DPs were quite similar to those implemented for Gender Mainstreaming: identifying special needs and tailoring the services (e.g. training) according to these needs. Awareness raising of key actors has been important. This approach has understandably often been identified with the implementation of the empowerment principle, which is a clear illustration of the sometimes unnecessary complexity of EQUAL.

The requirement of ‘equal access of all groups to all thematic fields’ has not been followed. The main reason for this is the already mentioned prevalence of a target group approach within the different thematic fields. Indeed such a requirement appears as very abstract and is not necessarily relevant for all themes. As a consequence, little is said in the evaluation reports about the added value of the horizontal approach of ‘Equal Opportunities for all’.

8. EFFECTIVENESS OF NETWORKING, DISSEMINATION AND MAINSTREAMING AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

8.1. INITIAL FRAMEWORK AND EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Mainstreaming is, after innovation, the second ‘*raison d’être*’ of EQUAL: the aim of the initiative is to fund, ‘*the development of innovative solutions to the delivery of the policy priorities of MS as set out in their NAPs. In order to obtain the maximum impact from EQUAL, the results must be analysed, benchmarked and disseminated both within MS and across the Union. It is important that policy makers, in particular those in charge of the NAPs and those involved in the objective 1,2, and 3 structural fund programmes, receive input from EQUAL.* (par. 30)

Furthermore, the paragraphs dedicated to Action 3 (43 – 45), i.e. ‘thematic networking, dissemination of good practice and making an impact on national policy’, provide some important complements with regard to the initial framework for networking and mainstreaming:

- ‘*There will be a separate action, for networking, dissemination and mainstreaming activities within EQUAL. Participation in this Action shall be mandatory for all DPS in order to ensure the mainstreaming impact that EQUAL seeks. It shall be organised*

under the responsibility of the MA in such a way to facilitate maximum input into labour market and employment policy and should involve the social partners’.

- *‘MS shall establish mechanisms which will facilitate mainstreaming at both the horizontal level and the vertical level. These mechanisms should aim at:*
 - *identifying factors leading to inequality and discrimination and monitoring and analysing the impact or potential impact of the DPs on the policy priorities set out in the NAP and on the different groups subject to discrimination and inequality in connection with the labour market;*
 - *identifying and assessing the factors leading to good practice and benchmark their performance;*
 - *disseminating good practice, from the end of Action I’.*

The Guidelines insist on the fact that programme management actors are responsible for the implementation of networking, dissemination and mainstreaming. In this context, they were to define action plans, involve key stakeholders, raise the awareness of decision makers at all levels and of the public about potential solutions to common social and economic problems.

The mechanisms set up to facilitate the mainstreaming process can be structured around the following 4 main steps¹¹⁴: (1) innovation (*‘DPs develop and test new ways to tackle inequality, discrimination and exclusion at work, and in access to work’*); (2) validation (*‘DPs and their networks, peers, stakeholders validate the innovative results’*); (3) dissemination (*‘DPs and their networks, as well as key stakeholders, distil the lessons learned and communicate them to the relevant target audience through briefings, publications events’*), and (4) transfer (*‘DPs identify the lessons that can be transferred to a different or wider context and make them available to third parties influencing policies and practices’*).

In the EQUAL framework, responsibility for mainstreaming in the Member States is thus shared between the programme management (MA, NSS, and MC) and the DPs. In this context, evaluation questions concerned both the programme level and the DP level.

The terms of reference of the EU wide evaluation required an assessment of the following:

- *The relevance of the composition of national thematic networks and their inclusiveness: Have the thematic networks enabled the participation of all relevant partners involved in the DPs? Have they involved non-EQUAL partners? To what extent have policy needs at local, regional and national levels been taken into account?*
- *The mechanisms set up at the national level for the identification of good practice, benchmarking of performance and dissemination of this good practice.*
- *The mechanisms set up at the national level for mainstreaming the lessons from EQUAL into the ESF programmes at national and sub-national levels and in the NAPs; as well as their effectiveness.*

The first question is addressed in a section entirely dedicated to the implementation of thematic networks (section 8.3.1.2). The second question is addressed in section 8.3.1.3. The last question, which is the most important, is addressed throughout this chapter.

As for the analysis of the implementation of other principles, our main source was to be the national evaluation reports, of which a comparative analysis and synthesis should be carried out. This has been done on the basis of the available final evaluation reports (16 out of 17 MS). It is important to note

¹¹⁴ Source: European Commission (2005). *Making change possible. A practical guide to mainstreaming*. DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Unit B4.

that, although all evaluators have addressed networking and mainstreaming arrangements in their 2005 reports, they have done this with different levels of depth. In the case of the DE evaluation, each report focuses on a key topic, which, in 2005, has been innovation. Mainstreaming is the key topic for 2006.

We have complemented this synthesis with other sources:

- Our 2004 interviews with the Managing Authorities and National Support Structures of the 17 initial CIPs;
- An in-depth review of the available documentation, in particular the Mainstreaming Guide¹¹⁵, prepared by a group of Member States and the EQUAL Unit and the background document prepared by the EQUAL Unit for the EQUAL Evaluation Conference (February 2006)

8.2. EVALUATION QUESTIONS IN NATIONAL EVALUATION REPORTS

What lies behind the concept of mainstreaming still leaves many confused. This confusion has resulted in mainstreaming being implemented in very different ways in the different Member States. The scope of national evaluation reports and their evaluation questions have varied accordingly. The methodologies used for assessing mainstreaming have also been quite varied.

In 11 national evaluation reports, evaluation questions were focused on the effectiveness and the contribution of National thematic Networks (NTNs) to mainstreaming.

Some of these evaluators (i.e. in FR, NI, GB and IE) organised the evaluation questions around 3 or 4 main issues: What types of mainstreaming activities have been carried out and what has been their horizontal and vertical impact? What have been the barriers and facilitating factors for mainstreaming? What types of mainstreaming arrangements have been set up? What has been the involvement of policy makers in mainstreaming? What has been the role of the NTNs and European Thematic Groups (ETGs)?

Other reports, such as those for LU or NL were more focused on mainstreaming at the DP level since, in these MS, mainstreaming is mainly under the responsibility of DPs. The NL evaluators addressed this question through their survey of DP coordinators, in which these were asked about the extent to which their projects had been mainstreamed, and about the geographical scope of take-up of their project results. The results were supplemented with interviews with NTN-members.

The DK evaluators also resorted to a DP survey. The questions concerned the degree to which DP partners intend to use the results of their projects and whether others have already adopted the practices developed and who. Questions were asked as to the extent to which DPs used the experience of other DPs and in which phases of their projects this experience had been used. Secondly, mainstreaming was addressed in the interviews conducted with the MA and the NSS.

The BEfrg evaluators analysed both levels of mainstreaming (programme and DP levels) and sought to test out 3 evaluation hypotheses in relation to networking and mainstreaming:

- The innovative practices identified have been documented.
- The innovative practices identified have been diffused to the parties concerned.
- The lessons at programme level have been drawn and disseminated to the parties concerned.

8.3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MAINSTREAMING PRINCIPLE

¹¹⁵ European Commission (2005). *Making change possible. A practical guide to mainstreaming*. DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Unit B4.

The EQUAL glossary defines¹¹⁶ two types of mainstreaming:

- *Horizontal mainstreaming* is ‘the transfer of lessons learnt to similar organisations (transfer can be specific – e. g. a particular tool, or broad – e.g. contributing to a change of practice)’;
- *Vertical mainstreaming* is ‘the transfer of lessons learnt and integration of all or part of results into policy and practice at the institutional, political, regulatory or administrative level’.

Mainstreaming may also be understood in terms of what is referred to as its ‘push and pull dimensions’:

- *The push dimension* refers to the efforts of individual DPs and networks to gain recognition for the innovative solutions they have piloted. According to the EQUAL Glossary, the push dimension is a mechanism by which DPs ‘seek to increase the visibility of their results with a view to transferring the latter to the other actors’.
- *The pull dimension* refers to the mobilisation of key actors and decision makers for the eventual adoption of innovative practice and policy change. According the EQUAL Glossary, ‘the pull dimension is a mechanism in which policy and decision makers or other key actors identify priorities within the experimental activities and follow their progress with a view to using the results’.

A different but interesting definition is also given in the ES evaluation report, which takes into account the mainstreaming of DP members within their own organisations, which is a useful addition and is in fact an indicator of sustainability. Furthermore, the idea that vertical mainstreaming can also take place between DP partners, if one of the partners is a regional authority for example, is an option which was not obvious in the European definitions.

Definitions given in the ES evaluation report

Basic horizontal mainstreaming (called ‘transfer’ in Spanish): transfer carried out by the DP members to their own organisations, i.e. by maintaining a service, a good practice a methodology or any other thing developed during EQUAL once the EQUAL funding has stopped;

Enlarged horizontal mainstreaming (transfer): transfer carried out at by DP members to other actors who are not DP members, but who are located at the same decision level (for example, if a DP is located at the municipal level, transfer to another local authority);

Vertical mainstreaming (normally bottom up): transfer carried out to other, normally higher, decision levels (i.e. from the local level to the regional, national and/or European level). When a DP has a DP member which operates at a higher level than the other members (for example a regional government), mainstreaming to that DP member has been called vertical mainstreaming.

8.3.1. Mainstreaming models of implementation at the national level

Most national mainstreaming strategies refer to the two types of mainstreaming, i.e. horizontal and vertical mainstreaming, while only few refer to the push and pull dimension.

8.3.1.1. Overall organisation of mainstreaming in the Member States in R1

¹¹⁶ *Networking for inclusion* – preparatory documents – Barcelona 16 – 17 may 2002

Three main models have been developed for the organisation of mainstreaming at the national level:

- In *Model 1*, horizontal mainstreaming (HM) and vertical mainstreaming (VM) are both under the responsibility of NTN. National Thematic Networks are at the core of the mainstreaming strategy.
- In *Model 2*, horizontal mainstreaming is under the responsibility of NTNs and vertical mainstreaming is the responsibility of the Monitoring Committee (DK, SE) or of an ad-hoc Committee called 'Mainstreaming Committee' (BE_{FRG}), or 'Mainstreaming Policy Group' (IE)
- *Model 3* can be seen as a combination of the last two, and has only been adopted in the UK_{NI}. In the case of UK_{GB}, it seems that the model implemented is model 1: the initial information was that the MC was supposed to act for mainstreaming but the UK_{GB} evaluators did not mention this role.

Table 8.1 – Mainstreaming models in the CIPs

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
AT	X		
BE _{FRG}		x	
BE _{NL}		x	
DE	x		
DK		x	
ES	x		
FI	x		
FR	x		
GR	x		
IE		x	
IT			
LU			
NL			
PT	x		
SE		x	
UK _{GB}	x		
UK _{NI}			x

Source: elaboration on the basis of EQUAL website – 'EQUAL in the EU: mainstreaming activities by Member State' – June 2004 – interviews with MA (November 2004) – updated in January 2006 on the basis of the 2005 national evaluation reports.

Three Member States have adopted specific mechanisms, which do not pertain to any of the above mentioned models: in the NL, horizontal mainstreaming is exclusively under the responsibility of DPs while vertical mainstreaming is the responsibility of NTN. IT has developed a very singular model, with the creation of Mainstreaming Committees at the national and regional levels (launched in October 2004), as a complementary approach to the 2 NTNs and to the technical group on good practice. Finally, in LU, horizontal and vertical mainstreaming is the responsibility of DPs.

In DK, which pertains to model 2, the NTNs and MC have in practice not taken much responsibility in mainstreaming according to the evaluation reports. Vertical mainstreaming rests to a high degree on the MA and the NSS and some MC members while horizontal mainstreaming is mainly a task for the DPs themselves, although the NSS and the 3 NTNs contribute.

The choice to adopt Model 1, 2 or 3 may have been related with the time at which a mainstreaming strategy was launched at the national level. Member States which went for an early launch and implementation of their mainstreaming strategy were better placed to adopt Model 1 or 3. Conversely, MS which started very late in the development of mainstreaming activities could have found it more difficult to entrust vertical mainstreaming to the national thematic networks.

Whilst mechanisms facilitating the 'push' dimension of mainstreaming have been set up in all Member States, *those promoting the 'pull' dimension are less developed*. We have found such mechanisms in BE_{FRG}, ES, FR, IT, SE and the UK_{GB}.

In some of these MS, the pull dimension is addressed by creating *a dedicated Mainstreaming Group* in charge of collecting thematic requests from policy makers and establishing the thematic priorities for mainstreaming both on that basis and on the basis of DP work. ES is a good example of this strategy, with its national Mainstreaming Group involving members of the Monitoring Committee and MA/NSS representatives. The group was in charge of developing the Mainstreaming strategy which represented the framework for Action 3 and NTG work, and was responsible for the final approval of Action 3 applications.

In ES, another informal group emerged at the beginning of 2005 with regard to mainstreaming in ESF: the 'exchange Group between the Community Support Frameworks (CSF) and EQUAL' (GIME). This group was set up at the beginning of 2005, due to the lack - observed both by staff in charge of the CSF and EQUAL - of channels of communication of positive experience of EQUAL towards ESF. Although this group is not official, it is fulfilling an essential task and is addressing this lack. The group is composed of staff of the EQUAL NSS (ESF Agency) and staff also based at the ESF Agency but in charge of the CSF. Its main objective is to derive the lessons from EQUAL for ESF actions. So far, this has resulted in the inclusion of EQUAL good practice in the ESF report chapters on the contribution of ESF to the European Employment Strategy (2004) and a study has been launched on the needs of the operational programmes which could be addressed through EQUAL so as to benefit from synergies. This type of practice can clearly reinforce the mainstreaming process.

In IE, the Mainstreaming Policy Group (MPG) is co-chaired by the MA and the Equality Authority (these bodies have two different parent government departments, a positive factor for mainstreaming). Consequently the Mainstreaming Policy Group has a higher profile and status than if only one department was involved. But, according to the evaluator, the MPG involved finally too many organisations and as all of the organisations represented on the group have a valid stake in the mainstreaming of labour market policy and practice from the EQUAL programme, it was too difficult to consider how this could be avoided. It was noted that perhaps the focus of the group could be improved by developing themed sub-groups. This would involve a small number of key stakeholders who would work together to examine potential mainstreaming with regard to particular issues, and this development could be worthy of further consideration.

In IT, 10 mainstreaming working groups took place at the end of 2004 at both the regional and national level. At the national level, 3 working groups were respectively focused on 'Integrated initiatives aimed at supporting socially and professionally isolated workers from disadvantaged groups, and outlining models for intercultural integration', 'Local institutions, reception approaches, and the integration of asylum seekers' and 'Diversity Management.' The 7 other groups were organised at the regional level on specific thematic issues. All working groups were temporary 12 month initiatives responsible for dissemination activities with an initial meeting, a final meeting, and work at a distance in-between. The groups were assisted by a special technical assistance agency (COGEA).

Other MS have chosen to give their Monitoring Committee a role in mainstreaming activities.

In the UK_{NL}, 2 committees operated, the MC and the North/South Steering Group set up to facilitate and promote cross-border co-operation between UK_{NL} and IE. According to the evaluators, the North/South Steering Committee has been effective in strengthening the DP linkages with IE, particularly since the implementation of R2. In a previous evaluation report, it was recommended that this group should prepare a draft workplan for the Monitoring Committee, setting out its plans and ideas on how to strengthen this dimension of the programme for R2. The main action taken was to organise a meeting of the North/South Steering Group on 9th June 2005 and a networking event involving DPs on 5th July 2005. Following this, evidence suggests that in R2, the North/South Steering Group has worked to facilitate networking between DPs, through workshops which encourage learning across DPs, and provide an important forum for dissemination and mainstreaming.

But in some cases, the role of MC in mainstreaming was not as effective as had been envisaged. In PT, the Monitoring Committee was supposed to play a role in mainstreaming but participation remained limited (only 8 out of 30 members have participated in all the meetings held twice a year). According to the evaluator, the transformation of the MC into a mainstreaming body has not been successful so far and more effort are required to achieve a reasonable level of information among members on EQUAL products.

Only few evaluation reports point out the direct role of MAs and NSSs in mainstreaming. In DK, even though MC members play an important role, the MA and NSS have taken specific initiatives towards mainstreaming. They have tried to establish direct contact between MC members and specific projects

of interest. They also arranged a mainstreaming conference. The UK_{NI} report also highlights a proactive role of the MA in seeking to disseminate EQUAL results. Such a role had been a recommendation of the previous evaluation report. The Managing Authority has promoted EQUAL through national and international dissemination events/ exhibitions, including a national launch Conference for the Second Round of EQUAL and participation in the European Employment Week exhibition. Future dissemination events are also planned at national and international level, and further initiatives are planned to facilitate greater participation by DPs in national and international dissemination events.

8.3.1.2. Implementation of Thematic Networks

National thematic networks

National Thematic Networks (NTNs) constitute the main networking vehicle at the national level. All Member States, except LU¹¹⁷ which has only three DPs, have set up such NTNs, although at different times since the beginning of the programme. Amongst the NMS, according to the documents on mainstreaming strategies published on the EQUAL website, the two Member States which took part in EQUAL R1 (CZ and HU) either have already established NTNs (CZ) or are in the process of doing it (HU).

Because NTNs are the main instrument for organising exchanges between DPs in a systematic way at the national level, the first question which arises is that of the **intensity of this networking effort**. The number of NTNs varies to a significant extent from one CIP to the other: from one in UK_{NI}, which is understandable as there are only 6 DPs, to 14 in DE.

In the table below, we are setting the total number of NTNs in each CIP against the total number of DPs. The ratio between the two is indicative, to some extent, of the 'networking intensity' in each CIP, although, to give a more exhaustive picture, regional and sub-regional networking should also be taken into account. The issue of regional networking is addressed below. It should be stressed that this ratio is only an abstract indicator, as we are not looking here at the number of DPs *actually* involved in National Thematic Networks.

As is logical, the intensity of networking is higher in countries with smaller EQUAL programmes: CIPs with less than 60 DPs have intensity ratios comprised between 4 and 10. Member States with medium-sized programmes (between 76 and 109) are not homogeneous: in the UK_{GB} and in DE, the ratio is around 8, whereas in PT and in NL, the ratios are respectively of 15 and 18,6. Amongst the Member States with the largest programmes, FR has comparatively the lowest ratio, with ES and above all IT having much higher ratios. Thus it could be said that the number of NTNs is perhaps too limited with respect to the number of DPs in some Member States, especially IT, but also ES, PT and NL. However it has to be noted that the planned creation of regional Mainstreaming Committees in IT could also be a good contribution to networking. The creation of such regional networking mechanisms was recommended by the IT evaluators.

¹¹⁷ 3 thematic seminars were organised, one per year : on self assessment in 2002, gender in 2003 and on identification and exchange of good practice in 2004.

Table 8.2 - An approximation to networking intensity in the Member States

	Number of DPs engaged in Action 2 – R1 (a)	Number of NTN (b)	Networking intensity ratio (a)/(b)
AT	58	11	5,3
BE _{FRG}	37	5	7,4
BE _{NL}	19	3	6,3
DE	109	14	7,7
DK	21	4	5,3
ES	159	3	53,0
FI	36	5	7,2
FR	231	9 (**)	25,7
GR	40	4	10,0
IE	21	2	10,5
IT	279	2	139,5
LU	3	-	-
NL	95	5	19,0
PT	102	9 (*)	11,3
SE	47	8	5,9
UK _{GB}	76	8	9,5
UK _{NI}	6	1	6,0
Total	1336	93	14,4

Source: National evaluation reports and « EQUAL in the EU : mainstreaming activities by Member State ». June 2004. EQUAL website.

(*) Seven national thematic networks and two thematic groups (organisational change in enterprises and social economy entities, use of ICT in training and insertion of specific groups)

(**) seven thematic and 2 transversal ones (rural DPs, DPs working with people with disabilities)

It would be useful to calculate intensity with regard to the number of DPs actually involved in the NTN. But here, three networking strategies need to be distinguished:

- In 7 CIPs (AT, BE_{NL}, DE, DK, FI, GR, UK_{NI}), the strategy was *to involve all DPs in national networking*: however, we ignore whether the strategy has been fully achieved in practice;
- In other CIPs, a different choice was made mainly because involvement of all of DPs was too complex to manage and because the objective of the NTN were different in terms of vertical mainstreaming. Thus in ES, in UK_{GB}, and in the NL, a *selection process* took place for the participation of DPs in thematic networking. This selection process was carried out in ES by the MA and NSS and in the NL by the experts appointed to co-ordinate the networks, according to the document produced by the MA on mainstreaming.
- In three other Member States (FR, PT, SE), it was decided that DP participation to NTN would be *voluntary*.

Table 8.3 – DP participation in national networking

	Compulsory participation of all DPs or actual participation of all DPs (or nearly all)	DP selection	Voluntary DP participation
Member States with a large EQUAL programme (> 150 DPs)		ES	FR
Member States with a medium EQUAL programme (70-150 DPs)	DE	NL, UK _{GB}	PT (under MA agreement)
Member States with a small EQUAL programme (< 70 DPs)	AT, BE _{NL} , DK, FI, GR, IE, UK _{NI}		SE

Source: elaboration on the basis of 'EQUAL in the EU: mainstreaming activities by Member State' – June 200 - EQUAL Website.

A second issue to look at is the **composition of National Thematic Networks**. The composition of NTN is highly dependent on the role allocated to NTN in the different CIPs. In particular, the *participation of non-EQUAL policy makers and multipliers* (e.g. the social partners) seems to depend on whether NTN are in charge of vertical mainstreaming or not. In those Member States where the NTN do not have any role in vertical mainstreaming but limit their work to the facilitation of horizontal mainstreaming (BE_{FRG}, BE_{NL}, DK, IE and to a certain extent AT, SE), NTN have not been opened to policy makers. Other groups are sometimes responsible for vertical mainstreaming and are indeed open to policy makers except in the case of PT where NTN advocated an opening up to non EQUAL actors, which finally did not take place.

The other MS have made the choice to open NTN to non-EQUAL policy makers (and ‘multipliers’). Overall, however, it seems that these NTN have been faced with the same problems as those observed at the beginning at the European level, i.e. the difficulty of involving policy makers external to EQUAL whilst there are not yet any concrete results to show.

Interestingly, two Member States (FI and GR) have made the choice of involving non-EQUAL projects/partnerships in the NTN (e.g., but not only, former ADAPT/EMPLOYMENT co-ordinators). This is assessed positively by the FI national evaluators, but they also found that this could ‘limit the laboratory dimension of EQUAL’. However it could also be thought that this might facilitate the direct transfer of experimentation methodologies from EQUAL DPs to other partnerships (horizontal mainstreaming).

Table 8.4 – Composition of NTN at this stage: participation of non-EQUAL policy makers and multipliers and participation of non EQUAL projects/partnerships

	Participation of non EQUAL policy makers and multipliers		Participation of non EQUAL partnerships/projects
	Yes	No	
NTNs engaged in vertical mainstreaming	DE*, FR, GR, NL, UK _{GB} , UK _{NL}	PT, ES	FI (involvement in working groups), GR
NTNs engaged only in facilitating horizontal mainstreaming	SE	AT, BE _{FRG} , DK, IE	

Source: elaboration on the basis of ‘EQUAL in the E.U. : mainstreaming activities by member state’ – June 2004. EQUAL website.

** Non EQUAL actors are involved in specific events (mainstreaming forum)*

No information on the composition of NTN in BE_{NL} and IT. No NTN in LU.

Most NTN have a single group structure, except in some Member States which have adapted the former European model for thematic work, with a core group (UK_{GB}) or steering group (FI) without DPs and a wider group including DPs. In CZ, NTN have liaison groups.

Different NTN **management and co-ordination mechanisms** have also been adopted in the various CIPs, with, in some cases, interesting specificities:

- *Experts* have been designated in NL to chair NTN and to select participants. They have a contractual agreement but can run their network as they wish, even though they are supported by policy officers from relevant Ministry and NSS. Most Member States have involved thematic experts in their NTN but in most of cases experts do not have a role in the NTN management. The appointment of experts gives rise to mixed assessments. In one MS where experts chair some of the NTN, the MA notes that, sometimes, the animation by an external consultant can be delicate when he/she is ‘selling’ his/her services (i.e. DPs asking questions which the consultant only answers at a very general level, referring to the fact that a specific answer can be given when he/she is ‘hired’). Co-operation with consultants in this area is not always working:

they sometimes come up with very generic solutions which are not very suitable for the animation team¹¹⁸.

- In SE, *the NTN are chaired by high level policy/decision makers*, i.e. a member of the Swedish Parliament, former government ministers and key employers and trade union representatives. This choice seems in principle relevant for the effectiveness of vertical mainstreaming but various failures have been identified in NTN work by the national evaluators, and in particular misunderstandings in the distribution of roles and responsibilities between the ESF Council, the Monitoring group, Government, DPs and NTNs – so that most NTNs do not consider vertical mainstreaming as being their responsibility. In the UK_{GB}, the NTNs are also chaired by a policy expert in the relevant thematic field.
- *Chairing by DPs*: Some Member States chose to entrust NTN co-ordination to DPs, selected either through a call for tender (FI) or directly by the MA (GR, PT). Even though in-depth assessments of the effectiveness of this type of NTN management are not available, we believe that it can be a risky strategy, for example, if DPs do not dedicate sufficient time to that particular role or if DPs are working more for themselves than for the DP ‘community’. Effectiveness of vertical mainstreaming may also be limited in such a configuration. This is confirmed by the FI evaluators for whom the ‘selection of DPs to manage NTNs is a clumsy solution’. The evaluators pointed out that the added value of such arrangements remains dubious and this approach would require better focusing of thematic objectives and more support to the NTNs from the management programme and from national experts who could better support by giving expertise inside the NTNs.
- *Multiple facilitation*: In PT, substantial efforts have been invested in the co-ordination and facilitation of NTN work: in addition to the co-ordinator, each network has a process facilitator, recruited outside EQUAL, to ensure participation in the debates, and one content animator (expert) with a strong technical background.
- In AT, NTN members were free to choose their representatives.
- Finally in FR, NTNs are co-ordinated by the NSS.

The design of NTNs has been particularly innovative in GR, according to the evaluators. GR NTNs deal with thematic fields particularly critical for the GR society and labour market. NTNs are also ‘innovative’, according to the evaluators, in their funding arrangements: NTN expenditure is included in the budget of Action 3, in contrast to the prevailing method in the rest of MS where the NTN budget is covered by Technical Assistance. The appointment of experts in NTNs is also considered innovative by the evaluators.

Co-ordination between NTNs is not always in place. Only few Member States (UK_{GB}, PT) have implemented specific cross-NTN co-ordination mechanisms, with frequent meetings between NTN coordinators or facilitators, chaired by the MA. According to the PT MA, this leads to greater homogeneity in the way NTNs are functioning, and together they become ‘a community of practice’. To improve networking between programme actors, some Member States have invested in virtual networks (UK_{GB}, DE). In FR, where NTN co-ordination is carried out by the NSS, there is logically less need for specific cross-NTN co-ordination mechanisms.

With regard to the **level of activity**, networking now seems to really be in place in most CIPs, although we do not have much information on BE_{FRG} and BE_{NL} (their mainstreaming strategies are not available on the EQUAL website).

¹¹⁸ MA interview, November 2004.

Results are extremely varied from a MS to the other and from a NTN to the other, even though most NTNs succeeded in promoting exchange, horizontal transfers and interesting practices.

- The FR evaluators put forward, on the basis of their interviews with NTN moderators, that the work done by all networks helped DPs to better structure their methodologies, and really contributed to improving project development. Furthermore, exchanges ensure a real visibility of the issues addressed. Benchmarking allowed DPs to become more aware of how their projects compared with others, and some of them developed tighter work relations (resulting, for instance, in a collective Action 3 project). According to the DPs survey conducted for the 2005 evaluation report, near half DPS who participated to a NTN perceived as a positive impact their participation, mainly in terms of exchange.
- According to the GR evaluators, networks generated a common perception for the partners and helped with the development of more holistic approaches to the issues addressed. Networks supported the transfer of know-how and contributed to horizontal and vertical mainstreaming. In addition, the evaluators observe that the function of NTNs makes a substantial difference by comparison with other programmes or disposals and action models in general dealing with specific issues in the labour market. They also provide a good illustration of the added value of NTNs. In GR, networking emerges as a good practice *per se* in EQUAL, and NTNs have been a particularly striking example of that good practice (thanks to common procedures of coordination and communication, common tools, a common programme and the design of policy proposals). Thanks to networking, agencies from the public and the private sector, social partners and NGOs have worked together on an equal basis for the first time in GR, according to the evaluators. New networks and networks which only existed informally have developed and consolidated, and this is to be regarded as an added value of EQUAL.
- In DE, all DPs participate in NTNs, and the vast majority regard them as relevant and important for the mainstreaming process.
- In PT, the potential of NTNs is also recognised. According to the evaluators, they have been valuable tools in R1, especially as they were a preparation for the communities of practice which came later. However their dissemination potential was limited as their main focus was on validation (of innovative products).
- According to the IE evaluators, thematic networks provide a co-ordinated framework for DPs within a given thematic field to work on a strategic basis to impact on policy and practice. Events have been held since 2002 for bringing similar DPs together to share learning from their projects. These exercises were considered by DPs to be useful in terms of allowing them to discuss common issues with their counterparts.

Some Member States still face **difficulties in activating their networks**.

- For example the voluntary approach in DP participation was not easy to manage in PT, according to the evaluators.
- In FR, the contribution and implication of DPs also varied across NTNs. The FR evaluators highlighted that NTNs resources were largely concentrated in 2 NTNs (Themes E and G). The time allocated to the NTNs by the NSS for their moderation differs a lot from a NTN to the other (from 96 moderation days for the NTN dedicated to adaptability to 6.5 moderation days for the NTN dedicated to employability), depending on their level of priority from the point of view of the MA.
- The NL evaluators found that DP-representatives did not contribute much to the NTNs (usually they lacked a broad view and were only familiar with their own project), that some NTNs had too many DPs to 'take care of' and others too little. They concluded that there had not been enough supportive staff available for the NTNs during R1.
- The UK_{GB} evaluators emphasise the importance of the NTN chairs which have provided a pivotal role. As the personality and style of NTN chairs has differed across the themes, the effectiveness of the NTNs has consequently been variable. For example, a strong lead seems to have impaired the exchange within the forum (by making it too hierarchical and less flat). The fact that some NTN chairs have changed has also had a negative impact (reduced focus). This was the case for Themes B and H.

- In ES, the selection of some DPs for participation in the NTN has caused dissatisfaction amongst other DPs who thought they could have contributed as well. The main working method has been through the creation of thematic sub-groups, of interest to the DP members. Usually members of the NTN who were neither of the NSS nor DPs did not come to these working groups and only came to plenary meetings which remained very formal and in which no mainstreaming has taken place. DPs and the NSS members of the sub-groups did intend intensely to invite external actors to take part in their activities but did not succeed. Overall, in the opinion of the evaluators, the activity of NTN has not been considerably different from the one that a single DP could do and has therefore brought little added value so far. It has represented a lot of work for little results. There has also been a lack of monitoring of the mainstreaming activities carried out and of their results, except in one cases (NTN 1), so that it is difficult to assess the work done.
- In FI, thematic networking has not functioned until now as a mainstreaming platform. More particularly, steering groups have not played the strategic role which was expected from them. According to the evaluators, thematic co-operation has only weakly influenced the results the programme has achieved.

In model 1, which focused on vertical mainstreaming, commitment of non EQUAL actors was important. In the UK_{GB} NTN have not been particularly successful in this respect, and there has been a lack of widespread policy involvement. However, the evaluators see nothing fundamentally wrong with the TNG model¹¹⁹ itself. The weakness lies with the lack of engagement of some of the key policy audience. As a result, according to the evaluators, only 8% of R1 DPs found the NTN to be a helpful forum. Similarly, ES NTN which are subgroups of the Monitoring Committee and also include members of the NSS and DPs, suffered from of a lack of commitment of MC members which has been detrimental to their mainstreaming potential.

Even in some Member States where NTN were not supposed to have an important role in vertical mainstreaming, evaluators can be very critical on the way they functioned: according to the UK_{NI} evaluators, in R1, it is broadly felt that the NTN played a limited role in the mainstreaming process. Although the NTN did provide an important forum for different representatives to meet together and build relationships, raise issues of concern and discuss, for example, how to monitor emerging soft outcomes, the NTN lost momentum in the course of Actions 2 and 3. The interaction between the projects and the NTN was also weak with the DPs noting that the network did not provide sufficient regular feedback or guidance to assist in the mainstreaming process. The degree of contact between the DPs and the NTN was generally low with DPs in many instances opting to make direct contact with departments instead. Hence, the NTN has been bypassed in most of cases.

To conclude, National Thematic Networks have not (not yet) been entirely satisfactory with regard to vertical mainstreaming but they have been quite effective in supporting horizontal mainstreaming.

Networking at the regional and sector level

As far as we are aware, few regional networks are implemented. Thus, by comparison with the development of networking at the national level, regional networking is much more limited, which is perhaps regrettable in Member States with large EQUAL programmes or in Member States with some extent of regional programme management, such as FR, ES or IT.

- In ES, it should be noted that 3 Autonomous Communities (i.e. the regional governments of Andalucía, Comunidad Valenciana and Extremadura) decided to set up regional networks within the framework of Action 3, with the objective of identifying, analysing and disseminating best practice and influence regional policy making. The three networks gather all regional DPs around one specific priority: equality of opportunities in Valencia and Extremadura and business creation in Andalucía. These networks have been operated as three Action 3 projects, in each case co-funded by the regional administration. The evaluators have more particularly studied the cases of Valencia and Andalucía. They value positively the involvement of the regional authorities in these networks, which is the condition for effective mainstreaming to take

¹¹⁹ TNG is the name of NTN in the UKgb.

place. They recommend the further development of this type of initiatives in other regions in R2, as there has been a very serious lack of formal mainstreaming channels at the regional level in R1. However they stress that, except in the case of Andalucía, there has been, as for the NTN, a lack of monitoring of the mainstreaming activities carried out and of their impacts on policies.

- In FR, there is one example of such regional network, in an overseas *département*. On the other hand, there have been two examples of sector-based networks. One concerned the rural sector and was constituted through a collective Action 3 project (VIVIER). The second one emerged from the NTN dedicated to Theme 2C (opening up business creation to all), where 9 DPs decided to implement collective Action 3 project (ATOOUT PME) with the objective to disseminate the main results produced by the NTN. No specific assessment was done of those networks. No assessment was available either for the two regional networks which have been set up in the UK_{GB} (a formal one in Wales, and an informal one in Scotland).
- In IT, the evaluators stressed that regional action was lacking in R1 despite the fact that it is precisely at the local level that mainstreaming had its greatest potential. The 7 local mainstreaming committees, currently being implemented, could play a networking role in the near future. Other, one-off, regional events may however have contributed to regional networking: 8 regional evaluation conferences were organised by the regional authorities together with the national evaluators, in which 150 DPs took part.

The advantages of ‘devolved’ mainstreaming strategies clearly show in the case of Wales and Scotland, where, according to the UK_{gb} evaluators, DPs benefit from a ‘certain proximity to their policy influencers’, and greater contribution of policy influencers is apparent. DPs having actively engaged with relevant government departments are more likely to have better partnership working at the stage of mainstreaming and dissemination. The Scottish context is illuminating, wherein those DPs that engaged with the Scottish Executive early on in the programme were far more likely to receive tangible mainstreaming support in the form of Transfer to policy and practice match funding’ (p.38).

Even if it is not part of their mainstreaming strategy, it could be logical for those MS (with large EQUAL programmes and/or regional programme management) to consider developing more regional networking, and indeed this had been a recommendation made by the FR evaluators in their Mid-term report, but, as far as we are aware, it has not been taken up yet. For other MS, particularly with small EQUAL programmes, it is not really an issue.

In most MS however, the local or regional level has been the level where mainstreaming (including vertical mainstreaming) has been assessed as most effective.

- Thus, according to the NL evaluators, 23% of the DP coordinators report that at least one local organisation has adopted/implemented their project results. 51% state that at least one regional organisation has done so. 31% confirm that at least one national organisation has adopted their results and 14% report that at least one European organisation has adopted the results. The adoption rates are highest among pillar III-projects and lowest among pillar IV-projects.
- In FR, whilst vertical mainstreaming has taken place mainly in ‘national DPs’, the survey conducted with R1 DPs shows that, for one third of DPs, the results of their projects have already been transferred completely or partially and that those transfers mainly occurred towards the regional level (33%); 24% took place towards the national level and 22% towards the local level.
- In the UK_{gb}, the evaluation report provides an illustrative table which shows the various levels at which DP actions have had some impact. This is done for each theme. By looking at all the themes, it is clear that the transfer of lessons has been essentially local and regional, although 35% DPs mention an impact at the national level. As could be expected, transfer towards the European level has been limited; there is just one example of EU transfer in Theme A: the DP influenced decisions on the creation of new/sister bodies/organisations around the specific target groups.

To conclude, one can say that the effectiveness of the mechanisms implemented at the local and regional levels for mainstreaming is higher than at programme level. This could be a lesson especially in large programmes, where it is more complex to organise national mainstreaming successfully.

8.3.1.3. Mechanisms for identifying and validating good practice

The identification and validation of good practice¹²⁰ has generally been under the responsibility of NTN, except in some MS (IE, LU, AT, BE_{FRG}). Most NTNs were supported by NSS and experts to implement this important task. The methodologies developed are usually based on specific questionnaires to DPs, visits, meetings and reports. Some NTNs and experts used tools produced by the ETGs.

There are exceptions to this general structure: in IT, the process is under the responsibility of a technical working group on good practices and in IE the Mainstreaming Policy Group and the MA are playing the main role.

Validation can follow 3 models (top-down, bottom-up, peer review). In many MS where NTNs are in charge of identification/validation of good practice, the peer review¹²¹ model has been adopted, as the NTN structure makes it possible. Nevertheless, the validation phase is not easy to implement and in most cases, Member States are missing methodological instruments to do it.

An exception can be made with PT which has developed a very interesting validation grid for products which is used for the selection of DPs for Action 3, i.e. product validation is compulsory for all applications to Action 3. In FI the MA and NSS organised training on mainstreaming for NTN steering group members. The purpose was to enhance the ability of members to identify, disseminate and mainstream good practices.

In most cases, the process was not assessed in great depth in national evaluation reports¹²². Overall, however, it can be said that assessments were quite contrasted, between Member States (e.g. PT) where the evaluation (although not exempt of criticism) was globally positive and Member States where evaluators found that the method lacked clarity (FR, BE_{FR}, UK_{NI}). For others Member States, no significant analysis was available.

- In PT, the validation of products is seen by the surveyed DPs as the most relevant added value of the NTNs. The process of peer review underpinning validation in the NTNs stimulated DP involvement but was found 'insufficient'. The assessment made by the evaluators about the methodology for good practice identification points to a possible lack of rigour and quality, due to a lack of time for providing an in-depth analysis of the products and to an at times missing contribution by experts able to benchmark the products against what is done in the area. The evaluators recommend a more extensive use of experts in order to have a more informed assessment.
- The UK_{NI} evaluators find that the process was not rigorous enough due to an insufficient interaction between the NTNs in Round 1. The DP survey and interviews showed that the DPs were disappointed with the lack of feedback from the NTN on the value of their project ideas.
- In FR, the process was under the responsibility of the NSS which elaborated a multi-annual plan defining NTN methods of work: these should include the elaboration of a catalogue of products and an analysis of DPs, identify DPs with promising practices, set up production groups and formalise results. Although the Plan was not assessed, the evaluators pointed out that the definition of what could be a good practice and the method used to identify promising practices were unclear.
- The BE_{FRG} evaluators mentioned that there had been so far no method identified on how to validate new practices as good or innovative. However the ESF Agency has commissioned a study to develop such a

¹²⁰ See annex 8.1 for an overview of mechanisms to identify and validate good practice in the Member States.

¹²¹ The DP is evaluated by peers (one or more of the other DPs), as well as by external evaluators, the NSS and policy makers.

¹²² Many evaluators themselves highlight examples of interesting practices or 'positive qualitative evidence' in their reports but this is a different matter, which we address in Chapter 5 (innovation).

methodology whose results had to be available by the end of 2005. As a result, the method will be used for R2.

- In ES, the evaluators do not address the precise methodology and mechanisms developed to validate good practices and as a result do not make any assessment. But they referred to the process in the regional networks presented below.

In Valencia, 29 examples of good practice were finally extracted from a total of 698 actions developed by the DPs, gathered in a publication and presented in a seminar. However the evaluators do not explain who did the selection, on the basis of what criteria, and whether mainstreaming went beyond these dissemination actions. In the case of Andalucía, the network aimed at improving the public interventions supporting business creation. Good practice was also selected on the basis of 'their proved innovative character, the transfer proposal – indicating from whom and to whom, with a legal analysis indicating how this should be done, and a comparative analysis with other autonomous communities'. Although the evaluators do not say this, we suppose that it is the very regional government which carries out the selection of the good practice, in order to include some of it in its own policies (some of these are actually being transferred now, according to the regional government). Although the 'proof that the good practice is innovative' is not a very clear criterion, the request of a legal analysis of feasibility of the transfer and of a comparative analysis with what exists elsewhere is indeed more precise and concrete.

Even though the rigour and clarity of the mechanisms to validate practices are varied, the material collected is substantial and significant. This is probably why 50% of the Member States have already established a database or repository to avoid the loss of good practices. Other Member States are interested in doing so.

8.3.2. Mainstreaming at DP level

DPs were expected in most MS to design and implement their own dissemination, networking and mainstreaming strategy, either on their own or together with other DPs, in addition to their participation in NTN activities. Only in DK and SE has DP participation in Action 3 been mostly channelled through their participation in NTNs¹²³. However, the way in which Action 3 budgets were distributed amongst single DPs or groups of DPs differs amongst Member States. Schematically, three main mechanisms can be distinguished with regard to the organisation of Action 3 :

- *Individual Action 3 budgets were included by DPs in their DPA, along with Action 2 budgets: in this case, all DPs could thus benefit from an Action 3 budget according to their own planning and requests.* This mechanism was applied in AT, BE_{FRG}, DE, FI, IE, LU, and NL. In two cases (IE, DE) however, an additional budget was made available for participation in specific mainstreaming actions (in DE, when DPs were selected for the participation in Mainstreaming Forums, in IE, for specific mainstreaming activities led by groups of DPs within the NTNs or outside them). In AT, evaluators pointed out that thematic merging took up more resources than originally expected and DP budgets were not adequate for that.
- *Individual or collective Action 3 budgets (for individual DPs or groups of DPs) were accessible through a call for proposals, and therefore not all DPs could obtain such funding.* This has been the choice in ES, FR, IT, and PT. In practice, the selection could validate all projects : in ES, we know that 98 proposals were made and all of them were selected because the main process took place before, with the NSS identifying, encouraging and supporting DPs which they viewed as having a good potential for mainstreaming . In FR, only 80 DPs had access to Action 3 and even if NTN moderators (mainly from the NSS) encouraged their participants to present collective Action 3 projects, only one NTN (theme 2C – business creation) led to a collective Action 3 project, called ATOUT PME and involving 9 DPs. In IT, amongst the 108 applications submitted

¹²³ But in DK, 3 DPs applied for specific Action 3 funding and in SE there is the ongoing possibility (between 2004 and 2006) for DPs to apply specifically for contributions to events or for publications. (Source: HoM-o4_059).

(52 individual and 56 collective), 37 projects were accepted (17 individual and 20 collective). A total of 91 DPs take part in Action 3 (59 DPs are involved in NTN). In PT, 61 Action 3 applications have been submitted representing 79% of DPs involved in Action 2 but the process is still underway and the number of final applications selected in Action 3 is still not known.

- *Action 3 budgets were made accessible, as an option, to all DPs, which had to submit an application for this:* this was the choice made in the UK_{GB} and the UK_{NL}. Although the process took some time to get started, in the end almost all DPs (except 3 in UK_{GB}) submitted such applications and had been approved for funding by mid-June 2004 (according to the national evaluation report, however, there were difficulties for securing match funding especially in UK_{GB}).

GR has adopted a different model, whereby, as in DK and SE, all DPs take part in NTNs (and sometimes in more than one), where they contribute to the drafting of a 'Common Working Plan', for the whole NTN, but they also had to produce their own 'Detailed Action Plan' for Action 3, for those issues specific to their DP and not addressed in the CWP. However we ignore how Action 3 budgets have been distributed. Furthermore, the MA encouraged DPs to appoint a person for information and promotion activities and to submit a communication plan. The MA itself appointed an external information and publicity consultant.

Thus, in a majority of CIPs¹²⁴, all DPs could take part in Action 3, simply by including an Action 3 budget in their DPA at the end of Action 1. In the UK_{GB} and the UK_{NL}, most DPs were expected to draw from an Action 3 budget (all in UK_{NL}). In ES¹²⁵, FR, IT and PT, only a share of DPs accessed Action 3 funding. And in DK and SE, very few DPs have an individual Action 3 budget.

The DPs which did not take part in Action 3 had various motivations: the main reason for not submitting a proposal was often a lack of time given the quantity of work required (ES, FR); other reasons were the lack of matched funding (ES, FR) or the decreasing commitment of partners (FR, PT). Conversely, the reasons given to enter Action 3 (according to the FR DP survey) are often dissemination of results (34%), information-mobilisation (25%), dissemination of products/tools (22%) and capitalisation (18%). Although collective Action 3 projects were very much encouraged in FR, there have been clear financial obstacles to their development. The fact that DPs were already engaged in individual Action 3 projects was another obstacle .

Substantial **guidance** efforts were reported in some MS, including through the elaboration and diffusion of mainstreaming guides.

- In GR, the MA drafted a Guide for the implementation of Action 3 addressing the goals, content, methodology and time table. As stated in the CIP Annual Report for GR, this Guide was translated into English and was sent to the EC for distribution to the new Member States for contributing to the European exchange of practices on mainstreaming.
- A UK_{GB} Guide for DPs called 'Mainstreaming and creating impact – a guide for Development Partnerships' was developed very early in the process by the national support structure.
- As we saw before, individualised guidance to Action 3 projects was provided by NSS staff in ES, where the NSS found that many of the 98 approved mainstreaming projects had to be re-oriented, especially as vertical mainstreaming was proving difficult to achieve. This has represented a very serious effort for the NSS staff¹²⁶. The MA and NSS tried to change this for R2, by requiring DPs to present a mainstreaming strategy already at application stage. Furthermore, DPs now have to nominate a person responsible for the implementation of mainstreaming. All DPs are obliged to devote 1% of the total budget to dissemination and mainstreaming activities during Action 2.

¹²⁴ We have no information for BE_{NL} on the mechanisms of implementation of Action 3 at DP level.

¹²⁵ Some changes were introduced for R2 (see below)

¹²⁶ interview with MA/NSS. November 2004.

- In FR, support to DP mainstreaming was under the responsibility of the NTN (for their DP members) and of the regional support structures (RSS). But, as official RSS mandates do not cover specifically this task, RSS did not systematically support DPs for the dissemination phase: only 2 out of the 22 RSS organised specific mechanisms for helping with dissemination both at the regional and national levels. In the other regions, there has been occasional help only or no help at all (5 RSS). In most cases, support has been provided on an occasional basis and has mainly focused on dissemination at the regional level. Support could take different forms, from general information on the dissemination phase, technical advice, administrative support, preparation for writing up an application for Action 3, list of contacts and actors to ensure a better dissemination, and even contributions to the elaboration of dissemination plans.

Finally, NTNs have been supportive of DP mainstreaming strategies in a few MS: in the UK_{GB}, the NTNs have been supportive of the development of MPAs (Mainstreaming Partnership Agreements) at DP level. In GR, the parallel elaboration by DPs of two working plans for Action 3, one common to all DP members of each NTN and one specific to each DP, can be seen as an interesting strategy, provided it is not too heavy to manage for DPs.

DPs seem to have mainly focused on **dissemination activities**: however, this assertion is also in part due to the evaluation methods used, as evaluators have sometimes tended to ask DPs more about their dissemination activities than about vertical mainstreaming.

- On the basis of their DP survey, the FR evaluators provided an analysis of the dissemination mechanisms used by DPs. However DPs were not asked about their mainstreaming mechanisms. In terms of dissemination, 1/3 DPs made a communication on their projects and results during seminars, meetings, forums and other events. 1/4 DPs drafted communication documents, and 1/5 DPs resorted to electronic communication or created an internet site. In some cases, publicity campaigns, radio interviews, exhibitions, plays, and even information buses have been used to disseminate. But the main vehicles used for dissemination actions have been the NSS bulletins, events, and newspaper articles.
- In the NL, only 8 DPs (9%) had not made any concrete dissemination or mainstreaming plans at the time of the evaluator's survey.
- In BE_{frg}, the DP survey showed that mainstreaming is mainly done through presentations (31%) and meeting people (32%). Projects are very active in organising workshops especially at the end of their project. This is for them the occasion to invite the main stakeholders in their domain (sector and public authorities). In the last year, DPs have made presentations during meetings of the Monitoring committee which provided a forum for DPs to present their results to the public authorities concerned. Some administrations carry out a follow-up of the projects in which they are directly or indirectly involved.

The UK_{GB} evaluators elaborated a typology of activities developed under Action 3 and found 3 main categories : 1) communication/events based activities, 2) product based activities and 3) action based activities. This typology, which is not limited to dissemination activities, appears as quite an interesting evaluation tool.

As shown in the table below, however, the first one has been the most common type of strategy.

Table 8.5 – Categories of Action 3 activities carried out by DPs in the UKgb

Type of Action 3 activities	% of DPs
<i>Communication / event based activities</i>	
<i>Conferences</i>	62%
<i>Workshops / seminars, showcasing</i>	35%
<i>Using ICT / media (websites, magazines, newsletters, leaflets, media, TV)</i>	30%
<i>Presentations</i>	20%
<i>Sharing good practice, awareness raising</i>	17%
<i>Product based activities</i>	
<i>Producing user guides, manuals, case studies</i>	17%
<i>Various publications</i>	16%
<i>Producing evaluation reports, assessing approaches and methodologies</i>	16%
<i>Undertaking further research</i>	14%
<i>Producing Toolkits and web/IT tools</i>	13%
<i>Action based activities</i>	
<i>Networking, building/cementing local/regional/thematic partnerships</i>	23%
<i>Train the trainer, mentoring, individual and organisational capacity building</i>	9%

Source: UKgb 2005 national evaluation report

8.3.3 Obstacles to implementation

8.3.3.1 Obstacles identified at programme level

Some evaluators identified weaknesses in the ways in which NTN operate, and in particular in the distribution of roles between NTN and other programme actors, that could limit effectiveness of mainstreaming :

- The UK_{GB} evaluators argue that the specific approach to Action 3 taken in UKgb, in which the funding has been devolved to DPs rather than being kept centrally, has had a positive impact in terms of DP ‘empowerment’, but the price for it has been less clarity as to the role of the NTN. For them, a negative aspect is that this has reduced the possibilities for mainstreaming (as opportunities for all the DPs to share lessons are reduced) particularly for horizontal mainstreaming.
- In BE_{NL}, due to the internal organisation of the ESF agency, and in particular to the attempt at linking activities of EQUAL and ESF objective 2 and 3, the thematic approach started too late for generating any meaningful results in R1. However this organisation might be quite fruitful for R2¹²⁷.
- The IE evaluators point out some lack of capacity within potential organisations themselves. The representatives who attend the Mainstreaming Policy Group have many other responsibilities, and it was noted that some lack the time to ‘sit down and think’ with their colleagues about how a policy or practice might be mainstreamed.

Other evaluators are critical of the very limited character of the mainstreaming strategies.

- In BE_{FRG}, the evaluators state that it is remarkable that, after 3 years of implementation of the CIP, ‘the mainstreaming plan 2004-2008 remains essentially a list of broadly defined actions, as was the case in the programming documents’.
- Surprisingly, in AT, it is the MA representatives themselves who point out the absence of strategy: they consider that there is a lack of resources, at MA level, to develop a mainstreaming strategy and at NTN level, to mobilise key actors. At the end of 2004, they thought that no mainstreaming would take place unless DPs took the matter in their hands¹²⁸.

¹²⁷ Interview with MA, December 2004.

¹²⁸ Interview with MA, November 2004.

In FI the evaluators argue that *'mainstreaming has hardly deserved its name. It started too late, the steering committee did not adequately support it, what happened was something less than mainstreaming'*.

In ES, a Mainstreaming plan was adopted in May 2003 by the Monitoring Committee whose general objective was assessed as relevant by the evaluators and in accord with the objectives of the initiative. However it presented numerous lacks which made the mainstreaming work difficult – in particular responsibilities were not clearly defined, between the Managing Authority, the Monitoring Committee, the NSS and the DPs, which led to a 'void' of responsibility, in a context in which decision makers have shown a notable lack of interest. The Managing Authority sees itself too much as a facilitator of mainstreaming and not enough as an actor of mainstreaming. The NSS took part in DP dissemination events but did not do much more to support DPs, so that in the end much of the mainstreaming effort fell back on DPs.

But there are also factors which do not depend on EQUAL actors. For example, the UK_{GB} evaluators refer to the *'crowded policy fields'*, i.e. to the limited awareness of or lack of interest in EQUAL in several key government departments. They might see it as just 'another initiative', and this seriously limits the potential impact of mainstreaming. Policy fields may well be particularly 'crowded' in the UK_{GB}, but this remark is likely to apply, though perhaps with less intensity, to all Member States. The UK_{NI} evaluators stressed that *'for much government activity in Northern Ireland, policy is devised in London distancing the DPs from opportunities to influence the core policy process. The narrow scope of local government responsibility and the suspension of the Assembly have also created further barriers to vertical mainstreaming'*. In this context, there is a need to be realistic about what actors engaged in mainstreaming can achieve as they face important constraints and there are bound to be differences between member states according to the country size and the political structures that exist.

Nevertheless, some limited improvements could easily be made: for example, it is surprising that MS which primary chose mainstreaming model 1 (see above) have not opened yet their NTN to non-EQUAL actors or opened them very late or occasionally (PT, AT, DE).. In this respect, it is interesting that in FR, the launch of R2 was an occasion to enhance the mobilisation of policy makers through the organisation of an event in the FR parliament to give more visibility to the programme.

Finally, there does not seem to be much difference in the results obtained by the various models of implementation opted for. Model 1, consisting in making the National Thematic Networks responsible for both horizontal and vertical mainstreaming, does not seem to be less effective than other models, e.g. in which NTN are responsible for horizontal mainstreaming whilst vertical mainstreaming is co-ordinated by the Monitoring Committee or an ad-hoc 'Mainstreaming Group'. In theory, this latter model allows for more focused strategies to be implemented, but in practice the **lack of involvement of policy-makers** has been an obstacle in most cases (some exceptions are nevertheless identified).

8.3.3.2. Obstacles identified at DP level

In those Member States where, by design, all DPs are supposed to be involved in individual mainstreaming, this is not necessarily happening. Different obstacles to mainstreaming were identified by DPs such as financial obstacles (lack of resources) or lack of anticipation. Difficulties also stemmed from the lack of mainstreaming strategies and, as a result, lack of mainstreaming plans.

Regarding the question of the lack of anticipation, it is interesting to note, with two national evaluators, that Action 3 is difficult to implement when capitalisation and dissemination have not been engaged during Action 2 (as said by the FR evaluator) and that although Action 3 has been designed for funding mainstreaming actions, all DPs were expected to develop dissemination and mainstreaming activities during Action 2 (as said by the PT evaluator).

- The evaluators have therefore assessed mainstreaming during Action 2 as well: in ES, they note a lack of mainstreaming strategy at that stage. Thus when there has been mainstreaming it has been horizontal (transfer of results to partner organisations and to other external, but similar, organisations).

- The BE_{FRG} evaluators found, during their interviews with DPs, that many ignored what Action 3 was, and that they had few concrete ideas about how they could proceed with dissemination. Activity reports do not mention any expenses in relation to Action 3, and, as a consequence, the ESF Agency does not know the amount of Action 3 expense so far. As a result, 48% of the project coordinators interviewed (53% of the project partners) stated that one of the difficulties faced in relation to mainstreaming were the absence of specific budget for DPs in Action 3.
- The SE evaluators stress that Action 3 budgets have been hard to find for the DPs. Many DPs have tried to find financial support through their organisations but they have had to wait for between 3 and 6 months before they received an answer from the ESF Council. One reason for this is – according to the evaluators – that some DP organisations have asked for financial support both for mainstreaming but also for the further development of their project work at the same time.
- In DE, the evaluators’ survey showed that almost all DPs are working on their dissemination strategies. However, mainstreaming is mostly conceived of as horizontal mainstreaming and transfer of know-how to other similar organisations whilst DPs have more difficulties to define their policy targets for vertical mainstreaming. This also seemed to be a difficulty for part of the UK_{GB} DPs. In GR, the evaluators found that the ‘detailed action plans’ for Action 3 were not often very imaginative in their strategy and did not go much further than the usual dissemination activities. These difficulties could be due to specific policy contexts: for example, the DE evaluators report that the current phase of structural changes taking place in labour market and social policies (with the so-called Hartz reforms) do not facilitate the identification of the correct policy targets.

Other obstacles come from the difficulties faced by DPs to produce a clear representation of what they are achieving, and even, in the first place, to identify what they are achieving: thus the UK_{GB} evaluators have identified problems with weak evaluation strategies – meaning that DPs cannot effectively distil the mass of information they are collecting and evidencing the lessons learnt. But this may well be a more general difficulty.

Problems in terms of transfer of ownership rights and intellectual property issues, as well as problems due to the tight timetable of EQUAL were also pointed out. In IE, transfer of ownership was cited as one stumbling block that potentially inhibits the extent to which mainstreaming from EQUAL takes place. It was also noted that where organisations that are prime targets for mainstreaming are not directly involved in a project at developmental stage, difficulties arose for them in accepting a finished product which could be taken into the organisation.

In NL, NTN_s reported that many projects started only very late with dissemination and mainstreaming. They think it would be wise to start this process already from the beginning of the project. Earlier NL reports already showed that many DPs did not know very well what dissemination and mainstreaming meant when they started their project. Moreover, many projects do not seem to be properly equipped for this task.

More generally, there is a sense at DP level (as well as, as we have seen above, at NTN level) that mainstreaming, and particularly vertical mainstreaming¹²⁹, is a daunting task which nobody really knows how to tackle. In many Member States, MAs and NSS recommended DPs with identifying policy links quite early on in the programme, and in fact even, to involve them as partners. Yet there is evidence from several Member States where public authorities have been significantly involved as DP co-ordinators or partners (e.g. IT, and more than anywhere else, ES) that this is not synonym with making clear policy demands (as reported by the IT evaluator), or that this official character can put a serious brake on innovation, and that it is then difficult to identify what can be mainstreamed (as can be the case in ES¹³⁰). In part, these difficulties could be solved with improved guidance on the part of the MAs/NSSs, and where they have this role, of the NTN_s. This was pointed out especially by the

¹²⁹ In those MS where DPs are expected to contribute to vertical mainstreaming.

¹³⁰ Interview with MA/NSS, November 2004.

BE_{FRG}, BE_{NL}, FI, NL and SE evaluators in their second interim reports. It was also pointed out in FR where the evaluators had recommended in their Midterm report to elaborate a methodological guide for Action 3.

Whatever the choice made for implementing Action 3, national evaluation reports pointed out a lack of programme support to DPs for the design of their mainstreaming strategy. As a result, Action 3 was more focused on dissemination actions (easier to implement) than on mainstreaming operations. In most cases, mainstreaming was interpreted as the communication of results achieved although there are notable and interesting exceptions: the AT evaluators provide the example of a DP which organised round tables between the local authorities elected representatives of its DP and a European MP, the Chairman of the local Chamber of Commerce, and the Directors General of Immigration and Employment of the region

In ES, although, as already said, the NSS had been very active in its support for the presentation of proposals to Action 3, it has not been able to maintain its support during implementation. However, in ES as in most of MS, there seems to be a major awareness of this gap amongst R2 although the confusion with dissemination has not disappeared and there is still a lack of mainstreaming plans.

8.3.4. Facilitating factors

8.3.4.1. Facilitating factors at programme level

The creation of an ad-hoc group in charge of mainstreaming including key policy actors very early in the programme represents a facilitating factor to implement a pull or a push dimension, as part of the mainstreaming strategy.

Such ad-hoc groups can be organised at different levels, as we have already noted:

- In FR, this took place in one sector, with the early set up of a ‘rural network’, called VIVIER, managed by representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, and involving all ‘rural’ DPs. The role of the group was to monitor those activities and results which could be taken on board in the new bill on rural development;
- In IE, the implementation of the Mainstreaming Policy Group was of great importance to provide a useful resource for raising awareness on the mainstreaming potential of EQUAL projects within key policy-making organisations. Consultations with key stakeholders have confirmed that the group has played an important part in building relationships between organisations and partnership work to mainstream ideas originating from the EQUAL programme has been stimulated outside of the groupe

The ‘pull’ strategy set up in IE could certainly be a source of inspiration for other MS. The stages involved in Irish mainstreaming are:

- To create awareness – through presentation of findings by the DPs to the Mainstreaming Policy Group;
- To get dialogue going between a DP and the potential mainstreamer – this occurs when the DP and the Mainstreaming Policy Group fully discusses the findings;
- To sell the outputs as relevant, useful and good for mainstreaming – further investment may be necessary to pilot or prove the findings and the Mainstreaming Policy Group has limited funds to support such an initiative;
- To create a champion within the implementing department or body.

A key mainstreaming event was held in March 2004, where the policymakers were brought to meet the DPs in thematic groups. Following the DP presentations and discussions, the policymakers met the Mainstreaming Policy Group separately to discuss their reactions to the presentations. Then the Mainstreaming Policy Group met the DPs to discuss their reactions. A very useful and practical dialogue was begun.

As a result, most evaluators clearly note the importance to involve different partners at the policy level in the implementation of the mainstreaming strategy, although the mechanisms for doing so usually remain unclear. However there are some concrete proposals:

- The SE evaluators urge to use the different partners in the Monitoring Committee actively as a channel for spread and mainstreaming. They represent together all the potential users for the results of EQUAL and they could be a useful and strong instrument for mainstreaming.
- The ES evaluators consider that mainstreaming cannot be left to the goodwill of a few interested actors and that there is a responsibility of public authorities to become more involved in the mainstreaming of EQUAL good practice. Since they often directly benefit from European funding (i.e. public money) their participation should be made compulsory.

Networks (national, regional and sector based) are clearly important tools of the mainstreaming strategy. They should be given more, and earlier, attention, whatever their role (whether they are only responsible for horizontal mainstreaming or for both horizontal and vertical mainstreaming). In most cases, networks have been considered an important and relevant mechanism for networking at regional and national level but also for supporting DP strategies. As we have seen, they can carry out the validation of good practices, act as communities of practice¹³¹ and promote the development of collective Action 3 projects with the objective to consolidate products and methodologies. Networks facilitated effective horizontal mainstreaming and can help with vertical mainstreaming. However, more guidance and support have to be provided to NTN to make them fully effective (support for the definition of clear objectives and methods; involvement of potential users). Only with such reinforced support could the main problems identified above be avoided. Moreover, the development of more regional or inter-regional networks would be important.

One more factor that can facilitate the implementation of mainstreaming strategy is an active involvement of programme actors (MA, NSS) in supporting DPs to anticipate and plan their mainstreaming actions both in Action 2 and in Action 3.

According to the FR Regional Support Structures interviewed by the evaluators, success factors for an optimal dissemination of EQUAL achievements include: a better collective visibility of the CIP at the regional level via events with the participation of institutional, social and economic actors, more mobilisation and training for DPs to help them to take dissemination better into account, finally enhanced support to DPs from MA and NSS at the national and a regional levels. This means that, in the future, NSSs should clearly be mandated for support to capitalisation and dissemination.

Supporting DPs in their elaboration of mainstreaming plans requires their prior understanding of the concept. Overall, support and guidance to DPs have to be given mainly in understanding the concept of mainstreaming, in how a practice can be mainstreamed and in the elaboration and implementation of a mainstreaming plan.

8.3.4.2. Facilitating factors at DP level

Some evaluators (in particular in IE and UKgb) provided a list of success factors at DPs level.

The IE evaluators have found that the critical success factors that generate success in mainstreaming are:

¹³¹ This concept refers to the process of social learning which takes place when people bearing a common interest collaborate to share ideas and develop innovative solutions.

1. A focus on the development of a physical product.
2. A generally small DP where a good working partnership has developed, with appropriately senior representatives from all the partners playing a proactive role in the development and delivery of the project.
3. Sufficient capacity within the potential mainstreaming policy organisations to take part in project development phases and facilitate the mainstreaming of an idea or product.
4. A number of key, committed individuals driving the project.
5. A high level of promotion of the initial project at both local and national level.
6. The understanding of potential mainstreaming impacts at the outset of the project, in order that activity can be focused throughout on achieving those impacts.

According to the UK_{GB} evaluators, DPs that have been most successful at mainstreaming have been those with high policy ambitions. Some DPs have developed innovative tools with a wide mainstreaming potential but this potential could be undermined because their focus has been on developing the tools as opposed to thinking strategically (in other words, they have focused on the technical/creative as opposed to the marketing/commercial dimension).

In other evaluations reports, some interesting proposals have been made:

- To open DPs to new partners in Action 3, particularly to partners with the required skills and contacts (communication, lobbying) is very interesting¹³² as we know that one of the obstacles for DPs to make a proposal for Action 3 has been the decreasing intensity of partnership. This opening-up to new partners seems to have taken place only in UK_{GB}. It could be relevant to make a more in-depth assessment of the benefits/limits of such an approach.
- To nominate a person responsible for the mainstreaming strategy and plan, in the same way as DPs have a transnationality co-ordinator.

Three national evaluations reports (ES, FR, SE) pointed out that one of the facilitating factors for mainstreaming at DP level is to anticipate very early the question of dissemination. This means that the assessment of good practice and capitalisation should take place already during Action 2. As a result, the FR evaluators recommended introducing capitalisation as an important activity of Action 2. In SE, the evaluators recommend that DPs allocated resources for dissemination and mainstreaming throughout their project duration and not only during the last months.

8.3.5. Changes in R 2

The 2nd communication has usefully re-asserted prior guidelines on networking and mainstreaming, and has made them more specific. In particular:

- The process of sharing information and exploiting the results of innovation, and the importance to set up thematic networks to achieve this, is re-affirmed. According to the new guidelines, '*activities at national level may include :*
 - *presenting and promoting the evidence for good practices*
 - *validation of the innovation*
 - *benchmarking innovation against existing approaches nationally and in other MS*
 - *dissemination of the innovation to additional actors concerned with the discrimination tackled*
 - *demonstration and transfer of good practice including mentoring*'
- More guidance is provided for mainstreaming, especially into the ESF programmes at national and sub-national levels :

¹³² See also chapter 4 (partnership).

- provide, at least once a year, a joint forum for the members of the Monitoring Committees of the structural found programmes (particularly objective 3), with the members of Monitoring Committees of EQUAL
- consider repeating annually the successful ESF seminars
- continue the thematic networks which have been established to mainstream results from EQUAL at local, regional, national and European level
- provide specific information in their national action plan on employment and on social inclusion on how the results of EQUAL have been mainstreamed

As a result, a greater emphasis has been put on mainstreaming in most Member States. Some evaluators have already reported on some of the changes made.

- In the UK_{GB}, the main change has been, according to the evaluators, towards having looser, less organised structures. For example, NTN have moved towards organising cross thematic events but on a less regular basis than the ones organised for R1. Despite their looser configuration, the rationale has been to enable all DPs (from both rounds and all themes) to share transversal practice and operational lessons.
- In NL, the MA has evaluated the functioning of the NTNs and decided to continue with them. In a policy document by the MA it is stressed that the networking function of the NTNs should be reinforced. That is why new members (non EQUAL) will be appointed, reflecting the network for which project results can and will be relevant (in some cases the Organisation of Dutch Municipalities or the Educational Ministry, in other cases the Unions). The selection of new members is mainly based on the experiences with R1 results. All NTN-members have 'adopted' one or a few projects with which they will have a closer communication from the start and throughout R2. This allows NTN-members to get a proper view of what is going on in the projects and spread the results in their own networks. NTNs will also guide projects with respect to dissemination and mainstreaming. According to the MA, Now that the NTNs are working 'full swing' they are also supposed to act more pro-actively.
- The DK evaluators find that the right understanding of the concept of mainstreaming has become more widespread since the mid-term evaluation and that mainstreaming has received considerably more focus. This is partly because the projects have gained experience that can now be mainstreamed, partly because the MA has put considerably higher priority on the mainstreaming initiatives. As the MA and NSS tried to involve more programme MC members in mainstreaming, this group examined which type of knowledge/experience is interested in, after which project knowledge and experience are grouped according to the themes raised by the MC.
- While the NTN had been bypassed in R1 in UK_{ni}, the dynamics has changed in R2 according to the evaluator: its role became more established and it proved more effective. It is argued that 'the role of the NTN has been reinigorated'. The need for this was clearly highlighted as a recommendation in the second interim evaluation (end 2004). As a first step, a number of members of the NTN from government departments were represented on the project selection panel that assessed the applications for the second call. The inclusion of a representative from the private sector has also increased networking opportunities and the potential to gain feedback from employers' organisations. This was also recommended in the second interim evaluation report, i.e. the need for greater levels of involvement with the private sector in the EQUAL programme. In addition, the early engagement between the R2 DP and the NTN has provided important learning and interaction opportunities.
- On the contrary, in FR, the choice has so far been made not to re-launch NTN activities for R2. The evaluators were surprised by this choice, since they had concluded to the effectiveness of the main NTNs in R1.

8.4. CONCLUSIONS

Networking mechanisms

National Thematic Networks (NTNs) have been set up in all Member States (except LU) in R1. NTNs have been the main tools for organising exchanges between DPs and have generally worked well in that respect, to the point that they sometimes transformed into 'communities of practices'.

Nevertheless, the intensity of networking has been varied from one MS to the other and NTN have sometimes suffered from inadequate resources and a lack of clarity in their role. There has been little regional networking, yet when it has been organised, it has been quite effective, including for mainstreaming purposes.

Identification and validation of good practice

This task has mainly been under the responsibility of NTNs, with the support of NSSs and of experts in most cases. The identification of good practice took place through specific questionnaires to DPs, visits, meetings and reports. Some NTNs and experts used the criteria produced by the European Thematic Groups. Validation has often taken place through peer review, especially when the NTNs were in charge. However this has not been an easy process and clear criteria and methodological instruments have been found to be lacking, both for identification and for validation, even though the material collected has been significant.

Dissemination and mainstreaming activities at DP level

Dissemination activities have been diversified at DP level. However they have been hampered by the difficulties faced by DPs in explaining and demonstrating what they do. In addition, there seems to have been some confusion between mainstreaming and dissemination, although this result may be due in part to the national evaluators' methodological instruments for assessing mainstreaming. There has been a general lack of programme guidance and support to DPs with their mainstreaming strategy.

Effectiveness of mainstreaming

Horizontal mainstreaming has been more effective than vertical mainstreaming, both at DP and programme level. At DP level, internal transfers between DP actors, as well as between some DP members and TN partners have taken place, whereas mainstreaming towards the policy community has been more limited. Similarly, at programme level, the National Thematic Networks have played an important role to ensure the transfer of know-how and exchange between participants, the development of common products, active communities of practices, etc. They have faced more difficulties for the mobilisation of policy actors.

The most critical aspect of mainstreaming so far has been the implementation of mechanisms for vertical mainstreaming. Specific mechanisms for vertical mainstreaming have only been set up in a few MS so far. On the other hand, it could be argued that vertical mainstreaming is quite a new way of envisaging policy making, and on which knowledge and practical know-how is still lacking. It is difficult, for example, to identify the 'right' policy makers and to identify the 'right' moment at which they should be contacted.

Mainstreaming has been more effective at the local and regional levels than at the national level in most cases, thanks to the inclusion of local and regional policy actors in the DPs, and, in some cases, to the development of regional networks. However it could also be that DPs more easily identify local or regional impacts than national ones.

Added value

Overall the contribution of the mainstreaming principle to the added value of the programme has so far been limited: in the words of national evaluators, 'most EQUAL achievements remain in the EQUAL Community', 'networking and mainstreaming have worked well inside EQUAL but had little impact outside'.

However important progress has been made since the Mid-term reviews and, following the Commission's second communication on EQUAL, the mainstreaming principle has received considerably more attention in most Member States in R2. As indicated in the European Mainstreaming Guide, 'transfer and incorporation of innovative results into policies and practice is not an automatic process and takes time'.

9. EFFECTIVENESS OF NETWORKING, DISSEMINATION AND MAINSTREAMING AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL

9.1. EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the EU-wide evaluation of EU-level networking and mainstreaming arrangements is to analyse the effectiveness of these arrangements and their capacity to contribute to the identification and take up of good practice, especially in the framework of the European Employment Strategy and of the Social Inclusion Process, with a view to make recommendations for future EU-level mainstreaming activities in future programmes.

More specifically, the **terms of reference** of the EU-wide evaluation require:

- An analysis of the facilitation of co-operation between National Authorities and the Commission, and of direct co-operation between National Authorities;
- The identification and effectiveness assessment of thematic «reviews» (ETGs), taking into account differences between themes;
- An assessment of the usefulness of European networking to those involved in EQUAL;
- An assessment of the relevance of EU networking for informing non EQUAL players;
- An assessment of the involvement of new Member States;
- An assessment of the added-value of Commission supported networks;
- An assessment of the influence of transnational work on national policy;
- Recommendations as to « which good practice should be taken on board in the EES and fight against exclusion and discrimination »;
- An assessment of the extent to which European mainstreaming has taken place (particularly into ESF) and
- Recommendations for future mainstreaming activities.

Over the years 2 strands of networking, dissemination and mainstreaming have developed at the EU level, with 2 distinct types of contribution (though of course sometimes with overlaps): **thematic** networking and networking on **principles**. In other words, EU-level contributions of EQUAL were organised in 2 areas: **content** and the very **architecture** of the programme.

2005 has very much been a transition year, in which a substantial overhaul of EU mechanisms of networking has taken place within the 2 strands of activity indicated above. This restructuring took place for several reasons:

- The full participation of the 10 New Member States in EQUAL;
- The launch of the 2nd call;
- The closer preparation of the ESF programming phase 2007-2013; as well as
- Internal changes in the European Commission Unit (B4)¹³³.

In addition, the continuous reflexive process¹³⁴ engaged by the main programme actors about the instruments in place had also pointed out to areas for improvement in the way in which EU networking had been organised so far.

¹³³ In particular, the arrival of a new Head of Unit. Since the beginning of the initiative, there have been, as far as we are aware, 4 successive Heads of Unit, with a period of vacuum in 2002.

¹³⁴ For example, thematic experts were asked at the end of 2004 to provide their views for an ‘assessment of current organisational and procedural arrangements for thematic work at EU level’.

Whilst existing mechanisms were partly re-scaled, wholly new mechanisms were also designed, both short term and for the rest of the life of the Community Initiative. Thus, although this is a final report, it would be premature to form final assessments of the mechanisms set up and their effects: in many cases we can only talk of preliminary results and potential effectiveness. However, the lessons derived from our assessment of former instruments can inform the current process as well as the organisation of networking and mainstreaming in future programmes.

For this chapter, we have relied on the following **sources**:

- Observation of thematic events: the Warsaw conference, the Madrid policy forum on gender equality and the Paris Agora on age management;
- A survey of 'non-EQUAL' participants to the Madrid policy forum (response rate 38%);
- Interviews and exchanges with members of the EQUAL Unit, including the Head of Unit ;
- 11 phone interviews with European Commission officials (other units of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, and other DGs);
- A survey with the EQUAL Managing Authorities of the new Member States on the use of European networking for the implementation of the key principles (response rate 90%);
- A survey with the ESF Managing Authorities on the mainstreaming of the EQUAL principles in the next ESF programming phase (response rate 52%);
- Observation of the two workshops for the preparation of the next ESF programming phase (8.12.2005 on innovation and transnationality, and 19.1.2006 on partnership and empowerment, and gender mainstreaming);
- Participant observation in the evaluation conference and seminar of 22-23.2.2006; and
- An extensive documentary review (documents presented and discussed in the meetings of Managing Authorities, policy briefs, success stories, web articles, background documents prepared by European Thematic Group experts, policy documents of other units and DGs).

In this chapter, the former and new networking and mainstreaming instruments are reviewed, first with regard to **thematic networking and mainstreaming** (section 9.2), and secondly with regard to the facilitation of **implementation and mainstreaming of the principles** (section 9.3). In each of these two subsections, we also review and map out the good practice collected at the European level, especially in terms of its relevance for the new European Employment Strategy, the streamlined Inclusion process and/or for the next programming phase of the European Social Fund¹³⁵. We also provide an analysis of the extent to which and how European level good practice was taken up. Conclusions are provided in section 9.4.

9.2. EUROPEAN THEMATIC NETWORKING AND MAINSTREAMING

9.2.1. Organisational structure of thematic networking until mid-2005

Until the end of 2004, and with a prolongation in the first semester of 2005, European thematic work has mainly been organised in the framework of European Thematic Groups (ETGs), with the following structure¹³⁶:

- Steering Group: Lead Member States (MS), Commission, European thematic experts;
- Liaison Group: Thematic representatives of all MS who comment on the SG proposals and link to the National Thematic Networks;
- Working Groups: Liaison Group members, DPs, TCPs, Social partners, NGOs, experts to identify, disseminate and mainstream good practices.

¹³⁵ However the full analysis of the contributions to the Employment Guidelines is presented in Annex 9.4.

¹³⁶ Source: EQUAL Unit power point presentation of Mainstreaming in EQUAL

As pointed out in our 2nd interim report, their focus changed over time, so that they at first played an important role as platform of exchange and ‘voice’ for DPs and TCPs at the European level (2003), whilst in 2004, the priority became ‘to validate the good practice from R1 in co-operation with the Member States, and to synthesise these into policy messages to present to the Conference that would take place in November 2004 in Warsaw’¹³⁷.

The events analysed below, the Warsaw Conference, the Madrid Policy Forum on gender equality, and the Paris ‘Agora’ on age management, were designed in this context.

The new structure for European Thematic work adopted in the meeting of Managing Authorities of 30/06/2005 is meant to address all of these successively adopted objectives – exchange, ‘voice’, validation of good practice and policy transfer. We analyse it in a separate section (see 9.2.3).

9.2.2. Implementation, results and lessons of European mainstreaming events

9.2.2.1. The Warsaw conference

The Warsaw Conference, ‘*Free Movement of Good Ideas*’, was intended as a forum for the presentation of policy messages derived from the EQUAL experience and finally took place on 25-26 February 2005. All ETGs were actively involved in the preparation of the event. This included the preparation of 9 thematic workshops and the finalisation of 21 policy briefs (available in English, French and German).

According to the report on the conference presented on the EQUAL website, the conference gathered almost 400 participants.

Our estimate of the share of **participants** not directly involved in EQUAL (i.e. being neither a Managing Authority, NSS, a DP or representing DPs) is about **35%**. As far as we could judge from the list, the institutional/organisational belonging of these ‘non-EQUAL participants’ was quite varied.

At Member State level, there has been a good representation, although not across all MS as is natural, of the social partners and of other ministries than the ones directly overseeing the implementation of ESF in their countries. There was some representation of institutions such as the employment services or national training agencies, and of NGOs or para-public organisations dealing with entrepreneurship, the integration of migrants corporate social responsibility, gender equality bodies etc.

In addition there has been a good representation of EU-level institutions (Council of Europe, Economic and Social Committee, European Parliament), of the European social partners (including European Trade Union Confederation – ETUC, EUROCOMMERCE, European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest – CEEP) as well as a representation of EU federations of NGOs (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, European Anti-Poverty Network) and other European federations such as CECOP or the European Association for the Education of Adults.

The Commission had asked MS to nominate 75% of the participants (stakeholders and policy makers). The Commission itself identified representatives at the EU level (institutions, lobbies, social partners, NGOs), partly through the ETGs and with the help of the thematic experts. The final selection of participants was made by the EQUAL Unit.

¹³⁷ Source: Document HoM-04/017.

The **format** of the conference included plenary sessions, as well as workshop sessions, in which panels allowed ‘advocates’ of the DPs to present their initiatives to potential ‘users’, who were then invited to discuss the relevance of these initiatives and results for their policies. Advocates were, in principle, partners who could use the products or results of the DPs, rather than the promoters themselves, which could facilitate the dialogue with the potential ‘users’. This organisation seems directly relevant for mainstreaming, even though our 2nd interim report highlighted the risk of having DP stakeholders who might not be involved in the day to day life of the DPs, which indeed proved to be a problem in some cases (see below). Nonetheless, this was a coherent choice with regard to the aim of the conference.

The conference certainly achieved two of its implicit aims, which were to give **visibility** to EQUAL, and to **disseminate** lessons. As for mainstreaming, the conference has to be located into a stream of events, which had started with some ETG-based conferences in 2004, were pursued in 2005, and will expand in 2006-7. It would be far-fetched to assess the contribution to mainstreaming of the conference in isolation, especially given its size. It is likely that awareness of the programme was raised, and some of the participants have been or will be invited to other events, so that exposure to EQUAL results can lead to capitalisation over time.

We did not carry out any specific assessment of the event, except by taking part and interviewing participants. However, the EQUAL Unit provided us with tables organising the data of the returned evaluation sheets. 126 sheets were returned (31%), although not all sheets contained responses to all questions. The main results of this necessarily limited **assessment** exercise are highlighted below:

- *70% of respondents were satisfied* with the overall results of the Conference, in the sense that they thought that it had met their expectations and objectives (N= 93).
- *The relevance of the plenary sessions was assessed as high* by 77% (N=101) of respondents (first day, policy speeches) and by 71% (N=84) of respondents on the 2nd day (round table on good governance in inclusive labour market policies);
- *The relevance of the workshop sessions was assessed in a more variable way*, depending on the workshops: between 62% (Entrepreneurial ladders, N=47) and 86% (Minorities take their place, N=42). *The absence of a specific workshop dedicated to the social economy was regretted*, all the more so that substantial work had been done by the European Thematic Group 2 on this, based on the also substantial number of DPs working on the promotion and upgrading of the social economy;
- *Facilitation and moderators* were assessed both in a severe (e.g. only 35% positive opinions, N=42) and in a highly positive way (81% positive opinions, N=36), depending on the workshops, but it is unclear whether what was assessed was the role of moderators or their performance, or both, as the evaluation sheet does not provide for these distinctions. We observed that their role and place could vary quite a lot depending on the role of the chair person.
- *Policy briefs* were also diversely assessed, although the bracket is more reduced – between 57% of positive opinions (N=44) for the policy briefs of the workshop on entrepreneurial ladders and 75% of positive opinions (N=32) for the policy briefs of the workshop on ‘Holding a job, having a life’.

As for the **advocate-user methodology**, it was largely approved of, by 78% of respondents (N=98). However many participants, in their comments, directly or indirectly observed that the method had not fully worked in practice, due to too crowded workshops, the high number of panellists, the fact that advocates in some cases were not well chosen, the lack of concretion and the prevalent consensual mood which seemed to impede a critical, more provocative debate. These views were partly shared by the members of the EQUAL Unit and experts attending the Conference, and led to changes in the organisation, for example, of the Madrid policy forum, which maintained the advocate/user methodology, but sought to change the conditions of implementation, even though, as will be seen below, some of the criticism persisted.

The Conference took place in a particular climate, as **it was to some extent marked by the knowledge that EQUAL will not be pursued in the next ESF phase** and by the difficult negotiations on the financial perspectives for the European Commission budget, more particularly for the European Social Fund. European-level organisations openly expressed their regrets and criticism

over the decision of ending the Initiative, as emerged in the last roundtable session. The Director responsible for Directorate B of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities asserted that ‘There is nothing in the new regulation proposed by the Commission that stops us from continuing the principles, the type of activity or the co-financing of projects, using ESF funding in the future, that we are doing today with EQUAL. It is now up to the Member States to show what they want by proposing how to take it forward’¹³⁸. But precisely the possibility for Member States to decide ‘à la carte’ on the scope for innovation, partnership, and even more for transnationality, represents a dramatic break with the past generations of Community Initiatives, and participants involved in EQUAL or supporting it showed an acute awareness of this.

9.2.2.2. The Paris AGORA on Age Management

The European event on Age Management, Agora 2005 – ‘Experience is Capital’, was held in Paris on 23-24 June 2005. The event was prepared by a steering committee involving representatives of the FR Ministry for Employment, Social cohesion and Housing; of the European Commission (EQUAL Unit and Human Resources Unit); of the FR NSS, RACINE; of the FR Agency for the improvement of working conditions (ANACT); and of the consultancy providing the thematic expertise for ETG 3. In addition, 8 Member State representatives (from BE, FR, DE, ES, FI, GR, IE, PL and PT) were involved in the preparation of the event through a ‘co-ordination committee’.

The AGORA was especially striking for its **size** and its **mode of organisation** (see box below).

Although we did not carry out any specific assessment of the event with participants, it was obvious for us as participants that the event was extremely successful, in that participants ‘played the game’. The evaluation carried out by the organisers, through the usual distribution of evaluation sheets at the end of the event, gave rise to 110 responses, 70 from participants and 40 from speakers (response rate: about 18%).

92% of those responding valued the ‘concept’ (methodology of organisation) of the AGORA as satisfactory or very satisfactory¹³⁹. European Commission officials not involved in EQUAL but invited to the AGORA saw it in this light as well, praised the format and were able to learn much about specific innovations¹⁴⁰. We ignore the longer term consequences of the event, and whether it has triggered opportunities for real mainstreaming to take place: as in Warsaw, the sheer size of it (600 participants, from 25 Member States) would rather characterise it as a **dissemination and networking** than as a mainstreaming event. This also shows in the evaluations by participants – for 49% of respondents, the main contribution of the event has been ‘the possibility of encounters and exchanges’¹⁴¹. It cannot be doubted, however, that it took place in a stream of events and policy communications, in FR and in Europe, which have **contributed to raising the issue of ‘age management’ at the top of the employment policy agenda**. In this respect, **it is surprising that only one further EQUAL event has been planned so far on this issue** (see next section), put forward by SE DPs (exchange event foreseen in June 2007).

The organisation of the AGORA on Age Management (Paris, 23-25. June 2005) was based on an original and innovative concept, consisting of:

¹³⁸ Source: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/activities/20050225-warsaw-conf2_en.cfm.

¹³⁹ Source: RACINE (2005): ‘L’expérience est capitale’. *Le Bulletin* 69-70. P. 59.

¹⁴⁰ Source: interviews with European Commission officials.

¹⁴¹ Ditto.

- A large ‘arena’, allowing to gather all participants together at some points of the event: in the opening session, dedicated to a short theatre play (*‘sel, poivre et compétences’*), which was particularly well assessed by participants, followed by others moments such as ‘the HR club of ESSEC’ (one the most important French ‘grandes écoles’), ‘the philosophers’ coffee-place’ (also very well assessed), the media ‘plateau’ (with interviews of people from the media – less successful with participants), and the final session with the French Labour Minister;
- A ‘grand place’ where people could discuss, have coffee or lunch;
- Around this ‘grand place’, exhibition stands presenting EQUAL projects;
- 4 thematic spaces – one dedicated to ‘enterprises’, one to ‘territories’, one to ‘individuals’ and one to ‘institutional actors’: in each of these spaces, 3 types of events were proposed : fora with the presentation of concrete experiences and debates (each forum could gather about 40 participants); counselling points in which experts could explain how to use specific tools and methods (for audiences of about 15 participants); and meeting places for project-based and institutional actors.
- A fifth ‘thematic space’ was dedicated to health at work;
- A library, with relevant videos, books and documents.

Before the AGORA, documents on experiences and tools developed within EQUAL were sent to participants, and more documentation became available during the event (e.g. MS documents on policies developed, documents presenting EQUAL projects). A total of 40 EQUAL projects were presented. Many documents can be down-loaded from the website www.equal-france.com¹⁴².

This mode of organisation left a lot of room for discussion and debates, with different size of groups depending of the type of session (individual discussion, 10 to 15 persons in the counselling points, 40 persons in the fora, 600 persons in the arena): this created dynamism and steered active participation.

9.2.2.3. The Madrid Policy Forum ‘Gender Equality: a key to change’

We chose to carry out a more in-depth assessment of one event, and selected the **Madrid policy forum on gender equality** (9-10. June 2005), especially because its more modest size allowed us to conduct a qualitative survey of participants. In what follows we review the main objectives and organisational aspects of the policy forum, before turning to the analysis of participants’ survey responses concerning, especially, expectations and outcomes. The full analysis of the event is provided in Annex 9.1 (Volume 4).

The main **objectives** of the event were to:

- Favour the debate and mutual understanding between policy makers and practitioners in the field,
- Publicise the EQUAL results and
- Explore the conditions for ‘vertical’ mainstreaming.

In terms of **organisation**, it has to be stressed that policy fora are very time consuming events, both for the Commission and for the host Member State. The joint mobilisation of the Commission (ETG co-ordinators), of the experts, and of the ETG lead Member States was required. In addition, each Managing Authority has to provide a minimum effort for targeting the appropriate participants.

One of the crucial tasks in the preparation of the conference was the **definition of potential participants**.

The ETG4 Steering Committee had decided in January that each MS would be invited to select 5 to 8 ‘high level participants’ outside of EQUAL, including: the NAP co-ordinator, an ESF representative, and representatives of employment policies authorities, education & training, social partner

¹⁴² However it should be noted that the link to the internet address provided in the special Bulletin referred to above (www.travail.gouv.fr/fse/agora) is out of date.

organisation & gender equality bodies & NGOs¹⁴³. ES, as host country, would have 25 more participants. The total was targeted to be at about 270 participants. The initial idea was to target 'generalists', rather than people working directly on equal opportunities. However, this strategy had to be revised as many of the nominated participants were Equal Opportunities (EO) specialists. 'This meant to consider them as (potential) multipliers of EQUAL EO good practice and that the role of the event was to provide them with strategies and examples to apply in their own context (empowerment dimension)'¹⁴⁴. This turned out to be an adequate strategy.

The final participants list shows that there was a total of 156 'non-EQUAL' participants, 3 at the European level, and 153 spread across 26 CIPs (LU could not send any delegate): they thus represented **55%** of the total of participants, a much higher figure than in the case of the Warsaw conference.

A majority of countries sent more than 5 'non-EQUAL participants'¹⁴⁵. The categories targeted by the organisers of the conference have been well represented, except for ESF co-ordinators. It is particularly notable that **many NAP co-ordinators have attended**, as well as the **social partners**. We have counted at least 73 specialists in equal opportunities, i.e. **47%**.

The event **format and methodology** was similar to that of the Warsaw Conference of February 2005, but some lessons had been drawn and adjustments made (longer presentations of DP practices in the workshops, less presentations, longer workshop sessions, different communities of users for different workshops etc.).

Our **assessment** of the event is based on our observation and interviews with participants during the event, as well as on a questionnaire sent to non-EQUAL participants as defined above, as we considered them as potential users or disseminators. We sent the questionnaire in July 2005, with a reminder in September 2005, to 167 persons, on the basis of the list of contacts provided by the co-ordinators of the event. A majority of respondents sent their answers back in September 2005, which meant that they had taken some distance from the event, and could make a provisional assessment of the lessons they had derived from it. We received 93 responses in 2 waves (July – end September), but only 60 were fit for analysis¹⁴⁶. The rate of relevant responses is thus 60/156, i.e. **38%**. Amongst these, 20 responses came from participants who had some link with EQUAL (see footnote above for the choices made by some countries). 32 of the respondents had direct responsibilities in EO issues, which represents 53% of respondents. As for the type of institutions/organisations which have responded, their distribution follows more or less closely the general distribution of non-EQUAL participants, although it should be noted that some participants wear various 'hats'.

¹⁴³ Source: Minutes of ETG 4 Steering Committee meeting, January 2005.

¹⁴⁴ Source: Minutes of the Steering Committee, February 2005.

¹⁴⁵ However, the mention 'non EQUAL participant' is not completely right: Managing Authorities and NSS representatives as well as EQUAL DPs are excluded from this calculation, but, for example, the Netherlands decided to send NTN co-ordinators as 'high-level' participants, because in the NL, NTN co-ordinators have relevant policy functions. Several countries also sent as non-EQUAL participants members of the EQUAL monitoring committees, who have many other responsibilities and can be relevant for vertical mainstreaming. Finally EQUAL DPs count with 'strategic' partners or partners on their board, which are institutions which may be mobilised for mainstreaming but are not involved in the operations of the DPs: some of them were sent as non-EQUAL participants. In addition to NL, AT, BEnl, and DK seemed to opt for sending delegations mostly constituted of people having some form of link with EQUAL.

¹⁴⁶ 16 were automatic messages indicating wrong emails; 6 persons answered that they did not attend the event; 11 corresponded to people who were in fact directly involved in EQUAL: either as Managing Authority or as DP. This led us to reduce the list of 'non-EQUAL participants' provided by the organisers and to arrive at the final list of 156, as mentioned above.

Participants' expectations

Almost all respondents were invited/asked to take part through direct contact by the Managing Authority or other actors involved in the preparation of the event. In addition to being officially invited, however, a majority of respondents attended the conference out of curiosity for other European contexts and practices, with a learning perspective. This expectation concerning learning often went together with a will to network.

However there were also more focused expectations, more directly linked to horizontal and vertical mainstreaming, which are not incompatible with the wider aspirations just mentioned. About 11 respondents, including some NAP co-ordinators, said that they viewed the conference as directly relevant for their jobs, their current tasks, and/or for their organisation: in the case of policy makers, there were explicit expectations that '*EQUAL could be a potential source for policy change*', that the conference '*was relevant for the current policy process*' in which they were involved, and that they could '*take up interesting practices*'.

Outcomes

Although a few respondents just mentioned 'information' as the main outcome of the conference, many respondents got much more out of it: 'ideas', 'inspiration', new 'tools', which directly led to changes or adjustments in their practices or to new projects, were in the process of doing so or had the potential to do so. Outcomes therefore seem to have often largely outweighed expectations.

The communication campaign of the NL DP on gender roles (*Men taking the lead* presented on the last day in the plenary session), and, to a lesser extent, the IE model of work-life balance and the territorial approaches to gendered time, presented in a workshop, seem to have been particularly inspiring. But more generally the experiences presented in the workshops and the contacts between participants generated reflection and ideas.

More concretely, these 'new ideas' gave rise to:

- On-going or planned direct transfer to individual organisations, e.g. the planned take up of an IE 'job-sharing' scheme by a CY-based group of companies;
- Take up of practices (e.g. territorial time agencies) by institutions and organisations acting as multipliers, in view of further dissemination and transfers;
- Direct contribution to – or sources of inspiration for – on-going policy making or negotiation processes (e.g. tools for promoting women's participation in the labour market were found directly useful by a representative of the EE Labour Market department, benchmarking for new childcare arrangements in BEfrg);

Some of these policy making processes have led/ are leading to the direct reproduction of experiences carried out elsewhere.

Thus the advisers of the Cabinet of the BEnl Minister of Equal Opportunities, who were part of the Flemish delegation in the conference, were very interested in the concept of the NL campaign on gender roles ('Wie doet wat?') and contacted the NL promoter: this led to the decision to launch a similar communication campaign in BEnl, in 2007, coinciding with the year of equal opportunities¹⁴⁷.

About 8 to 10 other respondents said they were using or planning to use the results of the conference when drafting policy documents.

¹⁴⁷ Source: direct communication of the promoters of the BEnl campaign to one of the EQUAL Unit co-ordinators of the Madrid event.

In some cases the conference provided the first contacts and steps leading to more sustained contacts and collaboration in view of the possible transfer and take up of models.

All this constitutes a fairly impressive mosaic of results, of direct relevance for the advancement of gender mainstreaming and the 'work/life balance' agenda. It also shows that this type of events can constitute **a step in the horizontal and vertical mainstreaming** of EQUAL results. In this respect, the small size of the workshops and the rather long presentation of projects were probably major factors.

However it is also true that there have been some 'frustrations', and that in any case, the direct contribution to mainstreaming could be improved. It is encouraging to note that quite a lot of respondents reflected on this and made concrete suggestions.

First, there was a general call for even smaller workshops and the promotion of the active participation of those present.

Some respondents also reflected on the gap between the objectives of the conference, which they had clearly identified as mainstreaming, and the fact that project presentations were very much about the implementation and results of local experiences, rather than on the obstacles and favouring factors for transfer and take up by policy makers. This confirms our observation of one of the workshops, in which the participants in a policy function tended to ask to DPs how they would continue their action, whilst DPs tended to ask policy makers what they could do to generalise their approaches: nobody, therefore, seemed to take responsibility for ensuring transfer, as each group of participants viewed it as the responsibility of the other group.

In this respect, it seems to us that there is sometimes a need for an intermediate level between the project and policy levels. Identifying precise policy demands, as well as carrying out an analysis of the feasibility of transferring existing solutions to address these demands, could be the role of intermediaries such as the thematic experts of the European Thematic Groups, provided this is not a means for indefinitely postponing the involvement of policy makers. Indeed this was both the intention of the policy briefs and of the advocate/user methodology. Precisely, the quality of the policy briefs and their usefulness was often highlighted by respondents. This policy demand drive could be reinforced, for example by identifying the concerns and questions of future participants (users), constructing workshop sessions starting from that basis or, as one respondent put it, by organising 'policy consultancy sessions' (cf. the 'counselling points' of the AGORA forum). However it is also probably true that participants' demands become more focused as they become more exposed to practices in other countries.

It was suggested that it would also have been useful to try and invite actors who were reluctant or faced difficulties in implementing equality and gender mainstreaming, so as to discuss obstacles in a concrete way. This, in a way, echoes some of the criticism made to the Warsaw conference, but also the initial intentions of the organisers, to invite generalists not necessarily won over to gender mainstreaming: however in practice it seems that Managing Authorities found it difficult to convince such people to take part (although some of the respondents in a policy-making position do seem to have been little exposed to these issues before the conference). Despite the difficulties, it would be good to try and maintain such targets, at least for part of the invited participants, as this would be a crucial contribution to discussing mainstreaming and its obstacles.

There was a wish for continuity, in the understanding that a series of actions, on the longer-term, was likely to contribute to the transfer and policy take-up of initiatives. The idea is to locate this type of events in a stream of activities on a few focused issues. To some extent this may be achieved, depending on who is invited as participant, through the organisation of the further events (the Tallinn conference in April 2006 and the 'Community of practice' to be organised in ES at the end of 2006). We come back to this below, when we discuss the new format of European thematic work.

On the networking front, as said, many respondents had said that one of their expectations from the conference was to make new contacts. This has indeed largely happened, but it has to be said that the wide majority of respondents mention that they have made new contacts or reinforced existing contacts in their own delegation or with the delegations of neighbour countries, or countries with which there has traditionally been a lot of exchange¹⁴⁸.

Such a trend is of course very difficult to combat. It is possible, though, that smaller working groups and an active role of moderators to favour cross-national exchange could help. The methodology of asking potential ‘users’ of a different nationality than the DP advocates to make questions to DPs at the panellist table could have been thought to facilitate this cross-national exchange. But we are dealing with very ingrained attitudes.

Conclusions

The main lessons which can be derived from the analysis of these three events are that it will be important in the future to:

- Move from visibility events to more in-depth thematic events, with small workshops allowing for more active participation;
- Continue to rely on expertise and intermediation roles between promoters and policy makers and even reinforce the role of expertise – especially as far as the analysis of transferability of innovation is concerned;
- Ensure continuity between related events, e.g. by inviting in part the same participants, drafting conclusions, circulating them to participants and building upon them in the following event etc.

9.2.3. New framework and instruments for mainstreaming

9.2.3.1. Overview of the new organisational framework for European networking and mainstreaming

In 2005, the Commission issued new proposals for a streamlined mainstreaming strategy and mechanisms at the EU level, which were validated in the meeting of Managing Authorities of 30/6/2005. The structure and focus of the ETGs was changed in line with this new approach.

From 2005, the main idea is that ‘Member States, supported by the Commission, will organise mainstreaming activities at EU-level in the context of a single framework for action and support. This framework should facilitate establishing and operating platforms of common interests to valorise experience and draw lessons from the initial years of implementation of EQUAL, with particular reference to the EQUAL principles and/or themes’¹⁴⁹.

These platforms would support:

- ‘horizontal mainstreaming – being the transfer of results to, and their use by, organisations at the same level in several Member States, through sharing of experience and expertise at EU level; and

¹⁴⁸ Thus 12 respondents only mention contacts in their own delegation. 11 respondents mention, in addition, contacts with the delegation of one other country (for example BEnl/NL, CY/GR, PL/LT). It is also to be noted that NAP co-ordinators seem to have reinforced contacts between them. Only 4 respondents mention wider contacts. The rest responded in a vaguer way to the question, or said that they had not made any contact.

¹⁴⁹ Source: Co-ordination meeting of the EQUAL Managing Authorities - 30/06/2005 - Item 5 - MA-05/017: ‘Mainstreaming at EU Level - Work Programme for 2005’.

- vertical mainstreaming – being the transfer to, and integration into, policies and general practice, including at EU level’ (ditto).

The functions to be implemented through these common platforms were defined as ‘*sharing* relevant issues, agendas and actions, as well as results, on projects, pilots and new approaches; *validating and assessing* results and achievements, on the basis of common criteria, ...; *learning* between programme managers and practitioners from within and/or outside EQUAL, ...; *networking* for sharing knowledge with a wider professional community...; *transferring* good practice, and the lessons learnt on new ways of policy delivery...’(ditto).

The 5 different types of platforms, through which different mixes of the above functions could be implemented, are the following:

1. *Exchange Events*, bringing together Development Partnerships, national thematic networks and other stakeholders involved in EQUAL in the development and testing of innovative good practice, with the aim of sharing good practice and results around a specific issue or theme;
2. *Peer Reviews*, bringing together advocates of EQUAL good practice and their peers from other Member States as potential users, with the objective of gaining a more comprehensive and mutual understanding of good practices validated under EQUAL and to support a systematic transfer of expertise and experience to the next programming period of the ESF;
3. *Learning Seminars*, bringing together programme managers and support services, with the aim of sharing tools and methods, as well as good practice in applying the leading principles of EQUAL;
4. *Networks/Communities of Practice* for knowledge sharing, bringing together programme managers and practitioners from within and/or outside EQUAL, involved in validating, disseminating and transferring innovative tools and methods – their main objective is to strengthen the institutional capacity and the efficiency of public administrations with a view to good governance of inclusive labour market policies;
5. *Policy Fora*, bringing together policy makers and interested parties outside the circle of EQUAL stakeholders, and presenting to them the benefits of the innovative solutions tested under EQUAL, in order to gain their confidence in the feasibility, effectiveness and efficiency of these innovations (ditto).

The criteria for the allocation of financial support by the European Commission to such platforms included the following:

1. *Transnational character*: ‘declarations of intent from representatives of at least 2 other Managing Authorities to collaborate in organising the platform’; and ‘the platform to involve participation from at least 6 additional countries (including at least one from a new Member State)’;
2. *Duration*: between 12 and 18 months;
3. *Open and mainstreaming oriented character*: ‘participation to include representatives of potential users not previously involved in EQUAL’;
4. *Co-ordination and cross-platform consistency*: ‘synergy with complementary platforms to be ensured (consistency in the methodology, common participants, mutual reinforcement)’;
5. *Demonstrated interest and relevance*: ‘demonstrated interest in the issue over a period of time, combined with the wish to engage in a more advanced level of activity; opportunity for developing synergies with national activities validated as particularly promising within the scope of EQUAL and ESF’;
6. *Demonstrated capacity*: ‘current commitment in joint Commission/Member State working groups, particularly if already experienced as lead Member State; capacity to mobilise competence and experience in the field of the proposed platform; co-financing capabilities; quality assurance system in place; organised co-operation with other transnational platforms’.

On the basis of our assessments of 2005 events, and especially of the Madrid Policy Forum, the **relevance of the above mentioned criteria** for the allocation of financial support can hardly be underrated. In particular:

- Criterion 3, which puts forward the need for the participation of non EQUAL participants, is a crucial pre-condition not only for mainstreaming, but for discussing and casting a critical light on the EQUAL practices, and overcoming the tendency for EQUAL, which has sometimes been pointed out by national evaluators, to form a closed community (for reasons which do not necessarily depend on EQUAL actors). However it is true as well that there may sometimes be a

need for prior elaboration and synthesis of results within the EQUAL community, before engaging in dissemination. The current framework makes it more difficult to allow for this to happen for R2 DPs, except if events on a certain theme are 'chained' (criterion 4).

- Criterion 4, co-ordination and cross-platform consistency, appears to us to be extremely important and one which can really constitute the added value of a European approach to networking and mainstreaming. The previous work carried out by the ETGs, the constitution of a body of thematic expertise by thematic experts, and within the EQUAL Unit, provides a certain guarantee that events build upon past work. However this criterion is also a stimulus for Member States to carry on forming working or steering groups on specific issues and build a multi-targets and multi-focus networking and mainstreaming strategy over time. The assessments made by the participants in the Madrid policy forum show their awareness of the need for continuity and capitalisation: this is the only way out of mere dissemination and visibility events and into mechanisms of influence;
- Criteria 5 and 6 reinforce this stimulus for Member States to join and form on-going groups on specific issues of interest to them. It seems correct to emphasise capacity issues, both in terms of experience and in terms of organisation, given the amount of resources, in particular human resources, required by this type of events.

These precautions are therefore very welcome and the strict following of these criteria should provide the basis for avoiding the 'race for events' which the grant system could give rise to. Nevertheless, it is evident that such a risk would be harder to avoid if the previous work carried out by ETGs, especially by ETG experts, ETG co-ordinators, ETG steering groups and in some cases DP working groups had not existed. Whereas there had been many problems for the identification and validation of good practice, which we had analysed in our 2nd Interim Report, the analyses of DP and TCP workplans across all Member States, the background documents, the dossiers prepared by the DPs and the experts, have formed a backbone to later thematic activity which should not be undervalued, in fact, which appears as essential.

9.2.3.2. Results so far

A **first restricted call for proposals** was issued on 25 October 2005 (VP/2005/0025). The deadline for the submission of applications was 15 November 2005 for operations starting no later than 31 December 2005.

Only the EE Managing Authority took advantage of this first call, for the organisation of a seminar on 'Reconciling work and family life by needs tailored services of care'. Its proposal was accepted and the seminar took place at the beginning of April 2006.

A **second restricted call** was launched on 19 January 2006 (VP/2006/007). The deadline for the submission of applications is 15 November 2006 for operations starting no later than 31 December 2006. Managing Authorities have to ensure a minimum of 10% of co-funding. The total funding available for 2006 is 6 million Euros, which means that between 20 and 40 events could be funded.

Results

So far a total of 30 expressions of interest have thus been put forward, which falls within the Commission's objectives (see table below).

Table 9.2 – Networking and mainstreaming platforms proposed by the Member States and the Commission, as of March 2006¹⁵⁰.

	Theme of platform	Type of platform indicated	Indicative date
PL	Adaptability of firms and workers / restructuring (especially new MS)	Peer review	Autumn 2006
Commission	Restructuring	Policy Forum	2007? (*)
SE	Age Management - 'Seniors in change' (but not organised by MA; will be org. by DP)	Exchange event	17, 18 and 19 June 2007
GR	Asylum seekers	Exchange event	1 and 2 June 2006
SE	Asylum seekers	Policy Forum	8-10 November 2006
FR	Diversity - Combating racism and xenophobia in the workplace	Exchange event and Network	September 2007
SE	Diversity - Legal systems to aid in fight against discrimination	Peer review	1st semester 2007
ES	Diversity - Integration of immigrants (to be confirmed)	? (*)	End 2006
UKni	Diversity - Involvement of employers for disadvantage workers	Exchange event	13 June 2007
UKni	Diversity - Involvement of employers for disadvantage workers	Policy Forum	November 2007
NL	Business Creation	Exchange event	30 and 31 March 2006: DONE
BEnl	Business Creation	Community of practice	2006
DE	Business Creation	Policy Forum	Spring 2007
ES	EO- Equal opportunities support measures	Community of practice	End 2006
EE	EO- Reconciliation of work and family life	Exchange event	3 and 4 April 2006: DONE
SE	Human trafficking	Peer review or Exchange event	2007
SE	Media and discrimination	Learning Seminar	June 2006 + autumn 2006 + spring 2007? (*)
DE	Re-integration of ex-offenders	Exchange event	10/2005: DONE
PT	Re-integration of ex-offenders	Exchange event	22 and 23 May (to be confirmed)
UKgb	Re-integration of ex-offenders	Policy Forum and Network	November 2006
CZ	Roma	Policy Forum	November 2006
HU	Roma	Policy Forum	12 May 2006
FI	Roma	Exchange event	18-19 June 2006
PL	Social economy	Exchange event	10, 11 and 12 May 2006
FR	Social economy	Community of practice	September 2006
IT	Social economy	Learning seminar	4 and 5 December 2006
FI	Social economy	Learning seminar	February 2007
DE	Social economy	Policy Forum	Spring 2007
CY	To be decided but likely to be exchange event in Employability theme	Exchange event	2007
CZ	Evaluation	Evaluation network	2nd half 2006

Source: elaboration on the basis of the table provided on 29/03/2006 by the EQUAL Unit.

(*) The question marks are those of the European Commission table and correspond to events whose dates or format have not been fixed yet.

Member States concerned:

12 'old' and 4 'new' Member States had expressed interest by March 2006. SE made 5 proposals (with one directly put forward by DPs), DE 3 (again, one of the events was put forward by DPs working with ex offenders and already took place), and FI, FR, PL and ES, 2 proposals each. New Member States have thus so far been less numerous in putting forward their proposals, which seems logical given their more recent entry in the programme.

Themes:

¹⁵⁰ Several changes were introduced since then, but our analysis was carried out in March 2006.

Only one event has so far been put forward on 'horizontal' issues, the evaluation network proposed by CZ. No event has been proposed on the EQUAL principles, which can be understood, given the initiatives taken by the Commission for the mainstreaming of the EQUAL principles into the next ESF programming phase (see further below). However there seem to be needs of new Member States for support to implementation on some aspects of programme management and on the principles (see further below). It has to be said as well that an event on project planning took place in LT in October 2005.

Most events are thus thematic in outlook. In terms of theme coverage, the employability and business creation themes are targeted by a majority of proposals, although in quite different ways: the two large sub-themes of the entrepreneurship pillar (business creation and the social economy) are covered, whereas under the employability theme, the events are spread across five issues (diversity and discrimination; media and discrimination; ex offenders; the Roma and victims of human trafficking¹⁵¹) rather than employability as such. This can be related to the facts that a working group of ETG 1 has worked on media and discrimination since the beginning of ETG1, and that a steering group on ex offenders was formed in the last year on the basis of the bottom-up networking activity of DPs working with this target group in several Member States (see below). The issue of diversity has also federated ETG work since the beginning.

Comparatively with the weight of the theme in EQUAL, the lifelong learning and adaptability pillar attracts few proposals: 2 on restructuring, 1 of them being planned by the European Commission itself, and one on Age management, which is a proposal stemming from the SE DPs. In the Equal Opportunities pillar, it is interesting to note that ES has made a proposal for a community of practice, which is certainly a way to organise a follow-up of the policy forum which took place in Madrid in June 2005.

The uneven distribution of themes brings about a question on the capacity of ETGs and especially their EQUAL Unit co-ordinators and experts to support all events: in particular the resources of ETG1 (13 events) and to a lesser extent ETG2 (7 events) could be over-stretched.

However the administrative burden will normally be largely shifted to the Member States, if the procedure of 'framework contracts' with the Member States is validated. So far the EQUAL Unit has had a large share of the administrative burden, as each event gave rise to 5 or 6 contracts, some of which had to follow a public tender procedure.

Type of instruments

The predominance of exchange events (11, one of them in combination with a network) is to be noted, as their aim may be found to be rather vague (sharing of good practice). However, policy fora, more focused on mainstreaming, also form an important share of the events planned (8 of them, 1 in connection with a network). By contrast, peer reviews, learning seminars, networks and communities of practice attract less proposals.

What seems most relevant for making a policy impact is the combination of various types of events in a given theme or on a given issue, with a planned progression: as can be seen from the boxes below, this is for example the case for the re-integration of ex offenders and for 'entrepreneurship for all' (business creation). This is also likely to be the case for the equality of opportunities events (which, in addition, may take stock of the Madrid policy forum in 2005), the events focused on the social economy and the Roma, although less background work has so far taken place on this latter issue. The event planned on discrimination and the media will probably take stock of the work carried out by a working group established in ETG 1 in 2003-2004 and materialised in a policy brief. In the same vein, it would be helpful to relate the Age Management event in SE to the lessons derived from the AGORA

¹⁵¹ The two latter target groups were proposed in the 2nd EQUAL communication for a transversal approach, however they are addressed by ETG 1.

in France. In other cases, the events planned may serve to define further work on the issue: this at least, appears to be a pre-condition for effective mainstreaming to take place.

Planning progress in mainstreaming through related events also means inviting at least partly the same participants to these events. The analysis of the Madrid forum has shown that the careful targeting of participants is crucial for the success of the event, but this requires substantial efforts from Managing Authorities: it would be hardly thinkable to mobilise MAs for such targeting and contact work for little less than 30 events over 18 months.

Three examples, amongst others, can be provided here of the progressive constitution of European groups of stakeholders (practitioners, policy makers), whether concerning a specific target group or a broader field, which have organised over time and are taking advantage of these multiple types of events to develop further as what could be seen as mainstreaming platforms, and in any case, as '*forces de proposition*': the steering group and networks constituted on the issue of the re-integration of ex offenders¹⁵², the group working on entrepreneurship for all – one of the two branches of ETG 2, and the asylum seekers ETG.

On the basis of early identification in ETG 1 of the fact that a substantial number of EQUAL DPs and TCPs were working with ex offenders¹⁵³, a steering group was constituted in October 2005, under the impulse of the DE and UKgb Managing Authorities, to bring together representatives of other Managing Authorities (BEfrg, IT, PL, PT, UKni), as well as one of the ETG 1 thematic experts and the ETG 1 co-ordinator (EQUAL Unit). This group agreed on a programme of European co-operation to identify and validate the outcomes from DPs active in this field and to support the mainstreaming of their good practices.

A mainstreaming work programme was agreed, including:

- an Exchange Event in Portugal, in May 2006, involving all offender-focused DPs, to agree on a set of topics to be presented at a subsequent Policy Forum and to plan how their presentation would be developed;
- a Policy Forum in the UK, in November 2006, to confront policy makers with the good practices that are emerging from EQUAL and to engage their interest in taking some of these forward;
- the launch of a Network or a 'Community of Practice', in 2007, to ensure the continued transfer and the sustainability of relevant EQUAL outcomes¹⁵⁴.

Further organisational work took place in a transnational kick-off meeting, also in Berlin in October 2005, of the 4 DE DPs selected for EQUAL R2 and working in the field of prison work and reintegration, which actually turned out to be a major conference for federating EQUAL DPs, as well as representatives of the Ministries of Justice and other relevant departments. The conference, which gathered 200 participants, served, among other things, to test the relevance of the programme agreed in the steering group, and 'provided a major opportunity to explore new options for networking', on the basis of the experience of informal networking between DE and UKgb DPs. 'The UKgb and the NL have already launched National EQUAL Offender Networks (NEONs) in R2 and several other Member States are planning to establish similar networks. A proposal was made at the conference that these new NEONs should collaborate in a new transnational network in order to more effectively exploit European experience for their own work in their respective national contexts'¹⁵⁵. The formation of such 'NEONs', their transnational collaboration and the continuity agreed for the steering group can be regarded as a very solid basis indeed for maintaining updated knowledge of the policy agendas in the Member States, close contacts with relevant policy makers and ultimately for organising the mainstreaming of EQUAL practices and results.

¹⁵² Source: 'Innovative approaches to sustainable Reintegration of (ex-) offenders'. March 2006. Web article, EQUAL webpage.

¹⁵³ 45 DPs in R1, 65 in R2, in particular due to the strong interest for reintegration work in the New Member States where the prison population is proportionately very high as compared with the rest of Europe (7/10 have selected DPs working in that field). Also to be noted the fact that 14 TCPs have been formed on this issue in R2 (6 in R1). Source: 'EQUAL Development Partnerships and Transnational Partnerships working on the re-integration of ex offenders – Analysis of DP and TCA data contained in the ECDB – Overview tables' March 2006.

¹⁵⁴ Source: 'Innovative approaches to sustainable Reintegration of (ex-) offenders'. March 2006. Web article, EQUAL webpage.

¹⁵⁵ Ditto.

As recalled in a recent document prepared by the ETG 2 experts for the Amsterdam exchange event on 'Entrepreneurship for all' (30-31. March 2006)¹⁵⁶, work in this area has been substantial under EQUAL R1 and is likely to continue under EQUAL R2, not only due to the high number of DPs working in this area (132 DPs and 46 TCPs in R1; 151 DPs in R2), but also due to the federating work carried out by the ETG, under the auspices of the Managing Authorities for BENl and DE: a first conference 'Making entrepreneurship accessible to all' was held in London in June 2003, gathering 120 participants including DPs and policy makers; the formation of 3 European working groups, which met twice in 2003 and 2004; and of 8 National Thematic Networks. These events, groups and networks have led to the preparation of a body of documents, alongside the write-up of 3 policy briefs by the thematic experts in view of the Warsaw conference. European work has been resumed in the Amsterdam exchange event, in order to decide upon the course to be taken in the next years, during EQUAL and for ensuring sustainability and mainstreaming after EQUAL. This will be consolidated through the creation of a community of practice, under the responsibility of the BENl Managing Authority in 2006, and the holding of a policy forum in DE in Spring 2007. It is interesting to note that this constructive progress has been accompanied and supported by critical analysis and diagnosis by the thematic experts – pointing out for example the strength of EQUAL DPs in providing for integrated support to entrepreneurs, but also their weaknesses in 'pre-start' and 'downstream' work on creating a business culture and consolidating start-ups – which is welcome and should provide the basis as well for improving the quality of DPs' work and results in R2.

A meeting between the European Commission, the thematic experts of ETG5 and representatives from the GR and SE Managing Authorities (the latter being involved in the ETG5 steering group) took place in October 2005 in Brussels to consider and plan for asylum seeker mainstreaming events for 2006. As a result it was agreed that two events would be held: an exchange seminar in GR in June 2006 (focusing on employment and employer relations issues for asylum seekers) and a policy forum linked to the reception directive in Autumn 2006 in SE¹⁵⁷.

9.2.4. Other instruments

9.2.4.1. Collaboration with other units and DGs of the European Commission

As announced in the communication of 19.5.2005 of the Head of the EQUAL Unit to the Managing Authorities, the Commission also committed itself to 'continue to support the work of the EQUAL Unit in disseminating results to decision-makers and stakeholders at EU-level'¹⁵⁸.

Until 2005, contacts made with other parts of the European Commission depended on the European Thematic Groups. Some had involved other Commission experts and officials from the beginning: this was the case of an official from DG Justice Freedom and Security (JLS), who takes part in the meetings of the ETG 5 Steering Group. In other ETGs, contacts were more ad-hoc, for example there were contacts between ETG 1 and the Disability Unit of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. There have been and are contacts between ETG 3 and DG Education and Culture.

In Autumn 2005, the approach was changed and made more systematic. One specific member of the EQUAL Unit took responsibility for co-ordinating contacts, especially with other units of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. According to this member of the EQUAL Unit, 'we had to convince them that we could be at their service, adopt a 'client oriented' approach, use their existing structures.' A presentation was made at the beginning of September 2005, after several failed attempts, to the heads of policy units in the 'post Lisbon group' of the DG, which raised much interest, both according to our EQUAL respondent and according to the participants interviewed, but also revealed a lack of minimum knowledge about EQUAL in the DG. It was decided that each Unit would designate a fix contact to follow up EQUAL work. The EQUAL Unit member in charge then set up a

¹⁵⁶ Discussion document 'Building the tools for opening up entrepreneurship for all', Amsterdam 30-21. March 2006.

¹⁵⁷ Information provided by the EQUAL Unit member in charge of co-ordinating thematic work.

¹⁵⁸ This had been a recommendation of our 2nd Interim Report.

meeting with all contact points, and made two proposals of collaboration: (1) that they could participate in steering groups of events organised by Member States which corresponded to their current interests, and (2) that research resources (in particular the thematic experts) could be available for joint project work to be defined. Reactions to this initiative were – and are – very positive, as interviewed participants highlight that it is not frequent to have ‘internal training on the Commission’s financial instruments’. The approach taken to offer tailored support and collaboration was also welcomed, and to a certain extent, taken advantage of (see below), although progress is slow.

Overall, and over the years, these contacts have been put to use differently and have yielded different effects. Some of them served for the **co-ordination between units**.

Clearly this has been the case for the DG JLS official’s participation in the steering committee of ETG 5, for whom an important purpose of this collaboration was to secure the complementarity of two European Commission financial instruments: EQUAL and the European Refugee Fund (ERF) and to avoid overlaps. This was to be done by making sure that EQUAL DPs did focus on asylum seekers, and not on refugees and displaced persons, who are targets of the ERF, and on the other hand, that they focused on the social and vocational integration of asylum seekers, rather than on reception for example, which is a specific remit of ERF. In practice it seems that the message concerning targeting was not always heard at the national level, but guidance was provided for R2, especially to the new Member States¹⁵⁹. On the question of the scope activities, one of the distinctive features of EQUAL DPs has precisely been their capacity to address asylum seekers and asylum seekers issues in a ‘holistic way’, which means that reception activities were included as part of a pathway.

Another example of such co-ordination, though of a much less systematic character, is that which has taken place with the Unit in charge of Article 6 projects. Contacts with the EQUAL Unit took place from the beginning of EQUAL, mostly due to the interpersonal relationships between staff who had been involved jointly in the previous Community Initiatives. One of the outcomes of these contacts was, again, the co-ordination between financial instruments, so as to both avoid overlapping between projects and to inform EQUAL DPs of the possibilities to access Article 6 funding. For the former objective, EQUAL Unit staff members were involved in the Article 6 project selection committee¹⁶⁰. For the second objective, members of the Article 6 Unit were invited in several EQUAL events in which they informed R1 DPs about Article 6 funding: in effect several EQUAL DPs completing their EQUAL projects successfully applied for Article 6 funding, which was a way to give some continuity to and consolidate their innovative actions.

Finally, the interviewed members of the Unit on free movement of workers, themselves associated in the organisation of the European year on mobility, have been in contact with the EQUAL Unit since their designation as contact points. Whereas their Unit is essentially a juridical Unit, its participation in the year on mobility means that they have been party to the call for proposals organised for that occasion, and were planning, at the time of the interview, to set up a meeting with their EQUAL contact once the final list of projects would be ready, to exchange on possible joint initiatives with these projects and DPs, on the theme of occupational mobility, a theme which so far does not appear to have been capitalised in EQUAL, but where a large strand of DPs could indeed make a contribution.

Networking between the EQUAL Unit and other units of DG Employment has also led to members of the latter units playing a role of **intermediaries, for the dissemination of information on EQUAL to their own networks**.

This has been the case for quite some time now with the Unit for Equal Opportunities, with regular cross invitations to events. This has also been the case, more recently, with the Unit for Social Dialogue, Industrial Relations and Adaptation to Change, which holds regular meetings with the social partners and has informed them about EQUAL, especially about DPs in which social partners took part actively. The respondent also took part in the AGORA on age management in France (June 2005) and was able to report on this to his social partner

¹⁵⁹ A Learning Day for new Member States was held in Dublin on 2 April 2004, and a guidance document was published following this seminar, with a specific ‘Fact Sheet’ on collaboration with the European Refugee Fund.

¹⁶⁰ Similarly the Unit in charge of the Community Action Programmes against discrimination and exclusion sent the text of the calls for proposals to the EQUAL Unit for comments.

network. Collaboration between the two units is to move one step further with the participation of the Social Dialogue Unit to the organisation by the EQUAL Unit directly of an exchange seminar with the social partners on 30/5/2006 for the dissemination of the results of EQUAL DPs in which social partners were actively involved. Similarly, the EQUAL Unit is planning an event on restructuring, for the dissemination of the results of the DPs having worked in that field, in whose preparation the Article 6 Unit and the special adviser for restructuring of DG Employment are to be invited to take part. There are other examples of such collaboration for dissemination purposes¹⁶¹.

Collaboration has also happened for the **exchange on processes**, in particular on mechanisms for the **exploitation of results** (*'valorisation'* in French) and capitalisation.

This has particularly been the case with DG Education And Culture, where a specific Unit was created in 2000 for the promotion of dissemination and exploitation of results, at first in the LEONARDO programme, and later in all programmes and policies of the DG. From 2002 onwards it associated other DGs to this process, including DG Employment and the EQUAL Unit there. Members of the EQUAL Unit attended sessions of 'thematic monitoring' in which projects were invited to face 'potential users' (administrations, firms, chambers of commerce etc.). This may have fuelled or, at least, converges, with the advocate/user methodology used in Warsaw and Madrid. In November 2006, the Unit will organise a Conference on intercultural dialogue, targeted to 'multipliers', and in which 20 'models' will be selected out of 200 good practices. EQUAL is to provide some of these good practices. Other instruments include the launch of three calls for proposals for conferences of dissemination/exploitation of results, gathering promoters and users, planned impact evaluations of the obligation of exploitation of results made to promoters of DG EAC programmes from 2005 onwards, and a web-based search engine allowing policy makers to identify potential responses to their unmet policy needs. This latter tool might be an idea to take into account for the EQUAL repository of good practice currently being developed (see section below).

This networking between different units or DGs of the European Commission also led or is leading to opportunities of **substantive collaboration** and **direct inputs into policy making**.

A case of early relationship between EQUAL and other units/DGs is that of the link established in 2003-2004 between ETG 1 and the Unit for the 'integration of people with disabilities'. A member of that Unit was invited to comment on the document entitled 'Recognising ability', which she had many occasions to use. On the policy front, several key documents drafted in recent years have used illustrations provided in this guide: most importantly perhaps, the Commission paper advocating 'Disability Mainstreaming in the European Employment Strategy' (1/7/2005)¹⁶², where two EQUAL DPs (Access Ability, IE, and Added Value, SE) provide illustrations, amongst others, of how disability issues can be mainstreamed in the new EES guidelines. However, more joint work would have been, and would still be, useful, in our view, as there is a risk that disability issues become lost in the new formulation of the 'Integrated Guidelines', and that monitoring will be more difficult, whereas, as said in the document quoted above, the evaluation of 5 years of the EES showed that active measures had been taken but remained 'inconclusive' with regard to employment for people with disabilities. The experience of EQUAL DPs working with people with disabilities could inform the monitoring of this mainstreaming strategy, and particularly contribute not only good practice in terms of mainstreaming, but also point out the obstacles in implementation.

Substantive collaboration has also taken place with JLS, on asylum seekers issues. There is the possibility for EQUAL to contribute to facilitate the implementation of the Council Directive 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003 laying down 'minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers', which was to be transposed in Member

¹⁶¹ A member of the Article 6 Unit also attended AGORA, where she made a presentation of Article 6 funding, and where she also learnt about DP projects which seemed highly relevant for Article 6 projects working on similar issues: she thus put in contact project actors with each other. The Unit for anti-discrimination and civil society, of DG Employment and Social Affairs, was contacted by the EQUAL Unit as part of the networking effort of Autumn 2005. There have also been informal contacts with specific EQUAL Unit members, which were to lead to a joint dissemination effort: the EQUAL newsletter could be disseminated in the Unit's networks, whilst the Unit's 'e-mail alert' could be disseminated to the EQUAL Unit and perhaps more widely, however nothing has happened so far. We can also note here the participation of EQUAL in the European wide conference 'Demographic Challenges - Family needs Partnership', which was organised in February 2006 (under the Austrian Presidency), by the Demography Unit.

¹⁶² EMPL/A/AK D(2005). EMCO/11/290605.

State legislation before February 2005. Article 11 of the Directive foresees that Member States should agree a period (not over 1 year) after which asylum seekers should be allowed to have access to the labour market. Of the Member States which have effectively transposed the Directive so far, only FI and ES offer unrestricted access to the labour market (respectively after 3 and 6 months)¹⁶³. The ES evaluator showed that the unique Asylum Seekers DP in ES had directly contributed to this legislative development. Precisely two EU level Asylum Seeker events are planned for 2006, led by GR and SE, addressing respectively employment relations, and the links between EQUAL and the Reception Procedure¹⁶⁴. The work carried out by EQUAL DPs on access to employment and relationships with employers can provide useful practical ideas for the implementation of the Directive, of course once it is transposed.

The more systematic contact network established in the last quarter of 2005 with units of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities led to a sustained collaboration with the Demography Unit: in addition to the already mentioned representation of EQUAL in the February 2006 conference held in Vienna on demographic challenges, the contribution of the EQUAL Unit was required for the preparation of the follow-up of the Green Paper 'Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations': in particular the Demography Unit is keen to receive policy briefs or other such analytical documents, which analyse a stock of EQUAL experience rather than single cases, on three issues addressed in EQUAL – active ageing, reconciliation and migration/integration.

In principle, a very important link to develop is the link with the Policy Unit in charge of the Employment Strategy. The network of contact points in DG Employment has served to make the Unit more aware of EQUAL as one potential source of inspiration amongst many others – and this potential is used as needs emerge, e.g. on the issue of the integration of immigrants in the labour market, or on youth employment. According to the Unit respondent, policy syntheses, such as the policy briefs, are likely to be more useful, in that perspective, than single DP experiences (such as the success stories). However, the Employment Strategy guidelines themselves have been fixed for three years (2005-2008) and no revision process is taking place at the moment. The new National Reform Programmes are drafted at a very general policy level which leaves less room than the former NAPs to put forward good practice stemming from ESF. Nonetheless it may be regretted that the prevailing vision at the EU policy level is that EQUAL DPs should implement the European Employment Strategy, rather than together form a laboratory which could feed into its review. The monitoring and innovation potentials of EQUAL DPs appear to be largely lost at that level: the link with employment policies, though difficult as well, is more direct at the local, regional, and sometimes national levels.

It has to be noted that the EQUAL Unit has also been invited to take part in the work of the recently created High Level Group on minorities.

Overall two kinds of collaborations can be distinguished: with units in charge of other programmes and financial instruments, collaboration has mainly tended towards the co-ordination between programmes, e.g. through participation in selection committees, cross-information to selected DPs and projects etc. Some of the respondents in charge of these programmes complained that the increase of financial management tasks more and more prevented collaboration on substantive issues. With the policy units, more direct contribution by EQUAL has been identified in the case of focused units (e.g. disability, demography) than in the case of general policies such as the Employment Strategy: in any case the sources of information for drafting policy orientations are manifold and EQUAL can only be expected to make an impact there when a substantial synthesis work has been done (such as that done in the policy briefs). With these limits in mind, the efforts recently made by the EQUAL Unit for a more systematic cross-Unit communication have been greatly appreciated.

¹⁶³ Source: 'Mainstreaming: tips and tricks' 22/02/2006. ETG 5 section of the EQUAL webpage.

¹⁶⁴ Source: 'News' page of EQUAL webpage. 'EQUAL Asylum Seeker theme: Who is in for the Second Round?' February 2006.

9.2.4.2. European repository of transferable good practice and other instruments

Another instrument was proposed by the European Commission in the meeting of Managing Authorities of 24/01/2006 and raised interest: a European repository of transferable good practice, and especially of tangible products, which would take stock of the experience, in particular, of the UKgb and PT EQUAL programmes.

The objectives of this ‘repository’, as presented in that meeting, are to:

- ‘Contribute to European mainstreaming;
- Allow for transnational exchanges and dissemination of transferable products;
- Ensure sustainability after EQUAL; and
- Provide good practices for the future ESF programmes¹⁶⁵.

The database, which will be ready by the end of 2006, will be limited in size (no more than 300 products across the 27 CIPs), and will include good practice of the national databases: a mechanism has to be designed for deciding which good practice is worth transferring to the European level – beyond the necessary representation of Member States and themes, it may be thought that the policy briefs may form an adequate first basis for identifying the themes and types of innovations most relevant for current policy developments at EU level. In truth, in order to locate this good practice in its wider context, the links of the products with the policy briefs and other policy background documents may be considered relevant. As said above, it would be important to liaise with DG EAC on their own search engine, to identify ideas for the structuring of the repository or even organise links between the two, e.g. in the field of lifelong learning.

It should also be noted that an EQUAL Newsletter has started to be disseminated in February 2006. ‘EQUAL in Europe’ is sent to all actors - decision-makers, experts, contractors, research workers, social partners, ... - who are associated, closely or by far, with the EQUAL programme or with its networks.

9.2.5. European level good practice and its relevance for the Employment Strategy and the Inclusion Process

In this section, we map out the ‘good practice’ produced by EQUAL and collected at the EU level according to the Employment guidelines and Social Inclusion objectives. Part of this exercise had already been carried out in the 2nd Interim Report, but the mapping had been against the previous EES guidelines. Given the extension of this exercise, we limit this mapping to a table (see table 9.3 below) summarising the main EQUAL contributions: the full analysis of the contributions per Guideline and objective can be found in Annex 9.4.

Both the European Employment Strategy and the Social Inclusion Process were considerably reformed in 2005 and 2006, through two successive and inter-related ‘streamlining processes’:

- In February 2005, the European Commission made a proposal for a ‘revamp of the Lisbon strategy to focus on delivering stronger, lasting growth and more and better jobs’. As indicated in the DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities website, this led to a complete revision of the EES, the guidelines of which will from now on be presented in conjunction with the macroeconomic and microeconomic guidelines and for a period of three years. This new process has been in practice from July 2005, with the approval by the European Council of the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs. These guidelines now form the basis for the Community Lisbon

¹⁶⁵ Source: Commission slide show.

Programme and the national reform programmes, which replace the National Action Plans for Employment.

- A communication ('Working together, working better: A new framework for the open co-ordination of social protection and inclusion policies in the European Union' – COM(2005)706), adopted in December 2005, set out the Commission's proposals to create from Autumn 2006 a streamlined framework for further development of the Open Method of Co-ordination for social protection and social inclusion, aiming at creating a more visible OMC with a heightened focus on policy implementation, which would 'interact positively with the revised Lisbon Strategy, while simplifying reporting and expanding opportunities for policy exchange'¹⁶⁶. In March 2006, the European Council adopted the new framework for the social protection and social inclusion process and a new set of common objectives – three overarching objectives and objectives for each of the three policy areas of social inclusion, pensions and health and long-term care.

Our examination of the EQUAL good practice collected and disseminated at the European level is thus geared towards those new guidelines and objectives to which EQUAL has made a contribution: amongst the Integrated Guidelines, this applies to Guidelines 18 to 24, with the exception of Guideline 22 ('Ensure employment-friendly labour cost developments and wage-setting mechanisms') which concerns more the design of legislation and collective agreements, and where contributions by EQUAL tend to be more indirect. Guideline 17 is so to speak an overarching guideline, whose provisions are taken up and developed in the other Guidelines. Although not belonging to the Employment Guidelines, Guideline 15 is also relevant insofar as it caters for the promotion of an entrepreneurial culture – an objective which had been previously a pillar of the European Employment Strategy and which only appears in an indirect way in the current Employment Guidelines.

Amongst the inclusion objectives, objective (f) concerning the promotion of mechanisms of co-ordination between stakeholders of inclusion policies is probably the one for which EQUAL has made a distinctive contribution.

One of the functions of the European Thematic Groups had been the **collection and validation of good practice** in view of their further dissemination and mainstreaming. Until the end of 2004, as said in our 2nd Interim Report, gathering evidence of good practice often proved a difficult exercise, as DPs had not completed their activities, and as National Thematic Networks had often only started their own collection and analysis of good practice. In reality, the main method adopted to gather evidence was through questionnaires sent out to the DPs put forward, for example, by Liaison Group members or directly identified by the experts on the basis of their mapping of DPs. In addition the conferences and workshops organised with DPs sometimes provided further material. Thus the difficulties of gathering and checking evidence were partially offset, in some ETGs and working groups, by the intensity of collective work, which enabled DPs, together with the experts, to construct messages based on a collective experience rather than on individual DP results.

Validation of good practice, according to reliability of the evidence provided and policy relevance, lacked the appropriate mechanisms, as Liaison Groups faced many difficulties in carrying out this validation function. However the work carried out by thematic experts for the identification of policy issues and their mapping of DPs according to these issues again partially offset these difficulties¹⁶⁷. So that 21 'policy briefs', presenting policy challenges and developments as well as EQUAL solutions – either based on single DP results or on a transversal analysis of the results of various DPs across various Member States – could be prepared and validated for the Warsaw conference. A further 4 policy briefs had been prepared by the experts of the Asylum Seekers ETG and were eventually

¹⁶⁶ DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities website.

¹⁶⁷ We made some suggestions for improvement of the policy briefs in our 2nd interim report. However the policy briefs had been completed and were not revised.

validated, and a further 4 policy briefs were prepared by the experts of the ETG on Equal Opportunities, in view, in particular, of the Madrid policy forum on gender equality (June 2005). The full list of Policy Briefs available to date is available in Annex 9.2¹⁶⁸.

Since then, no more policy briefs have been prepared, as it was thought that some time should pass before new policy developments should be addressed, and the focus of expert work turned to the identification of ‘success stories’. However it may be thought that success stories serve more a dissemination purpose than a pro-active mainstreaming strategy, which was the purpose of the policy briefs. In that sense it would be useful if at least part of these success stories were related to relevant policy briefs through ‘hyperlinks’ on the EQUAL webpage.

30 such ‘stories’ relating individual EQUAL DP experience and results were available on the EQUAL webpage at the time of writing (March 2006), both in a short and long versions¹⁶⁹. Further success stories are to be gathered by thematic experts in 2006, amongst R2 DPs. The success stories are meant to exemplify good practice, not only in terms of contents and results but also with regard to the implementation of the EQUAL principles. Indeed they show how the architecture of EQUAL and its requirements have helped reach DP results. The success stories stem from all ‘old’ EQUAL programmes except LU, with a more important representation of AT and UKgb DPs (4 each). The full list of success stories available at this stage is presented in Annex 9.3.

‘Success story’ DPs were put forward by the Managing Authorities on the basis of their (or the NSS’s) everyday knowledge of DPs and by the thematic experts, on the basis of their mapping of DPs in each theme and of their subsequent field visits. The EQUAL Unit thematic co-ordinators then proceeded to an informal rating of the cases and to a final selection, taking into account criteria of thematic and geographical spread. There were no predefined and agreed quality criteria, except that, as said, the DPs chosen should be examples of good implementation of at least one EQUAL principle, in addition to being in a capacity to show results. It may be thought anyway that, at this stage of the programme, MAs, NSSs and thematic experts have a good knowledge of the programme and are indeed well placed to put forward examples of ‘good practice’. It is worth noting that some of these cases were also highlighted by the national evaluators (see Chapter 5 – Innovation – and Chapter 10 – Impacts and added value).

Nevertheless it should also be pointed out that there is a gap in the assessment of the contribution of EQUAL results to the programme objectives and to the EES and Inclusion guidelines and objectives, between the overall impression stemming from reading the policy briefs and success stories, on the one hand, and the impacts identified so far by national evaluators, on the other hand. This is mainly due to the fact that there is still a lack of assessment of the *proven* capacity of the EQUAL ‘new practices’ and products to trigger sustainable changes ultimately impacting labour market discrimination and inequalities.

The table below maps out the contribution of EQUAL to the EES guidelines and Inclusion objectives, as presented in the policy briefs, success stories and background documents prepared by the thematic experts at the EU level.

¹⁶⁸ All policy briefs are available on the website and in paper form, in French, English and German.

¹⁶⁹ The short version is available in French, English and German, whilst the longer version is available in English.

Table 9.3 – Mapping of EQUAL contributions to the Integrated Guidelines and Inclusion objectives

Guideline or objective	Specific measures	EQUAL contributions
Guideline 15: Promote a more entrepreneurial culture and create a supportive environment for SMEs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved access to finance, - Strengthening economic incentives, - Strengthening the innovative potential of SMEs, - Providing relevant support services. 	<p>Making existing provision, both of finance and of support services, more inclusive, through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Products and tools for the creation of the culture and conditions for entrepreneurship; - Products and tools for integrated business for all; - Products and tools for appropriate finance; and - Products and tools for consolidating and ensuring sustainability
Guideline 18: Promote a lifecycle approach to work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building employment pathways for young people and reducing youth unemployment, - Resolute action to increase female participation and reduce gender gaps in employment, unemployment and pay, - Better reconciliation of work and private life, and the provision of adequate and affordable childcare facilities and care of other dependants, - Support for active ageing, - Modern social protection systems... so as to support participation and better retention in employment and longer working lives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrated approaches for the reduction of occupational segregation and gender mainstreaming - Development of services for the care of dependants through the integration or reintegration of long-term unemployed and inactive women, and paying attention to the recognition of qualifications, the quality of the jobs created, the flexibility of the services, and their sustainability. - Approaches for challenging gender roles - Approaches for promoting older workers as experienced workers (e.g. intergenerational learning)
Guideline 19: Ensure inclusive labour markets, enhance work attractiveness, and make work pay for job-seekers, including disadvantaged people and inactive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Active and preventive labour market measures, including early identification of needs, jobsearch assistance, guidance and training as part of personalised action plans, provision of necessary support services to support the inclusion of those furthest away from the labour market and contribute to the eradication of poverty, - Continual review of incentives and disincentives resulting from the tax and benefit systems... - Development of new sources of jobs in services for individuals and businesses, notably at the local level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actions targeting the causes of discrimination and the labour market integration of discriminated groups (including asylum seekers, members of ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, prisoners and ex offenders) e.g. through the involvement of employers. - Introduction of empowerment approaches in labour market integration agencies, including public employment services. - Creation and professionalisation of social economy enterprises working with and for people at a disadvantage on the labour market.
Guideline 20: Improve matching of labour market needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Modernisation and strengthening of labour market institutions, - Removing obstacles to mobility, - Better anticipation of skills needs, - Appropriate management of economic migration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approaches for developing more inclusive labour market institutions, especially through the promotion of multi-institutional and multi-disciplinary partnerships. - Working with employers on more adjusted definitions of skill requirements and recruitment procedures, coaching and training of long-term unemployed.

Guideline 21: Promote flexibility combined with employment security and reduce labour market segmentation, having due regard to the role of social partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The adaptation of employment legislation... - Addressing the issue of undeclared work, - Better anticipation and positive management of change, including economic restructuring, ... so as to minimise their social costs and facilitate adaptation, - The promotion and dissemination of innovative and adaptable forms of work organisation... - The support for transitions in occupational status. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrated approaches for the combination of flexibility and security at the level of territories (e.g. time agencies). - Promotion with employers of employee-driven flexibility (work-life balance). - Promotion of strategic partnerships for anticipating and tackling industrial restructuring, defining new job profiles and re-training workers.
Guideline 23: Expand and improve investment in human capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclusive education and training policies and action to facilitate significantly access to initial vocational, secondary, and higher education, including apprenticeships and entrepreneurship training, - Significantly reducing the number of early school leavers, - Efficient lifelong learning strategies open to all... especially for the low skilled and older workers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Involvement of social partners, especially unions, in the promotion and organisation of lifelong learning (e.g. through network of 'Learning representatives' in firms). - Opening entrepreneur careers to all, including through training for the management of social enterprises. - Design of lifelong learning strategies at the local and regional levels.
Guideline 24: Adapt education and training systems in response to new competence requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Raising and ensuring the attractiveness, openness and quality standards of education and training... - Easing and diversifying access for all to education and training... - Responding to new occupational needs, key competences and future skills requirements... 	<p>Approaches for making learning more inclusive including purposeful use of ICT, extension and institutionalisation of validation of prior learning.</p>
Inclusion process	<p>Promote... a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by ensuring ... (f) that social inclusion policies are well-coordinated and involve all levels of government and relevant actors, including people experiencing poverty, that they are efficient and effective and mainstreamed into all relevant public policies, including economic, budgetary, education and training policies and structural fund (notably ESF) programmes.</p>	<p>Promotion of local multi-stakeholder partnerships to tackle not only employment issues but also the underpinning attitudes and behaviours of employers leading to the discrimination of employees or jobseekers.</p>

9.3 FACILITATION OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE KEY PRINCIPLES AND MAINSTREAMING

9.3.1. European and cross-national facilitation of the implementation of the EQUAL principles and of the EQUAL programmes

The EU-level organisation for facilitating the implementation of the key principles of the initiative included, until 2005, two main mechanisms:

- 'Horizontal groups' gathering the European Commission, volunteering Member States, and working sometimes with the help of experts, and
- 'Learning seminars', organised/supported by the horizontal groups, usually hosted and co-organised by a Managing Authority, and in which all Member States were invited.

In addition, some new Member States organised the provision of technical assistance on a bilateral basis for the implementation of systems and procedures (Other cross-national platforms, between 'old' Member States also exist and were mentioned in our 2nd Interim Report).

We first provide a brief description of the main EU-level and cross-national activities aiming at the facilitation of the implementation of the programmes at national level. We then provide an assessment based on an e-mail survey carried out with the Managing Authorities of the new Member States.

9.3.1.1. Activities in 2005

The main objective of the **horizontal groups** had been to favour the exchange of good practice in the **implementation** of EQUAL (and, especially, the translation of the EQUAL principles into practice) and, for 2004, to facilitate implementation in the new Member States, notably through the production of guides.

The activities of the main active groups in 2005 have been as follows¹⁷⁰:

Transnationality group

The Transnationality Group, which had been in existence since 2001 and included AT, DE, ES, FR, FI, IT, PL¹⁷¹, SE, UKgb and the European Commission, had an important role to play in order to ensure support to Managing Authorities for the implementation of the 'transnationality window' in EQUAL R2.

- *A group of national co-ordinators was established.* These co-ordinators acted as national contact points on all aspects of partner search and find activities (distribution of the guides

¹⁷⁰ After the publication of the Guide, there was no further meeting of the Gender Mainstreaming group although the EQUAL Unit maintained bilateral contacts for a follow-up of implementation. The Partnership Group lasted only until March 2005, as it was thought that the 2 projects it had planned to carry out (Develop a screening tool for potential ESF partnerships and a Guide for ESF Managing authorities on how to organise when working with partnerships) could be taken up within the new framework of 'platforms' organised by Member States. Following on from the October 2004 Bratislava Learning Seminar, a new group on Evaluation was planned. The meeting of Managing Authorities of 27.10.2005 confirmed the relevance of joint activities on monitoring and evaluation in 2006-8, and a further step was made with the organisation of an Evaluation Seminar on 23-24. February 2006.

¹⁷¹ Since Summer 2004.

- in national languages, handling requests for information, collecting and sharing national experience and problems ,etc). Two meetings of these co-ordinators were organised in Brussels at the beginning and at the end of the ‘transnationality window’ (February/June).
- *A training seminar on ETCIM* was organised on January 27 in Brussels to ensure that all skills and tools were in place for establishing concluding and approving Transnational Cooperation Agreements between DPs.
 - *A ‘clearing house’ was organised in Prague* at the end of April 2005. Its aim was to support Member States in identifying transnational partners for their ‘orphan’ DPs. The event was hosted by the Czech Managing Authority and gathered almost all Member States. Although most DPs had found their transnational partners by that time more than 130 DPs still needed this assistance so they could conclude transnational co-operation agreements before the transnationality window was closed. Only one of over 130 DPs tackled during the meeting could not be provided with suggestions of potentially suitable partners¹⁷².

Additional language versions of the transnationality guide were produced¹⁷³ and the NSS/MA Handbook for transnational co-operation was finalised.

Some members of the group have reconvened in the group for the mainstreaming of the principle of transnationality into ESF (see below).

Mainstreaming Group

The Mainstreaming Group, which was created later, included FR, GR, IE, PT, SE and UKgb as well as the European Commission. Its purpose, for 2005, was to:

- Organise a Learning Seminar on Mainstreaming, which was hosted by the IE Managing Authority and took place in Dublin in April 2005;
- Finalise the Mainstreaming Guide (Publication on the EQUAL website in September 2005).

The group has now been disbanded, as its chief objective was the production of the guide. However a new ad-hoc group on innovation and mainstreaming has been set up for the mainstreaming of these principles into ESF (see below).

Planning group

A new group was established on Planning, monitoring and evaluation of partnerships, on the aftermath of the June 2004 Vilnius seminar. This group can be considered as an outcome of the previous sub-group of the Partnership group dedicated to the implementation of the Project Cycle Management approach in EQUAL. The overarching objective of the new group was wider: ‘to increase institutional capacity to manage and evaluate EU projects and programmes in order to contribute to the best possible use of EU funding in current and future programmes’¹⁷⁴.

Its objectives for 2005 were the following¹⁷⁵:

¹⁷² Source: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/news/20050429-prague-transnat_en.cfm

¹⁷³ The guide is now available in 17 languages.

¹⁷⁴ Source: Co-ordination meeting of the EQUAL Managing Authorities 24/01/2005, Item 6, MA-05/010. ‘EQUAL European horizontal work. Report for 2004 and outlook for 2005’.

¹⁷⁵ Source: minutes of Rome meeting, 11-12 April 2005.

- To support ESF programme designers for the incorporation of PCM (Project Cycle Management) in to the core programme documents and programme implementers are to set up detailed PCM implementation system in their Member States’;
- ‘Monitor use of PCM guide through action-learning’;
- ‘Provide examples of added value by applying the principle’;
- ‘Mainstream developed /validated tools and methodologies’.

It included BEfrg, BEnl, HU, IT, LT, LV, PL, SE and the European Commission as active members; and CZ, DE, IE as associate or interested members.

Its main activities were to:

- Organise an ESF seminar on ‘Exchanging experiences in sound planning’, hosted by the LT Managing Authority in Vilnius, on 17-18/11/2005;
- Develop and finalise a Partnership Development Toolkit (October 2005) as well as a Partnership development toolkit ‘card’; and
- To carry out a ‘Synthesis report of self-evaluations on planning approach’ (Report on use of Development Partnership toolkit by DPs in several countries), which was finalised in November 2005.

Learning seminars, prepared by the Horizontal Groups together with host Member States, counted with the participation of Managing Authorities and National Support Structures of all or most Member States. Learning seminars are ‘platforms for the regular communication’ between NSS and MAs, aiming at facilitating the exchange of good practice in the implementation of EQUAL at the national level, especially with a view to sharing a common vision of the administration of R2 and to facilitate the entry of the NMS into the initiative. In 2004-2005, these included:

Table 9.4 – Learning seminars - overview

Issue	Preparation by	Date	Host	Venue
Organising Transnational cooperation between DPs	Transnationality Group; ES (host)	03-04 March 2004	MA of Spain	Barcelona
Organising the call for proposals for the second round	EU Commission <i>(initially planned by Czech Republic)</i>	29-30 March 2004	EU Commission	Brussels <i>(initially planned in Prague)</i>
Planning, establishing, managing, monitoring and assessing DPs	Partnership Group; LT (host)	03 –04 June 2004	MA of Lithuania	Vilnius
Gender mainstreaming in EQUAL DPs and networks	Gender Mainstreaming Group; HU (host)	01 – 02 July 2004	MA of Hungary	Budapest
Evaluation at CIP level	EU Commission and SK, with 2 external experts	26-27 October 2004	MA of Slovakia	Bratislava
Mainstreaming	Mainstreaming Group; IE (host)	14-15 April 2005	MA of Ireland	Dublin
Transnationality ‘clearing house’	Transnationality Group; CZ (host)	29 April 2005	MA of Czech Republic	Prague
Exchanging experiences in sound planning	Planning group; LT (host)	17-18 November 2005	MA of LT	Vilnius

Source : our own update of table presented in Document HoM-04 / 063 (adopted at the MA meeting 24/06/2004).

Bi-lateral co-operation

In our e-mail survey of March 2006 to Managing Authorities of New Member States (in which 9 NMS took part), we asked the Managing Authorities whether they had engaged in bi-lateral co-operation with other Member States, what was the content of that co-operation and in what ways it had been useful to them.

Responses show that various mechanisms were put to use for bi-lateral (or multi-lateral) support and exchange: from twinning arrangements or service contracts with NSSs from 'old' Member States through PHARE (e.g. HU, PL, SK), to study visits (CZ, LV) and one-off or on-going consultations (LV, LT). Participation in multi-lateral fora such as the Baltic Sea meetings was also mentioned by PL. Three NMS did not mention any active bilateral co-operation for the facilitation of the implementation of EQUAL.

These co-operation mechanisms have had different purposes according to the time at which they were implemented. In the programming phase, for example, HU had a PHARE twinning arrangement with RACINE, the FR NSS, for advice and support in the development of the Programming Document and Programming Complement. Overall advice for systems implementation has also been sought. Thus:

HU organised service contracts with the NSSs of Ukni, UKgb and FR for support (still on-going) for institutional capacity building, including training for the MA, NSS and State Treasury, help with financial procedures, communication strategy, and with the implementation of Project Cycle Management amongst other tasks.

CZ paid visits to the UKgb MA and NSS and hosted their visits as well, for the development of programme and financial management and evaluation, and more specific aspects such as work-sharing between the MA and NSS, annual reporting, DP monitoring and controls, documentation flows etc.

LV benefited from the advice of the Ukni MA and NSS for the organisation of the call for proposals (and other implementation issues): a visit took place to Ukni in September 2004, with meetings with the Managing Authority, the Paying Authority, the National Support Structure, as well as with DPs. The Ukni MA and some DPs took part in the EQUAL conference organised in Riga in December 2004.

LT had consultations with SE, Befrg and FR and benefited from 'transfer of experience' on issues such as audits, state aid rules, internal NSS rules, and eligibility issues. There were also bilateral contacts with LV on these issues.

Finally support was also received for programme management aspects more specific to EQUAL: design of the Mainstreaming strategy (HU and LV), DP self-evaluation (LT), transnationality – e.g. during the process of validation of TCAs (LV), product validation (for which a visit of the LV representatives to the PT MA is planned).

9.3.1.2. Assessment

The following assessment is based on the responses to the e-mail survey to NMS already mentioned above.

Bi-lateral co-operation

Advice sought from other Managing Authorities and NSS has been crucial at all stages – and could probably only be provided by national programme actors which had passed through the same processes and asked the same questions: as stressed by one respondent, 'a lot of practical advice' was received in this way.

Nevertheless, two NMS, which benefited from bilateral support, suggested that more systematic support (e.g. through monitoring visits) and training could be organised by the European Commission on technical and administrative management issues, such as avoiding making 100% checks of payment claims and more generally financial systems, de-commitments, audits, eligibility issues and programme closure. This seems to us all the more important that too stringent financial procedures and checks can severely constrain innovation at DP level. Another MS, which did not mention any bilateral co-operation, would have wished for more practical on-going support by the EC.

Activities and products of horizontal groups, learning seminars

We asked NMS programme management actors to assess the usefulness for them of a series of mechanisms – events, products – set up at EU-level as support to the implementation of the key principles of EQUAL, with a focus on those which took place or were delivered in 2005. The overall assessment and assessment of each of these is extremely positive, with very few qualifications. It is clear, in particular, that the implementation of transnationality has been greatly supported by all the mechanisms set up, from the network of co-ordinators, to the clearing house, including the guide and toolkit. A few MS regretted that the timeliness of events/products had not always been adequate, other MS made suggestions for the continued use of these mechanisms (see below). But generally the remarks made at the end point to demands for other such events or tools (see below). The relevance and direct usefulness of EU-level support mechanisms and tools are thus stressed with extreme clarity, which is a lesson for future programming.

More specifically:

- Facilitation of Transnationality:

The network of transnationality co-ordinators, which included all Member States for co-ordination during the Transnationality window, was found essential: through it, ‘quick and successful solutions (were found, by e-mail, by telephone) whenever problems occurred’; it was very useful to identify ‘conditions and requirements of transnationality in other MS’, for ‘harmonisation between MS’ (including harmonisation of expectations from transnationality) and ‘common understanding’ as well as to benefit from ‘very close practical co-operation with the EC’.

It was suggested that the network could pursue its work and ‘elaborate common guidelines for the evaluation of the added value of transnational co-operation for projects, and guidelines to projects for them to achieve very concrete results from transnationality and not just a vague exchange of experience’.

The Birmingham conference on transnationality proved decisive on various fronts: to share experience with other Member States and ask ‘practical questions’ on the basis of their R1 experience, but also, thanks to the exhibition, to hand out information about DPs so as to identify potential partners.

As ETCIM had received some criticism in EQUAL R1 for being difficult to handle by DPs, the training organised by the European Commission in January 2005 was very welcome. NMS participants were unanimous that this had been an extremely useful session (‘it made our life easier’, ‘very good and clear’) and three of them explicitly report on the organisation of training sessions for DPs immediately after the Brussels training so as to avoid potential mistakes. ETCIM as such was assessed as ‘a central hub’, ‘without which the complicated co-ordination of transnationality would not be possible’.

The Clearing house held in Prague in April 2005 was also appreciated although not all NMS had 'orphan' DPs: in addition to indeed identifying partners where necessary, it reinforced the network of co-ordinators, and allowed for more exchange of experience between Member States.

The two publications, the Transnationality guide and the Transnationality handbook, also helped, through their concrete examples, both DPs and the programme management actors. In one case, it is not clear that the difference between target audiences (DPs for the transnationality guide, MAs and NSSs for the handbook) was identified correctly. One MA praised the methodologies and procedures advocated in the handbook, but regretted that 'they lacked resources for implementing them'. Finally one MS reserved its judgement as the external evaluator had not yet carried out an assessment of the usefulness of the Guide for DPs.

- **Facilitation of Mainstreaming:**

Not all NMS representatives attended the Dublin seminar but those who did found it useful, practical, full of good 'tips' although one NMS still wished for more practical examples. One NMS thought this had been 'a very useful and fascinating meeting', to highlight the national strategies for Action 3. As for the guide, it is unanimously praised for its clarity, practicality, and for the guidance provided especially with regard to product validation. One NMS added that 'to have the PT validation methodology on board represents a quality jump'. Another MS stressed that the guide would be the main document used in the event they plan to organise on Mainstreaming in April 2006.

- **Facilitation of Planning:**

The Partnership Development Toolkit has been used by DPs in PL, IT, LT, BRfr, LV, UKgb, HU and SV, and all these MS provided guidance and support in their own language, based on the toolkit. The usefulness of the Toolkit has been assessed by all eight Member States that have applied it, and a synthesis assessment has been presented at the ESF Conference on sound planning in November 2005. According to this synthesis report¹⁷⁶, use of the toolkit varied from 12.5% to 100% of the DPs surveyed in the different Member States concerned. Amongst those DPs which chose to use the toolkit, satisfaction with the usefulness of their work was 'overwhelming'. According to our own survey of NMS Managing Authorities, the toolkit was still being translated in SK at the time of our survey (March 2006), and the PL authorities remarked that it had 'only been recently obtained'. However, they had used the draft version of the toolkit to prepare their own guide, which was used in the preparatory phase of R2 (Action 1). In LV, it was thought a 'good toolkit for promoters, for use in planning and implementation in the next programming period'. In addition to the Member States covered in the above mentioned assessment, the MAs of CY, CZ and MT also informed that the toolkit was being used in their country.

- **Facilitation of Gender Mainstreaming:**

The guide was assessed as well prepared, easy to understand, with a lot of information and guidance on how to approach GM. The LV respondent mentioned that it was useful not only for DPs, but also for members of the Monitoring Group, Mainstreaming Group and Thematic Groups. Similarly the PL respondent, who stressed that the guide had been translated into

¹⁷⁶ PCM Group (2005) *Synthesis report of self-evaluations on planning approach as applied by the EQUAL programme*. November 2005

Polish¹⁷⁷, pointed out its usefulness for DPs but also for the national thematic network for theme G, further uses remaining to be evaluated.

- **Facilitation of Evaluation:**

Not all respondents made the difference between the Evaluation conference, which took place on 23 and 24 February 2006 and the evaluation seminar held on the afternoon of the 24 February. Some of them actually assessed the conference¹⁷⁸. Generally speaking respondent appreciated the exchange of views with other Member States in the way to conduct evaluations (the workshops were useful for this), and the concrete contributions of national evaluators for the evaluation of the key principles. The conference provided a perspective from which to locate their own evaluation process. The seminar provided clear steps forward and possible actions. The HU respondent put forward that the seminar should be repeated, that common criteria should be agreed and that evaluation should be a requirement for funding and not 'a nice option'. The PL respondent pointed out that it had represented a basis for further co-operation, but that this may be limited by the fact that the evaluation terms of reference in Poland had already been decided and the contractor had been chosen, thus highlighting the need to have addressed continuity in evaluation in 2006-2008 at an earlier stage.

Overall, the mechanisms of support set up at the EU level have thus been assessed as highly relevant and useful. As one Member State respondent points out: '*The European Commission provided all the possible support. Problematic issues in the programme implementation are related to the national context and international help would be of limited usefulness*'. Nevertheless, other respondents prefer to take advantage of the good quality of the support provided so far to ask for more assistance on specific implementation issues, including, in addition to the administrative issues already pointed out above:

- *Transnationality*: Monitoring of transnationality, TCAs¹⁷⁹, evaluation of added value of transnationality;
- *Mainstreaming*: Call for proposal for Action 3, best practice of old MS for mainstreaming (especially vertical mainstreaming) and for thematic networking, bilateral cooperation with other MS in thematic networks;
- *Capitalisation*: and especially how to capitalise the results of EQUAL for the new programmes (as far as we understand, this means not just capitalising the principles, but the actual DP and overall results);
- *Evaluation*: capacity building on evaluation, including self-evaluation; and
- *Monitoring*: exchange on methodologies and indicators for project monitoring.

One MS pointed out that events have so far involved MAs and NSSs and that future events could also target DPs, especially from the new Member States. However, this respondent did not specify the themes on which such events would be desirable, so that we ignore whether this is a call for the re-launch of European working groups, as in 2003-4, or whether more training on implementation issues is what is asked for.

9.3.2. Mainstreaming of the EQUAL principles

The decision not to pursue EQUAL in the next ESF programming phase was accompanied by a decision to provide space for the 'mainstreaming' of the key principles of the Community

¹⁷⁷ The Guide is currently available on the web in 17 languages – however the Polish version is still not accessible on the EQUAL webpage.

¹⁷⁸ We had not sought an assessment of the Conference as we felt respondents would not feel comfortable given the fact that we made a presentation there.

¹⁷⁹ Presumably the demand concerns the revision of TCAs.

Initiative. An important part of the work at European level in 2005 has consisted in organising fora of exchange to put forward proposals of how this mainstreaming could be materialised within the framework of the Commission’s proposal of ESF regulation available.

The operational launch of this reflection process was the ad-hoc meeting of the technical working group of the ESF Committee on June 29, 2005 to identify key issues to tackle¹⁸⁰. The meeting took place on the eve of a meeting of EQUAL Managing Authorities, and was actually a joint meeting between the ESF Technical Committee and the EQUAL Managing Authorities. The starting bases for reflection were identified for each of the four ‘mainstreamed’ principles:

- *Gender equality*, whose promotion is obligatory in ESF;
- *Innovation and mainstreaming*, whose promotion was at the time supported and encouraged by the draft ESF Regulation 2007-2013, and for the implementation of which specific themes should be chosen. ‘Most Member States’ were reported to be ‘committed’¹⁸¹. The interinstitutional agreement has now adopted innovation as an obligatory activity of ESF.¹⁸²
- *Transnationality*, whose promotion is supported and encouraged in a ‘flexible’ way by the draft ESF Regulation but especially under the form of a dedicated priority or programme (as a bonus of a 10 % increase in the intervention rate is planned in that case¹⁸³). At the time of the meeting, only ‘a number of Member States’ declared themselves ‘in favour of supporting transnational co-operation through their new programmes’. The interinstitutional agreement has now adopted transnationality as an obligatory activity of ESF.
- *Partnership*, it was reminded, was ‘an essential element of all Structural Fund interventions’. However the EQUAL legacy would eventually make this requirement more specific, and not just at the level of the governance structures for ESF.

As a result of this meeting, 4 Working Groups of Member States were set up, with a view to draft reflection notes on the best ways to integrate the principles in planning the new ESF programmes and to assist with the organisation of 3 seminars with the ESF Committee – in November 2005 in Vilnius on Sound Planning, on December 8 on transnational cooperation and innovation, and in February on Partnership and Gender mainstreaming. This mandate of the groups was validated in the ESF Committee Plenary Session of 23. September 2005.

The Member State composition of the groups has been as follows:

Table 9.5 – Participation of Member States in Working Groups on principles (2005-2006) and in Horizontal Groups (2004-2005)

	MS composition of working groups	Reminder: MS composition of horizontal groups
Gender equality/mainstreaming	AT , BEnl, BEfrg ¹⁸⁴ , EE, ES, FI	AT , BEfrg , DK, DE, FI (chair), GR, FR, HU (chair), IE, IT, LV, LT, PL, PT, SE, UKgb
Innovation/mainstreaming	NL, PL , PT , UKgb	(Sound planning) BEnl, BEfrg, HU, IT, LT, LV, PL , SE as active members; and CZ, DE, IE as associate or interested members. (Mainstreaming) FR, GR, IE, PT , SE, UKgb

¹⁸⁰ Although the meeting of Managing Authorities of 24. January 2005 had already identified ‘providing evidence for the value added generated (by the principles) and ... guidance for applying it in the next round of Structural Funds programmes’ as key objectives of the workplan for 2005.

¹⁸¹ Source: ‘Summary of the results of the ad hoc meeting of the Technical Working Group of the ESF Committee on the future of the EQUAL Principles, on June 29, 2005’.

¹⁸² http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf2000/2007-2013_en.html

¹⁸³ Ditto.

¹⁸⁴ However this Member State is not mentioned amongst the authors of the reflection note produced.

Transnationality	BE _{NL} , CZ, ES, FI, PL, SE, UKgb	AT, DE, ES, FR, FI, IT, PL, SE, UKgb
Partnership/empowerment	AT, BE _{nl} , CZ, DE, GR, PL, PT, SE	AT, BE _{fg} , DE, DK, FR, IE, IT, PT, SE, UKgb

Source: Slides presented in meeting of Managing Authorities on 24/1/2006, and 2nd interim report.

As can be seen the highest coincidence between horizontal group and new working group was achieved in the cases of transnationality (5 out of the 7 members of the new group had been involved in the horizontal group) and in the case of the innovation and mainstreaming group (where 2 Member States had been involved in the horizontal group on mainstreaming and 1 in the group on sound planning), although this latter group had quite a limited membership. In general however continuity has been ensured.

Overall 15 Member States have taken part in this essential policy task of deriving lessons from the EQUAL experience and highlighting ways forward for their take up in ESF. 8 Member States have sought to be particularly active: BE_{nl} and PL (3 groups); AT, CZ, ES, FI, PT, UK_{gb} (2 groups each). Some Member States which had participated in horizontal groups – sometimes in more than 1 – (DK, FR, HU, IE, IT), did not take part in this exercise, which may be regretted.

9.3.2.1. Outcomes

Four reflection notes (one per group) were produced, and served as background documents for three seminars mainly targeting ESF negotiators at the national level: the already mentioned seminar on sound planning held in Vilnius on 17-18. November 2005, a seminar held on 8. December 2005, which addressed transnational co-operation and innovation (and mainstreaming), and a seminar held on 19. January 2006, on gender equality and partnership (and empowerment). The EU-wide evaluators have made an analysis of these notes in the versions presented at these seminars which is presented below.¹⁸⁵

The four reflection notes, although following a similar overall structure, are quite different types of documents, in part due to the greater or lesser specification of the draft ESF Regulation for each principle, in part due to the nature of the principle but also due to the nature of the experience of each group of authors.

The degree of specification of requirements for the implementation of the principles is highest in the case of **gender equality**, for which the draft ESF Regulation¹⁸⁶ foresees that Member States have to explain how they will promote gender equality in programming, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. The group therefore puts forward a few recommendations for the structuring of the principle in the programming documents (cross-cutting priority + possibly, dedicated priority), but mainly focuses its argument on the need for guidance (at project level) and for achieving a more common understanding of the principle across Member States: 2 examples of different ways of understanding the principle are highlighted (‘woman-focused’ or ‘gender-focused’ approach), and, on that basis, a concrete proposal is made for this explanation and convergence effort to be made between the Member States and the Commission. It is unclear however when this should happen, and who should be responsible for organising such a process, but this is certainly an issue for future monitoring and reporting.

¹⁸⁵ After the seminars, the working groups substantiated and revised these notes, taking into account all comments made during the seminars. The revised notes were presented to the EQUAL Managing Authorities, and to ESF desk officers in DG EMPLOYMENT. These consultations, along with adjustment to the revised ESF regulation, lead to further revisions and clarifications. The final versions were presented to the ESF Committee in June 2006, translated into 5 other languages and widely circulated.

¹⁸⁶ COM(2004) 493 final.

In some ways the discussions which took place in the working groups during the 19. January 2006 seminar dedicated in part to this principle echoed the issues discussed in the reflection note: the need for increased guidance and support by expertise was stressed, both for programme and project actors. However the question of the difference in understanding of the principle across Member States does not seem to have been given much importance¹⁸⁷. And the proposals for overcoming the difficulties identified (lack of knowledge and expertise, lack of political will, persistence of gender stereotypes) were put in gerund form, thus avoiding to name institutions and actors responsible for undertaking the actions proposed¹⁸⁸. Similarly the co-ordination needs stressed in the meeting (Support to increase understanding and know-how...; clear objectives, guidelines, indicators; and raising visibility) do not translate into any concrete suggestion as to how and when this co-ordination should be carried out and by whom.

The principle of **partnership** is also quite defined in the draft ESF Regulation (article 5), at least with regard to programme governance (consultation and implementation), where it is obligatory¹⁸⁹. Participation of the social partners in joint activities in the programmes is explicitly supported and a minimum of resources is allocated under the convergence objective. Participation by ‘non-governmental’ organisations to the funded activities is also encouraged. More globally, partnership is stressed as an instrument for reform (Article 3). However provision is more flexible in the draft ESF Regulation concerning the implementation of the principle at project level, which has led the authors of the note¹⁹⁰ to highlight the added value of the partnership approach in EQUAL (strategic advantages, advantages for individual partner organisations and advantages for individual beneficiaries) in quite some depth and with examples. The authors of the note:

- analyse the pros and cons of adopting partnership only as a general governance principle and of adopting it as a project requirement, whilst clearly favouring the second option.
- They also discuss the opportunity of applying the principle on a cross-cutting basis or as a special priority, highlighting the desirability of opting for the cross-cutting principle as a minimum and even more of opting for both, especially in cohesion countries – but also, if financially feasible, in the other Member States (‘at least in one of the nation-wide ESF programmes’): such dedicated priorities are best placed, it is argued, for the translation of the Lisbon agenda at the local level. Interestingly, the internal debates of BEnl and AT are provided as examples, which makes the whole discussion more concrete.
- Finally, as in the case of gender mainstreaming, the need to plan for adequate technical assistance, including training, is underlined. And the proposal is also made to develop a common understanding between Managing Authorities of how to apply the principle, including through a practical guide drawing on from EQUAL guides, a network, a database etc.

During the already mentioned seminar, Member State representatives discussed whether the principle would be applied on a cross-cutting basis or whether its scope would be limited to specific priorities: in that sense, it may be thought that the examples provided in the reflection note and in the Member States presentations and the criteria provided for helping with decision-making are useful. Thus the general added value of the principle for project work does not seem to be questioned – what is at stake is rather whether its added value is higher for certain types of

¹⁸⁷ At least judging from the summary of results available on the EQUAL webpage (News section): ESF seminar on ‘Integrating Partnership and Gender Equality into ESF Programmes for 2007-2013’. January 2006. And from the Commission slideshow presented in the meeting of Managing Authorities of 24. January 2006.

¹⁸⁸ Thus the report on the discussions mentions ‘*Sensitising* top decision-makers; *Providing* training for those in charge of drawing up the National Strategic Reference Frameworks and Operational Programmes; *Ensuring* that ‘programme designers’ have access to gender experts’.

¹⁸⁹ Source: ‘Reflection Note on Integrating Partnership into the ESF Programmes 2007 – 2013’.

¹⁹⁰ Source: ditto.

projects or domains. Various demands were made on the Commission, again marked by the ambivalence concerning the respective roles and responsibilities of Member States and the European Commission: to facilitate learning, dissemination of good practice and capacity building; but also to take a ‘strategic and pro-active’ support role with Member States.

As said in the reflection note¹⁹¹, ‘promoting **innovation** is not an option in the design of the ESF programmes’: Article 7 of the draft ESF Regulation foresees that ‘in the framework of *each* operational programme particular attention *shall* be paid to the promotion and mainstreaming of innovative activities’. However the draft ESF Regulation does not say much more than that the promotion of innovation and mainstreaming will be supported. The authors of the note make a substantial and original contribution to providing possible contents to these concepts, starting from the basis that the Lisbon strategy not only promotes technological innovation, but *social* innovation as well: the reflection note not only clearly explains what social innovation is, but also shows why it matters, as ‘the full potential of technological innovation cannot be exploited if these are not accompanied by social innovations’. This, although well known, is a very important distinction to make in the light of the EQUAL experience, where innovation has sometimes (though not frequently) been limited to new IT developments.

Further, the note provides:

- Different possible goals for innovation: improvements in existing policy and practice; supporting the development of new policy;
- Arguments for supporting innovative projects: in particular the possibility to test changes and improvements on a small scale initially;
- Criteria underpinning successful innovation (entrepreneurial spirit, orientation to user needs, sound management, monitoring of developments in the field including on a cross-national basis, organisation ‘to create confidence’, and, most importantly the *usefulness* of innovation);
- Criteria for supporting innovative projects: added value with regard to mainstream approaches, feasibility, and acceptability.
- Fields in which innovation has shown to be productive in EQUAL: integration of disadvantaged groups; build-up of institutional links; adaptation of economic sectors; improvement of the quality of the work environment; systems innovation and improvements in policy delivery.
- Key questions for programming, and resources/lessons for addressing them: themes in which innovation will be funded; ensuring user orientation; validation of results; and mainstreaming mechanisms.
- Requirements for implementation: the note highlights the need for adequate resources and support, as well as co-ordination within Member States, between Member States (for mutual learning) and at the European level (ensuring European-wide priorities are taken on board).

This note, by far the most comprehensive, thus provides clear questions and ways to address them, from a programming perspective. It clearly highlights the options at hand – e.g. using innovative projects for increasing the effectiveness of policy delivery or using it for testing new policies and fill gaps and provides criteria for deciding where the promotion of innovative projects can actually be most beneficial.

The discussion which took place in the seminar of the 8. December 2005 allowed to derive some further key lessons to take into account in the programming phase, including¹⁹²:

¹⁹¹ Source: ‘Proposal for a framework for programming innovation in the next generation of ESF programmes’.

¹⁹² Source: EQUAL webpage, News section: ESF seminar on ‘Integrating Innovation and Transnational co-operation into ESF Programmes for 2007-2013’. Brussels, December 2005.

- 'To accept a broad definition of innovation, related to real needs and existing policy provision;
- To improve the knowledge on needs and gaps in existing policy, by carrying out good baseline studies, make better use of monitoring and evaluation information;
- To involve stakeholders in all stages of the policy cycle...;
- To simplify national rules (eligibility rules, control and audit arrangements, funding criteria)...

This latter lesson is particularly validated by the evaluation of the principle.

Finally, provisions with regard to **transnationality** have been subjected to much change since the Commission proposal, which, in its Article 8, foresaw the compulsory implementation of a separate priority ('The Member States and managing authorities *shall* ensure that the programming of transnational *and* inter-regional activities takes the form of a specific priority axis within an operational programme or a specific operational programme'). Accordingly, the authors of the reflection note made cautious and broad proposals:

- concerning the organisation of transnationality at programme level, they proposed three 'options': (a) inclusion as a separate priority (for which an increased intervention rate had been proposed by the Commission); (b) inclusion as an additional complementary funding option in some or all of the priorities; (c) or both.
- Importantly they also specified the type of transnational activity which could be proposed for funding. Thus the note puts forward the possibility of transnational co-operation at project level, between regional/national networks, between regional actors, between national level institutions, and between structural support services.
- They identify areas where independent decisions could be made at Member State level, and others which required co-ordination: eligibility of activities would rest with Member States, provided a common minimum thematic cluster was agreed to facilitate exchange of experience; common mechanisms for partner search 'may' be needed; approval of funded activities would rest with the Member States although co-ordination 'will' be needed.

The widening of the scope of transnational co-operation for it to include co-operation between programme actors is interesting and based on the EQUAL experience, in which transnational co-operation has taken place not only between DPs, but also between managing Authorities and national support structures, and National Thematic Networks. However, this means allocating already probably shrunk transnationality budgets to activities which had been considered in part as technical assistance.

Much of the discussion in the December seminar took place around the options put forward for programme organisation, without any clear pattern emerging. Debate also concerned the role of the Commission, and once again, there were two trends, some working groups being 'in favour of the Commission taking a leading role in facilitating transnational cooperation, while others made clear that Member States should set the guidelines and priorities while the Commission's role would be to provide complementary support'¹⁹³. As already stated the interinstitutional agreement has now adopted transnationality as an obligatory activity of ESF.

9.3.2.2. Assessment and take up

Overall, the working groups, reflection notes and seminars allowed, as a minimum, for the identification and discussion of scenarios for the possible organisation of the principles in the

¹⁹³ Source: EQUAL webpage, News section: ESF seminar on 'Integrating Innovation and Transnational co-operation into ESF Programmes for 2007-2013'. Brussels, December 2005.

next generation of ESF programmes, and, in some cases (especially innovation), for the identification of the most important questions in programming terms, with possible responses stemming from the EQUAL experience.

The perspective taken is clearly that of Managing Authorities, although some references are made to the work of evaluators: hence the organisation of a separate event for evaluators to contribute their perspective. In a way this dichotomy signals a certain failure of the ‘formative’ character of evaluation in EQUAL, and of its full integration as decision-making tool. Thus the concepts of ‘partnership’ and ‘innovation’ used in the reflection notes tend to reflect more how these principles *should* materialise than the variety of ways in which they *have* materialised and the difficulties faced. The dichotomy is most perceptible in the case of transnationality, where the EU-wide evaluation had demonstrated the essential character of common mechanisms and co-ordination at the EU level.

The ground covered is larger than just programming: all reflection notes and all discussions clearly point out to the need for exchanges, support, capacity building, training etc.

However the mechanisms for addressing these needs, and especially, the respective roles of the Commission and the Member States are a matter of rather heated controversy. In this context, ESF Director of Directorate B repeated the official stance of the European Commission, in his final address on the 19 January 2006, although this position has been communicated time and again to Member States and although it is difficult to imagine, in the current context and with the current architecture of ESF, any other possibility. Thus he reiterated that *‘in principle, there will be no rules from Brussels beyond what is in the Regulations’* and that *‘the Commission will continue to facilitate the exchange of good practice, experience and potential solutions to help you develop and implement your programmes. The Commission is prepared to respond to requests from Member States to continue with these types of learning platforms if there is a demand to do so’*. This position seems, as said, to stem quite logically from the architecture of the future programmes and does not raise any problem with regard to the implementation of most principles. However, it does in two areas:

- for transnationality, as already argued, where the need for tight co-ordination has been proved by the evaluation, and has been recognised by Managing Authorities in EQUAL (see, in particular, the developments earlier in this chapter on the highly positive reactions of new Member States to the mechanisms set up for R2);
- and for thematic exchange of experience and mainstreaming at the European level, where we have argued, on the basis of solid evidence, that there is a need for expertise and support over time, which requires a certain degree of initiative and foresight on the part of the European Commission.

Although programming is on-going, we have thought it important to identify how Member States are currently planning to organise the take up and implementation of the principles in the next ESF programmes, and to gather their assessment of the support provided in that process: we thus proceeded to an e-mail survey to heads of the ESF departments in all Member States on these issues, in March 2006.

The response rate is low, probably due to the fact that the information was perceived as too sensitive and due to the already mentioned on-going character of programming: only 13 responses altogether, i.e. 52%, with 8 responses by ‘old Member States’ – DK, ES, FR, GR, LU, NL, PT, UKgb – and 5 by ‘new Member States’ – CZ, EE, LV, MT, PL.

The programming process

In all these Member States, the programming process was ‘on-going’, except in GR where it has been recently launched.

Resort to expertise for programming is variable: in six Member States, there is none or what is mentioned is the ex ante evaluation, the evaluations of ESF 2000-2006 or ‘internal expertise’. In other Member States, external expertise has been sought or is currently organised for support for the design of some programmes (in ES: for the design of Multi-regional programmes), and for the drafting of some parts of the programming document. In CZ the EQUAL evaluator has been appointed for this task. It is interesting to note that in PL expertise has been sought for facilitation (of stakeholder meetings) rather than on content issues.

Forms of collaboration with EQUAL programme actors are variable. Institutional links are usually strong, in the sense that the EQUAL and ESF Managing Authorities are often not only located in the same ministry or department, but actually belong to the same administrative Unit, when they are not simply one single body. However, institutional proximity does not necessarily mean actual joint work: this is why the ES respondent points out that ‘one member of the Technical Working Group set up for programming works as ‘link’ between the 2 Managing Authorities’. In GR, the Head of the EQUAL Managing Authority participates as a permanent member in the Working group in charge of programming. In both cases, the Managing Authorities went jointly to the ESF seminars organised in Brussels.

The assistance provided by the working groups on the principles and the 2 ESF seminars is usually appreciated, except in one case where the contribution was found to be limited. This assistance is, first, at the level of ‘exchange of information’, ‘receiving new information from other Member States’: this, for the LV respondent, has been of ‘tremendous’ assistance. Further, the seminars served to ‘clarify the options’ ahead. In some cases (CZ, ES, LV, NL, PT) respondents report that they were able to derive direct lessons for their programming, e.g. CZ on transnationality (CZ was involved in the corresponding working group) and NL on innovation, and for identifying ways of transferring the EQUAL principles (ES). The evaluation sheets passed by the EQUAL Unit at the end of each of the two seminars also show a high rate of satisfaction with regard to participants’ expectations (60/68 for the first seminar, 58/59 with regard to the second). As for the evaluation conference, it provided, again a ‘useful platform of exchange’, clear data on the added value of the principles (GR) and ideas for the mainstreaming of the principles (CZ, DK, GR, MT). However two respondents found that it had not been useful for programming (EE, PT), but rather for the evaluation of EQUAL (EE). The NL respondent found it was useful for planning evaluation in the next programmes.

Current options debated at the national level

Respondents provided us with the current state of their reflection on the take up and organisation of the principles in the next ESF programmes: their responses are usually made in the conditional tense and should therefore be taken as provisional.

- Partnership/empowerment:

(9 responses)

In one case (UKgb), partnership seems to be promoted as a general principle of governance: the implementation of the principle is planned through ‘engagement with regional, national and social partners’. In the other cases, partnership is envisaged at project level as well. There the options debated concern the voluntary or compulsory character of the principle, and its scope:

- implementation may be optional, as explicitly foreseen in EE and PL, although in EE, higher grades may be allocated to projects organised on that basis. In NL, project promoters

will be encouraged to ‘programme together with other stakeholders their targets and objectives for future projects’.

- 5 Member States (CZ, ES, LV, MT, PL) are currently planning to organise it on a cross-cutting basis (including in PL where the option would be available under all priorities). Conversely, GR is planning to organise the implementation of the principle through a distinct measure.
- **Innovation/mainstreaming:**

(10 responses)

Here the main debate concerns the take up of the principle as an over-arching or cross-cutting principle, or its implementation in specific measures/actions. Some Member States are considering both:

- 4 Member States (DK, GR, MT, PL) foresee the cross-cutting implementation of the principle, although in the case of PL take up will be voluntary, as for the partnership principle; in DK, innovation will be one of 4 over-arching objectives of the new ESF Programme;
- 4 Member States are considering implementation through distinct measures or activities (LV, NL), for specific sectors (UKgb) or specific operations (EE);
- Finally 2 Member States (CZ, ES) are considering both at the same time: promoting innovation as a general principle and encouraging it more specifically in specific actions or perhaps measures.
- **Transnationality:**

(10 responses)

As could be expected this is the principle for which the diversity of options is greatest.

- One MS (NL) is considering not to take the principle on board;
- One MS (UKgb) is considering taking it on board, but at a strategic level only and not at a project level. This would not be through a dedicated priority;
- 3 MS (DK, EE, PL) are considering to take it up as an option for projects, which may be available in all priorities (PL);
- 3 MS are planning implementation through a dedicated priority (ES, GR, LV);
- 1 MS (MT) is planning implementation of transnationality as cross-cutting principle;
- and one MS (CZ) is planning implementation both as cross-cutting principle and as dedicated priority.

- **Gender equality/mainstreaming:**

(10 responses)

As for innovation, the main debate concerns the scope of implementation:

- The majority option (6 Member States) is that of cross-cutting implementation: in the case of PT this is currently seen as the minimum (so that PT may evolve towards the promotion of a dedicated priority as well);
- One MS (EE) is considering requiring implementation only in ‘relevant measures’;
- 3 MS (CZ, ES, MT) are considering both cross-cutting implementation and the promotion of a dedicated priority.

As can be seen, and although a complete picture is failing here, the architecture of the ESF programmes is likely to be very diverse across Member States. The partnership principle and the gender equality principle are the ones where options are less varied but the implementation of

innovation and, above all of transnationality is foreseen in highly different ways. This is of course a special cause for concern in the case of transnationality where decisions made by Member States have effects not only for their own programmes but for those of others.

9.4. CONCLUSIONS

Facilitation of co-operation between National Authorities and the Commission and direct co-operation between National Authorities

An intense networking activity has taken place at the EU and cross-national level in the last years. This networking has been concerned both with identifying, sharing and disseminating lessons derived from the DP initiatives in the 9 thematic fields and with facilitating the implementation of the EQUAL principles during EQUAL as well as their transfer to the next ESF programming phase. This *double focus of European facilitation* has been essential for the implementation of the Initiative and for the mainstreaming of results.

With regard to *thematic facilitation*, policy fora, conferences, direct contacts with other units and DGs of the European Commission have taken place. In addition, the continued work on specific themes and issues, and the progressive constitution of European networks through chained events has given rise to the constitution of relevant networking and lobbying platforms, especially in the areas of diversity, ex offenders, business creation, the social economy, gender equality and support to asylum seekers. This will hopefully intensify or at least be maintained in the last years of the Initiative.

The schedule of European events planned by the Member States with the support of the European Commission for the years to come is impressive. However, the move away from the former format of the European Thematic Groups (ETGs), which, although heavy, ensured a continuity of work on the main issues of each thematic priority, is not without its risks. We had not recommended such a move, although we had made proposals for the improvement of ETGs. The current system of grants to Member States for the organisation of events could transform the European networking and mainstreaming activities into a 'race for events'. It therefore seems particularly important to abide by the criteria decided for the European funding of these events, and to take into account the findings of the European evaluation: move away from visibility events towards more in-depth thematic events, such as the Madrid policy forum on gender equality (June 2005), as small workshops allow for more active participation; maintain and reinforce the role of thematic experts as effective intermediaries between promoters and policy makers (for example, through the production and update of 'policy briefs'); ensure a continuity between related events.

The *European facilitation of the implementation of the EQUAL principles* initially took place through the creation of 'horizontal groups' in charge of producing guidance materials on the various EQUAL principles and of organising 'learning seminars' (platforms for the regular communication between NSS and MAs). Member States' participation in these groups was voluntary, which ensured strong commitment and a good level of activity, although the production of guides in the national languages was sometimes delayed. The production and translation of 6 methodological guides (two successive guides on transnationality, the EQUAL guide on Gender mainstreaming, the EQUAL Guide for Development Partnerships, the Partnership Development Toolkit, and the Practical Guide to Mainstreaming under EQUAL) is not a small achievement. The Guides have been useful to Managing Authorities and National Support Structures in their guidance to Development Partnerships. Not all of these mechanisms were still active in 2005: the main active groups were the Transnationality Group, the Mainstreaming Group and the Planning Group.

The relevance and direct usefulness of EU-level support mechanisms and tools were stressed with extreme clarity by NMS Managing Authorities, and this is an important lesson for future programming. It is clear, in particular, that the implementation of transnationality has been greatly supported by all the mechanisms set up, from the network of co-ordinators in all Member States, to the clearing house, including the guide and toolkit and the European

Common DataBase (ECDB). In this respect progress has been made between R1 and R2 in the sense that all Member States took part (e.g. through the network of co-ordinators).

Various mechanisms have been put to use by the NMS for *bi-lateral (or multi-lateral) support and exchange*: from twinning arrangements or service contracts with NSSs from ‘old’ Member States through PHARE, to study visits and one-off or on-going consultations and participation in multi-lateral fora such as the Baltic Sea meetings. These co-operation mechanisms have had different purposes according to the time at which they were implemented (design of the Programming Document and Programming Complement; advice for systems implementation, and support for programme management aspects more specific to EQUAL such as the design of the Mainstreaming strategy, DP self-evaluation, transnationality, and product validation).

Advice sought from other Managing Authorities and NSS has been assessed as crucial at all stages by the Managing Authorities in the NMS – and could probably only be provided by national programme actors which had passed through the same processes and asked the same questions. Nevertheless it was also suggested that more systematic support (e.g. through monitoring visits) and training could be organised by the European Commission on technical and administrative management issues.

Finally, considerable effort and work has been put in by Member States and the European Commission in 2005-2006 for *informing the next ESF programming phase* with the lessons derived from the implementation of the EQUAL principles. The working documents prepared and the workshops held for that purpose have generally been well assessed by the national ESF co-ordinators¹⁹⁴.

Thematic reviews for the identification and dissemination of good practice at EU level

One of the functions of the European Thematic Groups in 2003, 2004 and until mid 2005 had been the collection and validation of good practice in view of their further dissemination and mainstreaming. ‘Good practice’ has been understood alongside various dimensions, including effectiveness (or potential effectiveness) and a capacity to illustrate the key principles of EQUAL. Gathering evidence of good practice often proved a difficult exercise, as DPs had not completed their activities, and as National Thematic Networks had often only started. Validation of good practice, according to reliability of the evidence provided and policy relevance, lacked the appropriate mechanisms, and Liaison Groups (now dismantled) faced many difficulties in carrying out this validation function. However the work carried out by thematic experts for the identification of policy issues and their mapping of DPs according to these issues partially offset these difficulties.

This led to the production of 29 ‘policy briefs’ by mid-2005, presenting policy challenges and developments as well as EQUAL solutions. But policy briefs were prepared at a time when DPs still could not document results and impacts, and they therefore tend to present potential rather than actual good practice.

Since then, no more policy briefs have been prepared and the focus of expert work turned to the identification of ‘success stories’, of which 30 are now available. However, contrary to the policy briefs, which located transversal lessons of EQUAL against European policy agendas, these individual success stories serve more a dissemination purpose than a pro-active mainstreaming strategy.

It should be pointed out that there is a gap between the overall impression stemming from reading the policy briefs and success stories, on the one hand, and the (more limited) impacts

¹⁹⁴ The results so far of this exercise are presented in section 14.4 below and our recommendations for the mainstreaming of the EQUAL principles in future programmes are presented in Chapter 15 (section 15.3.3).

identified so far by national evaluators, on the other hand. This could easily be remedied by updating the policy briefs on the basis of an analysis by thematic experts of the evidence now available on results at DP level.

Added value and influence

Despite the problems associated with an at times heavy structure, despite the difficulties caused by the various changes in orientation and organisation over time, and bearing in mind that activities are still on-going, European networking and facilitation mechanisms have already proved their relevance and added value, both for the constitution of thematic networks across Europe and the cross-national mainstreaming of results as well as for the facilitation of implementation.

In particular, the policy briefs have already proved their usefulness, as testified by high level policy or decision-makers, who, even at that level, can be unaware of developments both of policy and practice in their own field in other countries. They are also keen to network, yet networking tends to take place with representatives of neighbouring countries, or even, of one's own country: hence the demonstrated importance of focused events, fostering active participation, and with continuity over time.

EQUAL has given rise to the formation of some stable European groups, pursuing a range of aims – from exchange of experience to lobbying, including peer reviews, thematic analyses and policy proposals. These achievements could not have been arrived at without a conscious, purposeful effort from the start and over time, for gathering programme actors at various levels and backing them up with expertise.

Similarly, European-level co-ordination and facilitation for the implementation of the programmes in the Member States has been and is essential. This is of course particularly the case for the implementation of transnational partnerships and networks. The improvements in the organisation and validation of transnational partnerships in R2 has clearly demonstrated the added value of a common schedule, common validation approaches, of a common database for searching partners, and of regular encounters and on-going contact between all Member States and the European Commission. But this is also true for the implementation of other organisational principles: regular exchanges between Managing Authorities on the concrete issues raised by the implementation of experimental and project management approaches, of monitoring and self-assessment, of gender mainstreaming, and, above all, of the mainstreaming of innovative practices, have provided programme management actors with concrete tools and solutions. This work needs to be consolidated and sometimes to be made more operational but the need for such exchanges, on a regular basis, between all concerned, and with a European facilitation, is beyond doubt.

10. IMPACTS OF EQUAL AT MEMBER STATE LEVEL

10.1. EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGIES

10.1.1 Evaluation framework at the EU level

The question of the impacts of EQUAL was addressed only in a very broad and general way in the Terms of Reference of the EU-wide evaluation. The requirement was to ‘assess the impact of EQUAL on the European Employment Strategy, the Social Inclusion Process and other Community Programmes (mainstream ESF, Gender Equality, Programme against Social Exclusion, and Anti-discrimination Programme)’, and specific evaluation questions bore on the identification of good practice and mainstreaming processes set up at the European level.

However, in the Guidelines for systems of monitoring and evaluation for the Human Resources Initiative EQUAL in the period 2000-2006 (July 2000), the Commission suggested that national evaluators should, in their final assessment (in principle by 2005), provide an analysis of ‘emerging impacts’. The Guidelines put forward what could be understood as impacts in EQUAL: *‘in comparison with the typology of effects used for the ESF, for EQUAL the impact would mainly refer to structural effects or impacts relating to the performance of (formal and informal) systems (e.g. in terms of effects on the formulation and implementation of policy and practices, establishment of durable partnerships, changes in training systems, changes in corporate or social attitudes, capacity building in organisations...).* An assessment of effectiveness and efficiency will however also require to assess, at the DP level, the effects on persons or companies who participate in the interventions (e.g. in terms of employability, capacity to integrate, adaptability, entrepreneurial aptitude, empowerment, gender equality) or the job creation where relevant’.

On that last basis, we were asked by the Evaluation Unit of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, to develop a methodological framework for the analysis of impacts in EQUAL, which was shared with national evaluators and the evaluation correspondents of the Managing Authorities on two occasions: in the ‘partnership meeting’ of 29. April 2004 and, one year later, in the partnership meeting of 29. April 2005.

The proposed approach distinguished between intermediate impacts, i.e. the take up and sustainability of new EQUAL practices, products, lessons at the policy level or at the institutional or organisational level; and final impacts, i.e. the actual contribution to a reduction of inequalities and discrimination, which could partly be assessed by looking at the situation of individuals and groups. The proposed focus was on intermediate impacts, but it was also suggested that the analysis of these should be carried out bearing in mind their ultimate contribution to the overall aim of EQUAL¹⁹⁵.

We come back to the approach for evaluating impacts in chapter 15 (Recommendations).

This chapter should be read in connection with Chapter 5, on innovation, and with Chapter 8, on national networking and mainstreaming, since the factors favouring and impeding the take up of EQUAL results were examined there.

¹⁹⁵ In addition, the added value brought about by the EQUAL principles was to be assessed: the results of these assessments have been provided in the chapters bearing on the effectiveness and added value of each principle.

10.1.2 The evaluation of impacts at the national level: methodologies adopted by the national evaluators

Most evaluators sought to assess the impacts of EQUAL in their 2005 reports. However, there are exceptions. The PT evaluators are currently preparing a last report on the use and dissemination of EQUAL products and good practices, and the DE evaluators will produce their final report on R1 later this year. Similarly, the BEfrg evaluators, who have identified DPs' self perception of their contribution to the programme objectives, will review the impacts of the whole programme (R1 and R2) in 2007. The FI and FR evaluators have provided some examples of impacts but it seemed difficult at this stage to carry out a more systematic analysis.

Amongst the evaluators who have addressed impacts in their 2005 reports:

- Three evaluators (ES, GR, UKgb) adopted the proposed framework and looked at policy, institutional and organisational impacts overall and by theme. Interestingly, the ES evaluators distinguished, amongst policy impacts, 'top-top' impacts (i.e. from the initiative as a whole to other programmes and policies) and 'bottom-up' impacts (i.e. from DPs to policies and programmes). Institutional impacts are called 'impacts on structures and systems', and organisational impacts correspond to impacts 'on companies' (although other types of organisations may also take up EQUAL results). Furthermore, although the AT evaluators rather refer to the 'transfer of innovations to social and labour market policy institutions', they in fact distinguish legal, institutional and organisational impacts and mention thematic illustrations. The LU evaluators mentioned these types of impacts in their analysis of the results of 2 DPs (out of 3). The IT evaluators assessed impacts at the overall programme level only.
- Two evaluators (SE, UKni) adopted different typologies of impacts. However these are very close to the one proposed: the SE evaluators have looked at the take up of new 'models and methods' by user organisations and, although in a more limited way given the stage of the programme, at impacts on 'structures and systems'. The UKni evaluators analysed 'horizontal' impacts (at project level) and 'vertical impacts' (at the national level): in other words, impacts were directly linked to mainstreaming activities, which, as seen in Chapter 8, have been structured around horizontal and vertical mainstreaming.
- The IE evaluators provide a list of impacts, without any predetermined typology, but these could also fit within the typology proposed at the EU level;
- Finally the DK and NL evaluators mainly approached impacts ('added value' for the NL evaluators) in terms of effects on beneficiaries. The DK evaluators have analysed the Danish social security database to identify employment trajectories and the NL evaluators carried out a survey of beneficiaries to assess their employment situation, improvement of their general situation and satisfaction with the EQUAL actions. Other evaluators (AT, ES) carried out surveys of beneficiaries or gathered beneficiary data in other ways (BEfrg, LU, UKni) but this has been in addition to other sources.

All in all, therefore, the findings of 9 evaluators can be classified into impacts on policies, institutions and organisations¹⁹⁶.

However, the **sources** for these impact evaluation exercises do not always allow to distinguish between the analysis of DP outputs (innovations) and the analysis of the take-up of DP outputs (i.e. impacts). Most evaluators rely on DP and programme sources. Even though interviews or surveys of DP evaluators, or direct access to self-assessment reports, may cast some light on impacts if DP evaluators have carried out such an analysis, this remains a DP source. The lack

¹⁹⁶ Some evaluators have also analysed the impact of the EQUAL principles, but this is dealt with in another part of this chapter.

of direct investigation with the potential and actual users of EQUAL results does not generally allow for an assessment of the actual take-up or sustainability of programme results, except in cases of documented policy and legal changes and except, naturally, for the take up of results directly by DP organisations themselves.

Some evaluators have interviewed **external users**: the SE evaluators have conducted a full study on the users of EQUAL results, which led them to interview around 35 key users, some of whom were involved in DP mainstreaming activities. Similarly, the UKgb evaluators carried out interviews with 20 policy makers identified by DPs as recipients of DP lessons in addition to the interviews with policy users in the DP-level case studies. The FI evaluators carried out a specific analysis of the adaptability priority, in which they interviewed enterprise users¹⁹⁷. The BEfrg evaluators carried out 12 interviews of public authorities not involved in the management of the programme. The FR evaluators interviewed 30 members of the public employment services by phone; however this survey does not seem to have informed the analysis of impacts much, as these respondents' knowledge of EQUAL seems to have been fairly generic¹⁹⁸. In their 'regional survey' in 12 regions, they also interviewed, in addition to programme actors, the regional 'delegates' to women's rights, who were able to provide an assessment of the impact of EQUAL in that area, as well as members of the selection committees who might also be potential policy users of the EQUAL results. As a result, we have more elements on the impacts of EQUAL in the field of gender equality than in other themes.

The UKgb evaluators have exploited the responses of users in a most systematic and simple fashion, which allows to have a very clear overview of the take up so far of EQUAL results, the nature of this take up and of the obstacles to it. They present the most significant responses obtained as 'Policy Recipient Reflections on EQUAL Policy and Practice Contribution', by theme. For each respondent an explanation is provided of the nature of their link to the EQUAL DP or of how they were contacted, of their reaction to the materials and results presented and of the actual use they have made or are planning to make of these results. As this seems to us to be a particularly useful approach to the evaluation of impacts, we have included the synthetic tables providing these responses in Annex 10-1.

The AT evaluators adopted yet another approach and, in addition to the material gathered on DPs and to the beneficiary survey (see below), they interviewed experts of the different thematic fields of EQUAL, who could comment on how they viewed the contribution of EQUAL to the reduction of inequalities and discrimination in their respective fields.

It could be interesting, in the future, to combine these different approaches: identify DPs' own assessment of the likely impacts of their projects, interview key potential/actual policy users pointed out by the DPs and possibly by the NTN and interview enterprise users where relevant. Completing this analysis with the opinion of experts of the EQUAL thematic areas, but not involved in the programme, seems relevant. Interviews with authorities not directly pointed out by programme actors appear to be less effective.

As mentioned in Chapter 8, national evaluators have faced difficulties in their impact analysis due to a lack of programme monitoring of mainstreaming activities and of their results. Another difficulty lies in the fact that, at the time of the write-up of evaluation reports, Action 3 projects were still ongoing: the evaluators thus warn that they could only identify preliminary impacts.

¹⁹⁷ The UKgb evaluators also interviewed beneficiaries in their case studies, but we ignore whether these included enterprises.

¹⁹⁸ The report only makes one mention of the Public Employment Service (PES), p. 92: 'The PES is still not very present (in the programme). Our survey with a sample of PES agencies has revealed several explanatory factors: they are generally working under pressure; the PES agents usually resort to ESF Objectives 2 and 3, whose financial scope is 'more substantial' and which are seen as 'more grass-root'. The EQUAL programme is assessed as too 'conceptual and theoretical' and 'difficult to manage'.

The use of beneficiary data

Although we advocated an analysis of impacts on final beneficiaries, this was very difficult to do within the evaluation timeframe. What beneficiary surveys, the analysis of monitoring data and even interviews with beneficiaries can capture at this stage is rather, as acknowledged by the AT evaluators, ‘short-term effects’ of the EQUAL actions (rather than ‘final impacts’ as put forward by some evaluators). Only the AT evaluators carried out a longitudinal analysis, as they organised their survey in two waves (2003 and 2005) in order to identify immediate and medium term effects. However the loss of respondents between the two surveys was of about two thirds, and the main share of respondents to the 2nd wave survey were new respondents¹⁹⁹.

But there are other issues raised by beneficiary surveys, data or interviews:

- First, the **supply-side perspective** of impacts tends to be over-emphasised. The identification of ‘soft outcomes’ (such as raised motivation and adaptability²⁰⁰) and the self perception of one’s increased chances (in the labour market, for accessing education) do not challenge current debates about employability. Broader societal perceptions and changes in employers’ attitudes, which are admittedly more difficult to assess, are likely to be much more important factors for the reduction of inequalities and discrimination than the individual motivation of end beneficiaries.
- Changes in the employment situation of beneficiaries are a more objective indicator of impact, but, first, as noted by the DK evaluator, direct access to employment was not necessarily the objective pursued by DPs, and second, these changes need to be observed over the long run.

In that sense, the AT survey design is interesting as beneficiaries were not only asked about their self-perception of their ‘labour market resources and chances’ but also about their objective situation, not only in terms of employment, but also in terms of income (low, irregular), health, housing etc. As said, unfortunately, the fact that two thirds of the initial panel respondents could not be reached in the 2nd wave means that it is likely that the individuals with the most stable situation were the ones who responded in 2005. It is then perhaps problematic to derive conclusions as to the stabilisation of beneficiaries’ situation after EQUAL.

- Finally, beneficiary data or responses are usually aggregated at programme level, or by theme: such data can contribute to inform decisions concerning the choice of thematic priorities in future programmes. However it makes it difficult to establish relationships between single innovations and outcomes for beneficiaries: in a qualitative and experimental programme such as EQUAL, contrary to mainstream ESF programmes, this seems more important than measuring overall effects.

However beneficiary data are important and relevant especially for assessing the **actual outreach** of the programme. Thus the analysis of beneficiary data, supplemented in ES with

¹⁹⁹ The LU evaluators adopted a biographical approach and carried out in-depth interviews with 14 end-beneficiaries of one of the 3 LU DPs: they thus obtain a detailed picture of the place and role of the EQUAL action in these beneficiaries’ trajectory. The LU evaluators’ role there is close to a role of evaluator at the DP level, and more generally they have recommendations addressed to each of the DPs, which is understandable in such a small programme.

²⁰⁰ Thus the AT evaluators asked respondents whether they were now motivated to look for a job, whether they were more ready to take on a job which had flexible working hours, which was in another region, or which did not correspond to their professional interests. The UKni evaluators highlight quotes of participants such as ‘it is a definite *plus*’, ‘I want to do *more* of this kind of work’, or ‘I have *more* self-confidence’. The terminology obviously reveals added value, but it is difficult to derive lessons from these in the absence of a more global understanding of the respondents situation and trajectory, not to mention the possibility of adaptation to the interviewer’s expectations.

case studies, revealed, as has already been commented in other chapters of this report, some issues with the targeting of beneficiaries in AT, BEfrg and ES (particularly in some themes).

In BEfrg, only 41% of the planned number of beneficiaries actually took part in EQUAL actions. Although the evaluators rightly stress that EQUAL does not have any quantitative ambition, they also rightly remark that this is indicative of problems of unclear visions about the target groups in the first place, especially in theme 3E (lifelong learning). Further, 10% of the participants were well qualified, but this proportion rose to 33% in theme 2C (business creation), which points to a difficulty to open up business creation 'to all'.

In ES, little targeting has taken place in theme 1A. The evaluators stress that, whilst raising employability was often the objective, the people 'with the lowest employability' were not amongst the beneficiaries²⁰¹. In the area 2C, whereas the integrated services for business creation set up by EQUAL were targeting people excluded from the usual circuits, in practice their real users have not really belonged to these groups (according to the case studies). In priority 3F (adaptability), the evaluators noted that the needs of workers were badly known by the DP technical teams, to the point that they sometimes included unemployed people in their target groups in order to reach the planned quota of participants. In the area 4H (reducing gender gaps), there has been very little targeting of the beneficiaries, and in some DPs (6%), no targeting at all. The survey of beneficiaries showed that 25.5% had a university degree or university-level education. But, on the other hand, data also shows that 28.7% of those surveyed had been unemployed more than a year at the time they started their EQUAL action – whereas the long-term unemployed represented 1.8% of the active population in ES in 2004. In ES, the qualification degree is not necessarily a good indicator of higher labour market opportunities.

The AT survey showed that beneficiaries of measures undertaken in themes 1A – access to the labour market, 1B – combating racism and 5I – asylum seekers were likely to experience multiple and cumulative problems. This was not the case in other themes. The beneficiaries of the social economy projects were often highly qualified, which may be due to a focus of social economy projects on managers and key staff of social enterprises, rather than on the creation of employment opportunities for more vulnerable groups.

On the contrary, the UKni evaluators found that EQUAL has successfully managed to engage a range of previously 'hard to reach' and marginalised groups which are otherwise reluctant to participate in labour market initiatives.

It would have been interesting to have similar analyses in other reports, as the difference between planned and actual compositions of target groups, especially of course in those themes where actions *directly* targeted people suffering from inequalities and discrimination, is crucial for assessing DPs' and the programme capacity to reach out to the most vulnerable and discriminated against.

²⁰¹ Although it is not clear what the indicators are for low employability.

10.2. POLICY, INSTITUTIONAL, ORGANISATIONAL AND OTHER IMPACTS – AN OVERVIEW

Due to the insufficiencies of the programme mechanisms for vertical mainstreaming, already mentioned in Chapter 8, evaluators have generally found it difficult to go beyond the presentation of single isolated cases of **impacts on policies**: whilst some of them are significant, it is difficult to make overall judgements on this level of impacts in the different countries. This is also in part due to the timing of the 2005 evaluation reports as many DPs were only starting their Action 3 projects at the time of the evaluation fieldwork.

General assessments of **impacts on institutions and on co-operation between organisations** were more feasible.

The adoption by public authorities of more co-operative ways of working was stressed by some evaluators, whilst others found that this was missing.

Thus the SE evaluators found that co-operation had developed between public authorities and organisations which had not co-operated previously, which they see as having widened the fields of competence for both types of partners. The ES evaluators noted a strengthening of the involvement of employer associations, unions, and organisations representing the target groups in decision making in employment and social inclusion policies. More generally they found that EQUAL had given rise to stable informal socio-economic networks, in which, ‘for the first time, all actors sat at the same table’ in a given territory. Some of these networks have been formalised and have given rise to the recruitment of agents.

Similarly, the IT evaluators stress that there had been some take up of ‘co-ordinated work method through both formal and informal pacts and agreements’, although more generally they highlighted a tendency for EQUAL results to ‘remain in the EQUAL community’ in particular due to the rather ‘passive’ stance of public authorities. However EQUAL has probably led more local actors to involve firms in the fight against exclusion. The GR evaluators highlight a Ministerial Decision for the development of co-operation of private and public agencies involved in the implementation of active labour market policies on the basis of the EQUAL DP model (regulated by law 2956/2001).

On the other hand, the DK evaluators found that the EQUAL DPs had worked in parallel with mainstream employment policies and that there had been little mutual influence.

In the description of impacts on institutions, there can be a tendency amongst evaluators, as already pointed out above, to highlight innovative measures set up by DPs (e.g. new work-based training schemes, or the creation of new professional profiles) without providing any indication as to their sustainability and continuity. In such cases it is correct to talk about innovations, but the impact remains unknown.

Impacts on organisations

EQUAL has contributed to the adoption of new working tools by **public administrations**. Thus, the greater awareness of EQUAL DPs in ES concerning the lack of proper diagnosis and research tools led some local authorities to create employment observatories. More generally, several evaluators mention the use by public administrations of research carried out by EQUAL DPs, to support the development of new policies (see examples below).

With regard to **impacts on companies** (e.g. as employers), there is a tendency amongst evaluators to highlight DP actions and outputs targeting companies (such as awareness raising campaigns) rather than the actual changes which may have taken place in companies as a result.

We have mentioned this methodological problem before as a more general one, but it is particularly marked in this case. Nevertheless, some general statements can be made. For example, evaluators (e.g. in ES, UKgb) noted that it had been easier to have an impact in those economic sectors with recruitment needs (construction sector, and services in general) and examples put forward by the IE evaluator (see below) show some success of DPs which have been able to start from practical concerns that employers had.

Some evaluators (e.g. AT, IT) have stressed the **capacity building process** which had taken place for NGOs and the third sector as one of the most visible impacts of EQUAL so far. More generally evaluators found that impacts so far had primarily concerned, as could be expected, the organisations taking part in the DPs, which have capitalised on the EQUAL projects and integrated new practices in their usual workplan and activities.

10.3. AREAS OF POLICY, INSTITUTIONAL AND ORGANISATIONAL IMPACTS

As already explained in Chapter 5 with regard to innovations, it is difficult to keep to a presentation of impacts strictly by theme. A presentation by theme would have the advantage of assessing how the Community Initiative has contributed to the initial objectives set out in the EQUAL guidelines and in the CIPs. However, there is an important downside to such an approach, which is that similar initiatives and impacts appear in a scattered fashion: thus labour market reintegration was to be addressed in theme 1A but also in themes 3E (lifelong learning) and 4G (reconciling family and professional life); the care sector has been a major area of innovation to which DPs across themes 2D (social economy), 3F (adaptability), and 4G have contributed. Etc.

We have therefore opted for presenting the main areas of impacts highlighted by evaluators following a similar classification as the one used in Chapter 5 on Innovation.

10.3.1 Impacts in the area of labour market integration

At this stage, the sustainability and impacts of these initiatives appears to be rather modest, or at least uncertain, across Member States, a rather disappointing result especially as theme 1A (which, as said, is not the only one aiming at labour market integration but is entirely geared to this aim) gathered one third of all DPs in R1.

Some evaluators tend to highlight the direct contribution of DPs to increasing chances of accessing the labour market: this is, for example, by far the main contribution which DPs across all themes acknowledge in BEfrg (84% of DP responses), yet this seems to be an end in itself since mainstreaming activities have been very limited so far in BEfrg. In ES, the evaluators stress the high number of participants in theme 1A (136,000), but firstly, as explained above, the evaluators have doubts as to whether these participants have been adequately targeted, and secondly, as acknowledged of course by the evaluators, EQUAL was not designed to reach large numbers of participants but rather to stimulate new and if possible sustainable ways of reaching out to the most disadvantaged and in bringing them back into the labour market.

However *proven* impacts in this area are often lacking at this stage. This lack of sustainability or wider take up is in some cases explicitly acknowledged by evaluators. For example the FI evaluators highlight a few innovations in this theme (see Chapter 5 above), the most significant of which are the trade-specific integration pathways developed in partnership with employers. However they stress that mainstreaming remains a challenge. Similarly the UKgb evaluators are uncertain about the sustainability of 'employer-related work' in the development of integration

pathways²⁰², except in two cases where sustainability of employer interest and participation has been secured, notably due to the recruitment bottlenecks in the construction sector.

The box below provides one of these two examples, with clear evidence of sustainability both through public funding and private ‘buy-in’, as employers eventually employed the ‘workplace co-ordinators’ initially paid out of EQUAL funds:

‘Building London, Creating Futures DP (Theme E) developed a workplace co-ordinator scheme in the construction sector in which EQUAL funding supported the employment of mentors in companies. A key success of the scheme has been the high level of private sector buy-in. Three major developers have chosen to retain and fund workplace coordinators on their sites. As one private developer delivering the scheme commented *‘it’s a good idea that is being effectively delivered in partnership with the private sector. It’s not seen as a government-led initiative which is a refreshing change for us and because workplace coordinators are part of our organisation, the scheme is taken seriously... it’s our reputation on the line’*. At least one London borough has firm plans in place to allocate ‘Section 106’ monies²⁰³ towards supporting the scheme’s continuance. Substantial RDA and ESF has already been secured for Jobcentre Plus clients to receive training through the programme.’

Source UKgb 2005 evaluation report, p. 33.

10.3.2 Impacts of the integrated approaches to tackling labour market discrimination and discrimination at work

Much awareness raising activity has taken place within this theme, including through campaigns targeting employers and a range of other actors, as explained in Chapter 5. It is therefore difficult to identify impacts of what appears to be a long-term process, although impacts are visible in DP partners themselves. Evaluators (e.g. in FI) thus sometimes prefer to stress the importance of the continuity of these efforts, secured through Action 3 and R2 projects built on R1 results. However this lack of concreteness, which shows in the very generic references made by evaluators, may hamper mainstreaming (even though projects may have an impact in themselves, without any mainstreaming) and it should be possible, at least in the case of focused campaigns and training actions, to interview targeted actors about the lessons they have derived from these or on how they have acted as multipliers.

One UKni DP had a highly original and ambitious approach as it directly targeted political parties: it sought to establish a Cross-Party Diversity Forum in which Members of the Legislative Assembly would be engaged. With the suspension of the NI Assembly, however, implementation of the forum has not been possible. Although such directly political initiative has not been frequent, this failure highlights the influence of the ‘political climate’ on potential impacts.

However there have indeed been intermediate impacts, at the institutional level, which might help to enhance longer-term impacts. For example, in ES, a DP has contributed to the inclusion of the professional profile of ‘tutor/mediator’, which the evaluators assess as ‘very effective’ in producing changes of attitudes with respect to migrants and ethnic minorities, in the National System of Qualifications.

Organisational impacts have also been obtained in cases of very concrete projects directly targeting organisational processes. There are not many examples of these, and it is perhaps significant that the most striking of these examples, in IE, is that of a theme 3E (lifelong learning) DP. The EQUAL At Work DP gathered 48 partners across public sector, private sector and community employers and aimed to change their human resources policy and practice to

²⁰² Theme 3E.

²⁰³ raised from private developers through planning approvals

open up recruitment and progression for people with low skills/formal education. The project led to the removal of the minimum recruitment requirements for clerks in local authorities and their replacement with a competency test, for which the DP succeeded in obtaining ministerial approval. Private sector employers piloted a job rotation scheme. In the community sector, recruitment practices were formalised. These different measures led to opening up employment and/or training opportunities for low skilled people. Although the evaluators do not say whether the job rotation scheme has been pursued and what have been its effects, nor what have been the effects in the community sector, at least the change in local authorities' recruitment criteria constitutes an important intermediate impact at the institutional level²⁰⁴.

Another IE DP capitalised upon employers' concern with the implementation of equality regulations and provided a self-diagnosis tool, accessible on the web (where it is largely consulted according to web statistics). The tool has been adapted by the hotel industry federation, another example of organisational impact, although of course it would be important to identify the changes made following the diagnosis.

The two examples, both from IE, are both indicative of strategies aiming at starting from employer concerns and interests as a gate of entry for actions against inequality and discrimination. The second example also highlights the decisive importance of legislation in this area, although of course providing employers with the tools allowing them to comply with the legislation has been crucial.

With regard, more specifically, to **gender equality**, the main impact signalled by evaluators has again been amongst partner organisations. Impacts include increased awareness but also the adoption of gender mainstreaming processes and procedures.

It is also an area in which professionals have become more organised. In ES and GR the role of 'equal opportunities agents' has been promoted, a regional professional association of equal opportunities agents has even been created in one Autonomous Community (region) and a provincial branch of one of the two main Spanish unions created a secretariat for women issues.

However the impact on companies is uncertain. In ES, the evaluators argue that the consolidation and expansion of the role of equal opportunities agent is likely to have longer-term impacts on company practices, but there is no assessment of its short-term impact. In the same vein, the GR evaluators highlight the importance of 'equality plans'. However we ignore the importance of their take up. The AT evaluators stress that although awareness seems to have increased on gender issues, actually few organisations targeted by EQUAL projects have created a position of 'gender agent' or have formally adopted a gender mainstreaming strategy.

Evaluation reports do not provide much information or examples on impacts in the specific area of **job de-segregation**. Theme 4H gathered only 116 DPs in total (8.6% of R1 DPs) with ES and IT having by far the largest numbers of DPs in this theme (respectively 32 and 34). In ES, many projects seem to have aimed at providing guidance and training women for self-employment or the creation of small businesses, where there has been some success in creating more sustainable support – for example through the creation of an Association of women entrepreneurs. This focus may explain why the evaluators find that the impact of theme 4H DPs on companies remains 'pending'. In fact the most significant example of impacts in this area is that provided by a UKgb DP, JIVE, which won the contract with the Department of Trade and Industry to act as the national resource centre for Women In Science Engineering and Technology. This, according to a DP representative, was a direct consequence of their work under EQUAL R1²⁰⁵. In that context, the UKgb evaluators report that the DP has been able to

²⁰⁴ Questions can be raised as to the consequences of these new recruitment practices on wage levels and wage progression in the local authorities.

²⁰⁵ Transnationality co-ordinator, interviewed in the context of our transnationality case studies.

‘brief ministers’ and to report ‘at the Trade and Industry Select Committee on gender segregation and the pay gap’. Similarly, in GR, an Observatory of Women in Technical professions has been set up.

10.3.3 Impacts in the care sector

There is much evidence of local institutional and organisational impacts in this sector, through the creation of new services for which continuity of funding is ensured, or through the introduction of organisational changes in existing services.

In various ES local authorities DP work on work/life balance issues has resulted in opening schools in the afternoons, widening the opening hours of crèches, and local authorities have dedicated more funding to ensure continuity for these widened services. In FR, the work of an EQUAL DP with the Chinese community in Paris has led to the design of a specific care facility for Chinese children, within an existing crèche.

There are also cases of highly significant national institutional and even policy impacts.

An important example is provided by the LU evaluators. In that Member State, EQUAL has served to pilot the new government measure of ‘*Maisons relais*’, which are childcare facilities characterised by extended opening hours, more flexibility of provision, the recruitment of mixed staff (highly qualified and specialised staff and more generic staff) and local networking. The two crèches created by the EQUAL DP will thus be maintained and their experience has been directly capitalised upon for the development and extension of this new childcare system. In this case the fact that EQUAL was used as a pilot for a governmental measure naturally secured the mainstreaming of results.

In the UKgb, a DP contributed to the elaboration of the Carer’s Act, which requires every local authority to provide an assessment of carers’ needs and provide services to carers, also in order to help them convert their informal skills into opportunities for becoming professional carers. These requirements to local authorities also mean that the financial sustainability of the centres set up by this DP for providing the ‘first qualification in the EU for unpaid carers and on-line learning’ has a high probability.

In AT, as mentioned in Chapter 5, a care voucher system was piloted by a DP and has now become institutionalised. It is also probably the country where more progress has been achieved in terms of improving the work environment of workers of the sector (as said in Chapter 5, this was an explicit focus of theme 2D). Thus, a Theme 2D DP prepared a model of collective agreement for the health and social sector, with clauses bearing on work flexibility (for work/life balance purposes), combating discrimination and introducing new job assessment methods. The evaluators stress that numerous clauses of the model agreement have been taken up in the agreements between works councils and employers in the sector.

In FR, the GEPETTO DP, which has been referred to on a number of occasions in this report since it has been considered as best practice from several points of view by the FR evaluators, has already had an important institutional impact in the area of childcare. The project ‘Childcare for the balance between family and working time’ aimed at the validation and accreditation by the National Fund for Family Benefits of a new childcare concept and system, whereby all-day home childcare services become available to parents facing employment ‘inequalities’ (in terms of working time, geographical mobility, and wages). The system has been developed by the DP in 8 local areas as a complementary resource to the existing childcare supply, and works with highly qualified childcare professionals. The Fund has now

taken up this experiment with a view to extend it to the whole national territory. It has to be noted that the Fund was present from the start in the project and contributed to its funding.

10.3.4 Impacts in the social economy

As already said in Chapter 5, this thematic priority has been an area of important new developments in some countries where the social economy lacked structuring. This also led to some important policy impacts: thus the GR evaluators stress the influence of EQUAL in the introduction of this new area of intervention in the revision of the National Action Plan for Employment and Vocational Training and the FI evaluators mention ‘new national policy initiatives’ for the development of social enterprises.

In the UKgb, the sector is not new but there has been renewed policy interest in ‘social enterprises’ in the last years, which the evaluators note constituted a positive background for DPs’ work. Indeed there are examples of successful institutional impact, for example, the take up and further funding by the Scottish Executive of the ‘social economy zone’ concept put forward by one DP (for the promotion of community businesses through the revision of public procurement), or the constitution of two sustainable regional networks of social enterprises.

10.3.5 Impacts of innovations in the support to business creation

This area has been an area of extremely vivid activity and innovation in a few Member States (as far as we could judge from the evaluation reports, in DE, ES, GR and PT). Innovations were identified especially in terms of creation of new support structures, new networks, and opening up new areas of entrepreneurship. Both the UKgb and the ES evaluators mention that success has also been in quantitative terms, even though this was not an objective of EQUAL. Thus one ES DP supported the creation of 275 businesses and 650 jobs. The UKgb evaluators mention results ranging from the creation of 100 to 750 new businesses.

Similarly to what happens in the UKgb on the social economy, the ES evaluators highlight the potential for mainstreaming of innovations in this area, as policies for support to business creation are high on the policy agenda at the moment in all ES regions. In concrete terms, they so far identified one case of continuity of funding to a regional advice centre for business creators created under EQUAL. This was ensured through the creation of a new territorial employment pact, cofunded by ESF objective 1 in Valencia. This territorial pact is a direct consequence of the mainstreaming forum created in EQUAL by the Valencia government.

Institutional impact is also likely at the regional level in the UKgb, where one Regional Development Agency in tight contact with one DP was for example planning to review its business start-up support policy and to integrate lessons from the EQUAL DP in that context.

Unfortunately, there were few other evaluation results. FR and PT are both important contributors to theme 2C in numbers of DPs, but no thematic impact evaluation was available yet.

10.3.6 Impact of new learning facilities, arrangements and contents

Whilst this area has not given rise to much significant innovation, as we saw in Chapter 5, the mainstreaming potential is usually good, since the funding channels for training and learning are developed. Thus much small-scale innovation, such as new modules, including in basic skills and literacy, has found or is finding ways for sustainability through take up by funding and

regulatory authorities, such as the Regional training authorities (in FR) and the Learning and Skills Council (in the UKgb). The take up of new specific qualifications in the national qualification systems has already been mentioned above: another example is provided by the UKni evaluators, with the approval by the Department of Education of a new qualification in Digital Technology and its integration in the national qualifications framework.

However there have also been important national policy and institutional impacts in a few cases.

Thus the GR evaluators stress the influence of an EQUAL NTN in pushing for the adoption, in the new law (3369/2005) regulating lifelong learning, of a system of certification of vocational qualifications. This includes distance validation of skills, a result in which one GR DP was influential²⁰⁶.

In the UKgb, a DP has used the already established scheme of Union Learning Representatives as a platform for enhancing access to training of workers usually not engaged in learning, through 'brokerage' tailored to individual needs. As a result agreements have been signed with retail sector employers to consolidate this brokering function. The evaluators mention 21 workplace learning agreements achieved in the retail sector, including national agreements with major retailers and the supply chain.

10.3.7 Impact of 'work/life balance' initiatives

Impacts in this area seem to have been achieved at the institutional level.

Thus the ES evaluators put forward a number of institutional developments informed by EQUAL DPs: the creation of an inter-institutional commission on work/life balance in one ES region, following the diagnosis of work/life balance practices carried out by a DP; the (unplanned) contribution of a DP to the introduction of a new article on work/life balance in a regional law on co-operatives, which will lead to the development of more flexible forms of work in co-operatives whilst respecting the co-operative form; and the inclusion, supported by the regional government, of work flexibility measures in the collective agreements of a whole Autonomous Community (region). However they note that what has come out mostly of EQUAL DPs working on this issue with employers has been the need to engage employers actively if a real change of attitude is to be obtained: awareness raising actions are not sufficient.

In many cases DPs working in this area have focused on improvements in the support structures (provision of care), which has been dealt above.

However there is not much evidence so far of impacts of the introduction of work/life balance strategies and measures at employer level, except in cases where the employers were the promoters of the projects (see Chapter 5).

10.3.8 Impacts of initiatives for the integration of asylum seekers

As has been explained in Chapter 5, many of the innovations developed by EQUAL DPs in this area have been carried out with existing centres of support to asylum seekers. This is to some extent a guarantee for securing organisational impacts, as these centres are likely to retain those of the new methodologies and tools which they see as most relevant.

²⁰⁶ : 'Validating skills from a distance' (DP Technomatheia) has also been selected as a EU-level success story (see chapter 9 above).

Although the policy context is rather adverse to the extension of facilities for asylum seekers, some DPs have been successful not only at securing the sustainability of their initiative but also at expanding and institutionalising them. Thus the documented enhanced capacity of a Scottish Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB) through the use of volunteers drawn from the asylum seekers themselves has led to further funding by the Scottish Executive for the application of the scheme (which involves the training of these volunteers) in other CABs. Similarly, the initiative of the IE SONAS DP, to recruit and train outreach workers for overcoming asylum seekers' distrust proved its effectiveness and led to a re-evaluation of the existing reception centres and to the setting up of a new outreach project in Cork. A course for outreach workers was also designed and leads to certification by a college.

In ES, the work of the only EQUAL DP in this theme, directly co-ordinated by the Ministry, has contributed to (or accelerated) an important legal change, as asylum seekers are now allowed to work after 6 months. However the campaigns with employers for them to recruit asylum seekers are said to have had a 'disappointing' impact.

10.3.9 Impacts of initiatives concerning specific forms of discrimination

EQUAL targeted in principle all forms of discrimination and inequalities in connection with the labour market. Some of the problems tackled concerned structural problems which affect large groups of individuals – e.g. the barriers to employment and/or to stable and quality employment which affect the long-term unemployed, the low skilled, migrants; barriers to employment in some sectors and inequalities in employment affecting women, migrants, low skilled workers, older workers etc. A share of DPs, variable in the different countries, chose to address multiple or highly specific discriminations affecting some more specific groups, e.g. people with disabilities, prisoners and ex offenders, the traveller community, the Roma and Gypsy communities, people discriminated against for their sexual orientation, etc.

It would have been important to assess the impact of initiatives combating these discriminations across several Member States: in particular this would seem possible concerning people with disabilities, prisoners and ex offenders, and some ethnic minorities, who were targeted in many Member States. At this stage this is not possible as the body of evidence is very limited. However there are some highly relevant examples of impacts in some evaluation reports, e.g.:

- The changes in the Prison Service Resettlement Strategy brought about by the action of the Personal Progression System DP in the UKni,
- The recognition of HIV / AIDS as a disability in the new Disability and Discrimination Act in the UKgb,
- The recognition of a 'partial' qualification for young people with disabilities in the AT dual system of vocational training,
- The institutionalisation of inter-agency work with drug users in IE (see below).

Various agencies working with drug users, involved as partners in the Blanchardstown DP in IE, agreed on a common protocol, a confidentiality policy, inter-agency release of information, referral forms and criteria and guidelines for meetings and individual care plans. According to the national evaluator, 'the potential to develop this concept with a view to mainstreaming this approach into national policy was identified, and funding was extended for the project from its original completion date to 31st August 2006'.

It would thus be interesting to carry out, possibly in the framework of the European networks set up (on ex offenders issues, or on disability issues), cross national impact evaluation exercises.

10.4. CONCLUSIONS

Overall it is still difficult at this stage to form a fair view of the impacts achieved by EQUAL in the different Member States. Many DPs were still at the beginning or in the midst of their Action 3 (transfer and mainstreaming) projects at the time of evaluation fieldwork. On the other hand, not all evaluators have looked at impacts and when they have done so, the reliance above all on DP and programme sources did not always allow for a proper distinction between outputs (innovations) and actual take up and sustainability (impacts) although some evaluators did consult external sources.

Institutional impacts have by far been the most documented. Impact on policies are said by most evaluators to be limited, however quite significant examples have been provided. There is a notable lack of reporting on impacts on organisations (other than partner organisations). Impacts can be said to still be very much local in scope.

On the basis of the review of the specific impacts pointed out by evaluators, it seems that the capacity to produce significant impacts (in terms of scope or level) often lies with a small number of DPs in each programme – at least this seems to be the case in the largest EQUAL programmes. The rest of DPs have much more modest ambitions and potential, and the capitalisation of their results rather makes sense through collective mechanisms. This should not be surprising given the experimental character of the programme: if, as already argued in Chapter 5, not all DPs can be expected to produce high quality innovation, even less can be expected to produce a timely and policy relevant innovation. What would be less satisfactory however would be if timely and policy relevant innovations were not being taken up, for lack of policy interest and/or adequate mechanisms.

Precisely, several evaluators point out that the ‘impact potential’ of EQUAL is much more important than what has actually materialised so far. There is thus, according to the ES evaluator, an ‘infra-use’ of EQUAL innovations due to the lack of appropriate mechanisms at the policy level for identifying, assessing and transferring EQUAL results. As already said in Chapter 8 above, the improvement of mainstreaming mechanisms is thus a pending and important task for EQUAL to fully play its role of ‘laboratory’ of social innovations. This is a rather urgent task as there is a risk that, once EQUAL funding comes to an end, the implementation of bridging mechanisms will become much more difficult. Nevertheless it is also true that a share of R1 EQUAL DPs are continuing their work in R2, which gives programme actors some breathing space for developing adequate mainstreaming mechanisms. This is also why it will be important to carry out an in-depth evaluation of impacts towards the end of R2.

Several lessons can be derived from the review of the main thematic impacts identified so far by national evaluators:

- The lack of reported sustainability and impacts of initiatives working on labour market integration or re-integration is a matter for concern and should be investigated further: is it because DPs have focused more on their immediate objectives of enhancing the employability of their target groups and less on publicising their approaches? Is it because of a lack of contact with mainstream employment policy actors? Is it simply because impacts have not so far been documented by evaluators? In any case this should be given more attention, as a substantial share of EQUAL funds have been allocated to this type of projects.
- There is a general lack of reporting on impacts on companies of the initiatives taken to combat discrimination at work, especially with regard to gender discrimination, job segregation and the introduction of work/life balance mechanisms.

- Important policy and institutional impacts are reported in the care sector, where projects are very concrete and outcomes are immediately visible. In the social economy and in the area of support to business creation, impacts are especially highlighted in those countries where these issues have attracted policy interest in the last years.
- Even though innovations are not particularly ground-breaking in the field of new learning facilities and contents, their take up and institutionalisation usually seem to be easier than in other areas, as many funding channels exist. This is an area where impacts can be very specific (e.g. the inclusion of a new qualification in the national qualification systems) but are numerous.
- Even though the context is adverse for the mainstreaming of initiatives targeting asylum seekers, the fact that DPs in this area have included existing reception centres or worked in complementarity with them means that the potential for change in the practices in these centres is important. There are already significant examples.
- Finally, it would be worth carrying out cross-country impact evaluations of initiatives targeting more specific groups, such as prisoners and ex offenders and people with disabilities.

In terms of evaluation approaches, the focus of the analysis on ‘intermediate impacts’, i.e. changes in policies, policy-making processes, institutional changes (including changes in the regulatory frameworks and inter-institutional co-operation) and changes in organisations (in terms of new modes of organisation, new procedures, new roles), seems to be the most feasible strategy at this stage, as longer-term impacts such as changes in mentalities, attitudes and representations are much more difficult to capture and to trace back to EQUAL interventions. However it is also true that such an approach privileges the reporting on the most concrete or formal and procedural impacts, rather than on the actual changes they trigger. Assessing the actual contribution of these to the reduction of inequalities and discrimination remains a challenge. In any case, it seems highly advisable to carry out the assessment of these intermediate impacts by organising interviews with key users (policy makers but also ‘multipliers’ and directly employers) pointed out by DPs and the NTN. It is also fruitful to carry out this type of investigation by theme, especially in the large EQUAL programmes.