



*Ministero del Lavoro
e delle Politiche Sociali*

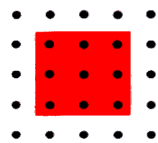


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Mid-Term Evaluation of PIC Equal

Executive Summary

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1. A METHODOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION

The question addressed in the third intermediate evaluation is the following:

- Did Equal impact on social exclusion ordinary policies?

In order to respond to the question the evaluation team adopted an action-research participative approach based on:

- 6 in-depth case studies (Provinces of Genoa, L'Aquila, Bari, Reggio Calabria and Catania; Region of Veneto). The case studies investigated all the DPs operating within the territories by triangulating the information collected through the involvement of:
 - 1) DPs partners
 - 2) Key-informants
 - 3) Context socio-economic and political analysisThe instruments utilised in the case studies comprise:
 - 1) interviews
 - 2) evaluation conference and meetings
 - 3) questionnaires
- final reports. A final questionnaire was sent to all the Italian DPs who had ended their actions. 77 of them responded and the data collected have been elaborated and included in the final reporting to corroborate the case studies findings.
- Desk analysis.
- Meetings with the regions technical assistance.
- Active participation to national events as external observers.

2.CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1.Conclusions

2.1.1. Main results and relevance of Equal in Italy

Considering the 2000-2006 EU programming period, the Equal programme allocates resources up to 802000 euros in Italy, including 401000 euros from the ESF. The programme counts the 4.7% of the total Italian ESF. This percentage is a little higher in the regions objective 3 (5%, while objective 1 regions are 2.1%). This last percentage is similar to the European average; only in the smallest countries (Austria, Finland, Luxembourg, The Netherlands), the percentage is higher.

Tab.1 Equal resources and ESF ordinary resources (absolute values in Euros and %)

	ESF A	Equal B	% B/A
Objective 1 regions	4.441.475.354	93.380.864	2,1
Objective 3 regions	4.055.805.200	202.972.136	5,0
Sectoral + Action 3		105.011.808	
Total	8.497.280.554	401.364.808	4,7

Sources: Ob. 1 and 3 regions – CSF financial plans; Equal: DOCUP. After the programming period

Equal in Italy shows a small relevance in influencing social exclusion phenomena, yet at the same time it has got a considerable financial weight in order to promote innovation.

2.1.1.1. Attention of the programme towards social inclusion

In the course of the evaluation, in order to analyse the problems and policies that Equal copes with, we grouped DPs into homogeneous policy categories. From this classification, a special attention of the programme to social policy themes emerges (about 30% in terms of projects and resources). This result confirms the programme strategy and the activation of an intervention area often marginal or excluded within the Italian ESF.

Tab. 2 Projects and resources by main policy frames (% and first run projects)

Policy frame	% projects	% resources	Main themes
Labour	27,2	26,4	- youth unemployment - long-run unemployed - ongoing training and adaptability - temporary workers
Local development	10	8,6	- territorial exclusion - rural development - tourism and environmental resources
Social	30,8	34,1	- migrants challenges - disadvantaged groups - integration with other existing social policies
Social entrepreneurship	19,7	20,6	- Empowerment of skills and organisational patterns of the third sector - the third sector as an active actor in social policies
Gender mainstreaming	12,2	10,2	- new business enterprises - new life/work patterns

Sources: Ismeri Europa's elaborations on first run projects

Although regional development might be of minor interest, it appears in many projects as it is a crucial element in the activation process (the partnership). There are also some innovative themes, such as migrants and temporary workers.

In some cases, Equal works for the empowerment and replacement of ordinary policies, rather than towards their innovative development.

2.1.1.2. Many beneficiaries, yet not treated in the long run

We observed a great difference between the average number of beneficiaries involved in well structured actions and all the others. Considering the 77 projects that returned the final questionnaire, information and communication actions have interested some 2440 people per DP, while they become 349 per DP for motivational actions and decrease more for structured interventions (training or care services): ongoing training shows 43 beneficiaries per DP, basic schooling 36 people, compulsory instruction 26 people, secondary education 20 beneficiaries.

Tab. 3 Average beneficiaries per DP, per DP typology and main action

	Total		Geographic	Sectoral
	people	firms	People	People
Actions for people				
Information and advice	2440	171	3274	624
Employment advising				
Motivational, work and consultant activities	349		338	387
Skills analysis	77		83	65
Education				
Compulsory education	26		37	
Post-compulsory education	20		11	41
Workers education	43		54	22
Primary education	36		40	27
Incentives				
Incentives to people	6		9	1
Services to beneficiaries	35		29	51
Actions to systems and structures				
Research	29	32	43	
Information and advising actions to operators	23		34	
System actions				
Networks creation	29	9	30	28
Systems integration	15	7	17	11
New pacts	238	3	344	5
Integrated informative system	1637	10	1761	1422
Permanent centres	1080	22	1471	224
Definition of new professions	30		27	37
Advising				
Services to beneficiaries				
Entrepreneurship	28	13	33	19
Social mediation	32	4	16	71

Sources: Ismeri Europa's elaborations on first run projects

These results show a great capacity of the projects to involve final beneficiaries, though only a small portion of this people follow insertion and empowerment paths.

There is also a difference between geographic and sectoral DPs: The geographic ones exhibit a larger influence in networking actions (new partnerships, services integration, new pacts...), while sectoral ones involve a greater number of beneficiaries. This is due to the bigger dimension of the sectoral DPs, although it resembles a lesser capacity in boosting local development.

2.1.1.3. Result Indicators: a considerable effort in the field

Tab. 4 Main indicators from 77 ended projects

Indicators	Total	Geographic	Sectoral
Orientation			
N. of skill balances	6508	4904	1604
N. final beneficiaries involved in other actions	5337	3375	1962
Training			
N. of unemployed final beneficiaries	2194	1377	817
N. of temporary worker final beneficiaries	2814	2286	528
N. of atypical worker final beneficiaries	1261	655	606
N. of trainers	1879	874	1005
N. of new professional profiles created for trainers	201	36	165
N. of new professional profiles created for final beneficiaries	819	542	277
N. of realised certification of competences	791	608	183
N. of promoted individual training paths	1207	593	614
N. of agreements among unions and firms for individual training	224	186	38
Other final beneficiaries	3454	773	2681
Placement			
N. of demand and supply matches	1993	1449	544
N. of not disadvantaged people employed	337	319	18
N. of disadvantaged people employed	444	226	218
N. of previous illegal workers employed	5	5	
N. of new individual business	48	48	
N. of new business	9	9	
N. of new no-profit business	10	6	4
N. of new social business	15	13	2
N. of business creation activities (joint venture, spin-off, consortia, incubators, etc. ...)	56	21	35
N. of temporary and atypical worker involved in equal opportunity actions	604	589	15
N. of enterprises involved in experiments of new organisation of working time	268	176	92
Other actions for the system			
N. of networks among public bodies	30	25	5
N. of networks among public and private bodies	115	78	37
N. of networks among private bodies	34	9	25
N. of integration of different services (employment, health, social, etc.)	22	19	3
N. of agreements among trade unions and businesses	21	21	
N. of pacts (employment, territorial development, training, etc.)	41	37	4
N. of programming acts (programs, plans, proposals, new regulations, etc.)	24	17	7
N. of worker in social bodies involved in counselling, orientation and other services	803	195	608
N. of promoted asylum requests	699	99	600

Sources: Ismeri Europa's elaborations on first run projects

By considering the results indicators it emerges that:

- 6269 people were involved in training actions: 44% were employed; 35% unemployed; 21% temporary workers. This shows how Equal has been able to involve new subjects deriving from the latest changes in the Italian labour market (recent "flexible" regulation);
- a great number of operators involved in training actions (24 per DP);

- about 10% of people trained have found employment;
- DPs have created more than 1 business enterprise (82), especially small individual firms or no-profits.
- DPs have often developed networks although not always permanent;

All in all, the programme seems aiming at creating new networks in the local action areas. The experimental actions appear more limited as for number of beneficiaries although, they are involved more intensively than in ordinary actions (between 20 and 40 people). These data may be modified in the second run, because the selection has paid attention to the project activities rather than to the size of partnerships.

2.1.2. A complex learning management system

The institutional partnership seems one of the most interesting innovation by Equal: they were able to test a new paradigm State-Regions within the same programme and they attempted to merge the managing capacity of different entities. This new asset brings in complexity and requires a strategic liaison for ensuring the implementation of the programme.

Tab. 5 The main actors' role in the programme management

	European Commission	Ministry	Regions	Local Entities
Role in the management	- programme direction - expenditure monitoring	- management role and sectoral DPs authority	- geographic DPs authority	- frequently present in DPs
Management issues	- absence in the steering committees - barriers to eligible costs - n+2 rule inadequate	- in the first run, weak coordination among different actors - in the second run, better relations - difficulty to involve other directorates and subjects - dissimilar attention of regions to the programme		- little work on the results' mainstreaming - problems in the activities certification
Contribute to and from the programme	- European roundtables and better coordination	- co-management experimentation between state and regions - lack of the political use of the programme		- experimenting of the relation between public entities, social and non-profits

Sources: Ismeri Europa

The second run required an intensive re-programming work addressed by each region and province. The climate within the institutional partnership improved from the first to the second run, as the active collaboration on the writing of both the DOCUP and the instructions of the steering committee proves.

There are still some differences, in terms of human resources employed and the usage of the programme by some regions, which seem seized by ordinary actions within the ESF.

2.1.2.1. A knowledge system for Equal

Equal has proved to be a tough management programme. Probably at the beginning, its complexity was underestimated because it produces unique situation which cannot easily be standardised, as instead it usually with ordinary policies. Equal always displays unique cases

and it requires diverse approaches and skills. Experimenting new actions requires complex teams and diverse expertise, although local entities have utilised ordinary approaches. It is necessary to add that the regions' technical assistance groups have contributed significantly to the improvement of management in terms of human resources and knowledge.

Improvements in the management of the projects are evident and they positively affect the relationships between the national and regional authorities, who have generated a community that is able to quickly decide about the programme. The role of national technical assistance groups is better defined and better addresses the programme needs. More integration and coordination between the different regional technical assistance groups is an important challenge for the second run.

It is necessary, however, that the technical and management expertise developed in the last years be transferred into the next programming and disseminated within the departments that deal with other EST interventions.

2.1.2.2. Horizontal relationships reinforcing the programme

Managing Equal requires a horizontal relationship work among directions of the same regional and ministerial entity, which is quite difficult to implement. Exchanges are rare and are not included into a plan aiming at improving Equal. This difficulty is traditional in the organisations with a hierarchy, and especially in the public ones. It points out to what extent Equal requires innovations in this field. Almost all the delegates of the directions involved in the management of Equal have expressed an intention to work on this specific point in the second run: this is to develop forms of mainstreaming beginning from management entities.

It is also important to deal with vertical relationships requested by the programme. In the course of the evaluation it has been noted the absence of the so-called "use of the programme" at the beginning of the process (the analysis of needs priorities) and at the end of it (lessons learnt from experimentation). The strategic involvement of policy makers must follow the efforts in the management.

2.1.2.3. The attention to the expenditure levels

In 2005, the financial expenditure reached 75% of the overall objective of Euro 165 million. This result does not seem to be too far from the objectives because, as it happened in the past, the expenditure tends to increase in the last three months.

There are some differences between DPs. As for sectoral DPs, the expenditure is quite quick (91%), as for geographic DPs expenditure is slower (71%). The most critical datum regards the certification of action 3. In 2004, action 3 closed with a 68% expenditure: this situation must be assessed accurately.

Financial certification in regions shows a great variability and a lack of continuity. These factors are due to organisational difficulties (collection of single certifications, tendency to process certification in the last periods of the year, etc.) and should be normalised in order to favour financial flows from Brussels.

2.1.3. The programme impacts: potentially strong

At this stage, the programme impacts seem quite weak. Significant changes promoted by Equal are not visible, but at the local level. The programme addressed the innovation question; but at the moment is unable to promote changes in the policy behaviours on a significant scale.

Impacts on public policies, action systems, actors and instruments (improving governance among public entities, promoting empowerment...) are not yet visible. It is too early to observe them, although, more likely, these results are not yet satisfactory.

2.1.3.1. A high value added programme

Equal is a considerable value added programme for the Italian system, because it was able in the first run to develop interesting actions, often responsive to the communities' needs, and sometimes really innovative. In the second run, Equal may work even better drawing on the lessons of the first run in terms of: reforms of social and labour policies are more advanced than in the Nineties; there are more people with a stake on it, the programme has more visibility.

At this time, briefly and to a different extent, Equal was able to:

- involve new actors in experimental networks (public entities, no-profit, ngos...) with formal and informal pacts;
- turn training into a more original and effective practice;
- intervene on an important number of beneficiaries in support, training, care actions; and it favoured the employment of some of them;
- improve employability of a good number of beneficiaries;
- stimulate organisations to learn experimental approaches and integrated interventions between different people and facing worlds;
- implement relevant social inclusions actions with limited resources and accelerate the integration process between social and labour policies;
- put a stop on clientelism and state assistantship applied to social exclusion by facilitating bottom-up approaches.

2.1.3.2. The innovation needs of territories

The innovation needs of territories, on which we evaluated the impacts of Equal, are often complicated and demanding with respect to the resources of the programme. Indeed, most effects appear weak in order to address these demands. The following table introduces the results, the innovation questions and the issues that emerge from the case studies picked by the evaluation team

Tab. 6 The case study synthesis

	The innovation questions	Effects	Problems
Genoa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - new welfare forms - high tech promise - various social needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - public entities linked to non-profits privates - discrete number of beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tough management - lack of directions - difficult dialogue among diverging actors
Bari	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - unemployment - traditional sectors industrial restructuring - lack of service for families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cooperation between third sector and public entities - organisational learning - low coordination among public entities - low empowerment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - scarce capacity of public entities to dialogue - low horizontal investment of DPs
Veneto	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - social inclusion model based on employment growth is suffering - ample inclusion networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - low impact of Equal on the regional inclusion model - the programme has not fully been used, but locally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - concentration of power around few subjects in DPs - small size of projects - difficulties in vertical mainstreaming
L'Aquila	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic decline - Unemployment - People ageing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - new networks between firms and public entities - social inclusion even with scarce resources - the Province interacted with social services - third sector provides more valid services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - inability to observe the territory's needs - lack of capacity to share innovative actions - DPs not always inclusive
Reggio Calabria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - insufficient economic development - environmental distress - crime 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - third sector reinforced - employment centres and disabled people linked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - scarce programme management - social needs too serious
Catania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - unemployment - urban distress - crime - drop-outs - housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - new training actions - low number of beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - inefficient political context - weak social context

Sources: Ismeri Europa

The Italian policy environment where Equal operates is changing, in terms of both institutional mechanisms (services are being set up after many years of decentralisation) and exclusion phenomena (which changed as a consequence of society and labour market modifications: new poverties, urban issues, a lesser safety at work degree), which are generally worsening

In less developed areas, there are services and programmes inefficiencies. In more developed contexts, there is a request of more strategic policies, able to foresee change.

Rather than a radical innovation need, Equal is expected to address an intervention question, so that innovation becomes a mere management of social transformation and inclusion processes. At the local level, the demand is to ease and make reform processes more efficient applied to: employment centres, evaluation and programming methods, community development and empowerment. Veneto region, instead, where ordinary policies combined with a dynamic economy and a prompt civil society work well, exhibit a certain effectiveness in facing discrimination phenomena. Here the demand is to foresee emerging needs, linked to social actual or potential transformations, and to implement preventive actions in favour of potential disadvantaged people.

Gaps in demands and expectations from Equal depend on contexts differences. However, it is necessary to implement an integrated action between services, regional and national public entities. This integration does not only merge different skills, but it is supposed to better define social issues by loosing the sectoral vision on the specific issues.

2.1.3.3. Problems faced by the programme

The analysis found the scarce precision of local institutions in the programming (either top-down or bottom up), evaluation and re-programming. This pertains to most of the policy areas and especially local development, where investments were higher and wasted opportunities more painful. As for social policies, this problem is less relevant, probably because programming (L. 328/00) is a relatively new concept, while previously one would refer to assistance services.

In this frame, it is difficult to practice coordination, above all between local and national government agencies. Regions, endowed with more competencies, have to learn how to exercise their strategic and managerial role towards local contexts, provinces and municipalities. They have also to recognise their collocation in terms of mutual interdependence at the national level.

There are similar problems between the national and European level. There is a lack in the coordination between ordinary and European funds, and a relationship between ESF and national policies (education, welfare, health system) is missing. Hence, Equal contributes to filling the gap by boosting integration between different policy areas. The lack of integration among different policies is responsible for the presence of “old” social exclusion phenomena such as: women unemployment, informal work, drop-outs, child work, which seem to perpetuate in spite of 20 years of interventions.

Finally, it has been noted a widespread incapacity in using experimentation. The case of Veneto region exhibits this phenomenon, where key-actors declare an abuse of experimentation without really addressing the emerging need of communities. In Catania, one would say that the programme experiments something, but positive experiences are not capitalised.

Paradoxically, Equal seems to suffer from the same problems of ordinary policies. This does not surprise, but it induces to reflect because the programme logic expresses an effort to solve this problem. Project flexibility, partnership, time assigned to partners and so on... proposed an approach (bottom-up) that does not resemble ordinary policies at all. Yet, this logic is inked to an ordinary paradigm does not produce expected results.

2.1.3.4. Limits to the programme implementation

Problems in governance also regard the decentralised organisations (the chain Ministry/ Regions/ Autonomous Provinces) and Equal as a programme within ESF. Difficulties in recognising authentic needs, choosing priorities, experimenting and learning from experience affect the DPs' activities. More generally, this difficulty affects the programme and determine a general obstacle in programming and coordinating sectoral and local efforts..

The possibility for a Region to be both manager and actor is plausible and feasible. This operation was quite complicated for the best functioning regions and provinces such as: Emilia Romagna, Lombardy and Veneto, which faced some difficulties in the management of the programme contents, the integration of policy areas and so on... Yet, they were able to make an

effort at least. Most regions have expressed a strong interest in improving the management in the second run.

Local areas call for a check on regional inefficient managements, as nobody cares about it and no penalties are applied. It is a problem that must be solved in order to implement correctly decentralisation. Equal has taught something in this respect: it was capable to bring regions and provinces around the same table and to promote debates among them. This exercise may overcome the old dependency/independency relationships, both inappropriate in the Italian context.

The mechanism proposed is the financing of projects, as for the ESF, but this time this appears to be more complicated because of the presence of the partnership. The ESF paradigm, that regards Equal as well, has produced a slow, overly-complicated management, which makes Equal a clumsy programme, without even save it from frauds. This effect might be less relevant in the second run, as the whole setting has changed and Equal, as a programme, has been acquired by many.

2.1.3.5. Summary of impacts according to the European categories

In short, following the instructions of the European Evaluator, the following table shows the main impacts of the programme on the basis of the information collected and ordered according to the classification:

- (a) policies;
- (b) governance systems;
- (c) organisations.

All in all, it seems that the intermediate impacts of the programme on ordinary policies are modest and strictly linked to the geographic context. Yet, Equal have transferred a new and more integrated approach towards the treatment of social problems. The programme has been a valid chance to reinforce the Third Sector, as a subject capable to experiment concrete caring of socially excluded people in junction with public entities.

Tab. 7 The impacts according to the European categories

Policies	Governance	Organisations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Weak and micro impacts – A new participative approach learnt – Integrated social policies – Empowerment of ordinary interventions – Agenda setting modified – Third sector empowered – New needs assessment – Employment centres modified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – local entities not proactive – low institutionalisation of actions – not very sustainable actions – more profits in ordinary policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – cognitive impacts – third sector empowered – integration with privates

Sources: Ismeri Europa

As for the governance, it seems that Equal has had few impacts, although it has induced, in some territories, ordinary actors to actively involve profit subjects in the treatment of social issues, an area where traditionally business enterprises have been absent.

The organisations have learnt different skills (technical, managerial, strategic, and so on...) from the partnership experience of Equal. A few subjects have been empowered (enterprises and third sector); others have consolidated their presence (leading partners; strategic project partners);

others have entered the strategic consultancy for the first time (small NGOs, associations, and so on...). Therefore, Equal has been able to broaden the range of subjects that have made an effort to deal with complex social issues.

It has eased the constitution of new networks which will have a role in the definition and implementation of new social, employment and development policies, even in territories that change slowly. There are four different actors who had a strongest role in the programme:

- the third sector has been empowered (the case of Genoa as well as Reggio Calabria);
- the training subjects have tested new models and interventions;
- the local entities have tested new interventions potentially replicable into the local social plans (L. 328/00), as well as into the restructuring of the employment centres, training, and so on...
- the business enterprises, though very numerous, in many cases have come closer to the diversified world of social exclusion.

Clearly, the successful examples cannot regard all the problematic areas touched by Equal. Unemployment of certain categories was a relevant issue faced by the programme but not certainly solved. The issues related to geographic exclusion of some communities are still acute in the mountains, rural and urban peripheries areas. Equal could not impact substantially on this: it has not enough resources. Instead, Equal impacted substantially on the empowerment of social entrepreneurship, certain categories (disabled, women, temporary workers), the intersection of ordinary policies (L. 328/00 and L. 68) with local communities.

2.1.4. Lessons from the programme logic

The key principles that characterised Equal have shown to be relevant both in the definition of and in the implementation of actions. They were a reference point for many actors and, although with a different intensity and success, have led the programme to create an identity of its own, strong and recognisable.

From a more detailed analysis of the single key-words, and more generally from their influence on the results of the programme, it emerges a certain trade-off between the different elements. For example, the partnership required a lot of efforts and this withdrew time and energy from the transnational cooperation, or the empowerment of beneficiaries against mainstreaming.

This gap is not due to managerial problems or to inefficiency but it has to do with the complexity of the programme logic, although other factors may have effected it.

2.1.4.1. Innovation: A widespread effort needing a more defined strategy

Analysing experimentations, we have evaluated that DPs have worked on relevant themes, although they do not easily reach a good degree of innovation/experimentation. They deal with important social exclusion phenomena, but really complex and acute. Considering the experimental profile of the programme it would have been interesting to see new ways out, especially if they offer the possibility to work integrally and with a wide range of tools. Also considering new themes, not many have experimented new ideas, though Equal has got very important knowledge tools.

Tab. 8 Innovation

Contribution to the programme	Problems encountered	Lessons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – modest innovation – focused on the problems only – significant on the people involved – interesting on the techniques 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – need for a sound partnership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – need for a clear strategy at the local as well as the national level

Sources: Ismeri Europa

The interventions and methodologies implemented are slightly innovative because of both the limited budget allocated and the management strict rules: DPs have often opted for well-known strategies, and innovation was promoted by experimenting few experimental actions. Those actions are still important because facilitated the integration of services and new ways to combating exclusion. The main issue was the absence of a solid partnership which could identify the innovation needs of the specific context: in most cases, instead, DPs have generally worked towards innovative practice without a sound strategy.

The strategic plan for innovation proposed by the programme was too large and not focused on the core priorities. To some extent, the large range of European eligible actions and the national DOCUP priorities (in some cases vague e too similar across regions) allowed the programme to move freely and flexibly. Clearly, the innovation strategy does not only depend on the priorities set, but also on the policymakers and management subjects' attention, the relations among them, the evaluation and monitoring systems. All in all, there was a weak relationship between territories and policy-makers on strategic and relevant choices for the programme.

2.1.4.2.Partnership: A contribution to local systems to grow

The partnership has played the most crucial role in Equal: many exchanges and mutual positive influence have gone through this principle. This happened through both different strategies (concerning the network or the partnership, as we outlined in the first intermediate report) and different organisational and efficiency levels. Within the partnership, a few pre-existing linkages among organisations have been reinforced.

Tab. 9 Partnership

Contribution to the programme	Problems encountered	Lessons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – important and used – crucial exchange locus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – concentration of resources around few partners – diverging capacity to using ESF tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – need for equilibrium between strategies and partnership – need for more tools to facilitating internal management

Sources: Ismeri Europa

The partnership confirmed his strategic richness and central role in the implementation of social inclusion policies, but it has also displayed a few difficulties. The empowerment of partners has been upset by the accumulation of financial resources around few actors, which is challenge to the horizontal participation of actors. Besides this, the absence of many mainstreaming actors, public entities and civil society associations in the DPs have jeopardized the partnership effects. In spite of a large presence of subjects in DPs, somehow, the implementation and the sharing of results among them has been weak.

2.1.4.3.Empowerment: a successful item to be reinforced

The involvement of beneficiaries in the experimentation has been poor, if we exclude the communication and advising contacts. The projects did not fully comprehend the importance of

empowering beneficiaries and, therefore, new inclusion strategies have not fully been tested. The DPs that made an effort in this respect showed a higher capacity to involve beneficiaries and to empower the projects' staff.

Tab. 10 Empowerment

Contribution to the programme	Problems encountered	lessons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - scarce involvement of beneficiaries in the experimentation - this tool reinforces DPs - more relationships favoured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - - generally only used in the implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - when present, it is a success - - need for DPs to work more on this aspect

Sources: Ismeri Europa

2.1.4.4. Transnational cooperation: an opportunity that should be used better

Transnational cooperation displayed many weaknesses in the implementation and remained at a potential stage. There are also a few successful cases but they are rare.

Tab. 11 Transnational cooperation

Contribution to the programme	Problems encountered	lessons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a potential contribution more than a real one - only few successful cases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - transnational initial networking not responsive to DPs needs - normative gaps - budget gaps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - need for a better transnational planning - need for fewer procedural barriers

Sources: Ismeri Europa

The DPs strategy have showed scarce attention to the selection and implementation of transnational actions and they did not fully involve the international partners in their projects. The normative and structural differences among countries interfered with the timing and the activities of the projects. The budget gaps among projects have further upset this instrument.

Because of the reasons outlined above, the transnational cooperation seems useful and interesting but they remain on the edge and are almost never decisive. It would necessary therefore to:

- develop a different approach to international exchanges (exchanging practices and connecting projects and policies);
- avoid an over-specialisation limiting the relationships among partners;
- reduce procedural rules.

2.1.4.5. Mainstreaming: an evaluation postponed

It is still tough to detect the results from mainstreaming, although the actions activated so far are ample and significant. This is due to the fact that the programme is still in course and visibility of actions in Equal is scarce so that results are unknown to many. Investments on mainstreaming are also very divergent (1,5% to 10% of the budget) and, probably, show the different attention of actors on this principle.

Tab. 12 Mainstreaming

Contribution to the programme	Problems encountered	lessons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - diffused but ineffective - divergent budget allocated to this - vague contents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - activated at the end of projects - vague results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - need for more participative projects - mainstreaming is not marketing

Sources: Ismeri Europa

Not all the DPs utilised strategies from the very beginning in a participatory way to sustain mainstreaming through, for example:

- the utilisation of advising techniques and territorial assistance, in order to create and spread learning areas among operators;
- the concrete experimentation of a different way to participation and responsibility within the relation between privates and public entities;
- the choice on mainstreaming contents where to work on.

In many cases, public entities were not perceived as actors able to coordinate integral processes of local development, but only as mere entities adopting action models. Although this fact may be useful, it tends to frustrate the programme goals.

At the regional or national level, it is probably too early to draw conclusions but it is necessary to state that large mainstreaming processes are challenged by the local government systems on social and labour issues. This system seems fragmented and not really capable to promote either vertical or horizontal cooperation. Thus, it is necessary to select and direct best practices, which else may result isolated and ineffective. This way, some activities (such as action 3, centres, best practices) seem relevant, but they need a strong link to decisional mechanisms of policies (the innovation demand) to be effective.

2.1.4.6. The use of key-words is a starting point

In short, the programme logic confirmed its validity, although it is necessary to produce a more adequate implementation system at the European, as well as the national level. More effective assistance and advising services, and a more flexible ruling, might have facilitated interventions. Among the main lesson learnt, it is possible to state that innovative actions in the field of social and labour policies cannot be either only top-down or bottom-up oriented, but there should be a mix of it: on the one hand an innovation strategy that is able to detect a community's needs, and on the other hand a more management freedom.

The large number of institutional subjects to include, the different needs they represent, the need for more attention and care towards the individual have found a first answer thanks to Equal, yet they ask for further refinement. In particular, lessons learnt concerning the partnership and networking and transnational cooperation should promote reflections on the implementation of innovative projects in the new programming 2007-2013.

2.1.5. Final considerations

First of all, it is necessary to remind that Equal, as opposed to Adapt 1994-1999, is not focused on a specific theme within the social policy arena. Equal proposed a strong integration among different approaches and instruments which come from different traditions. The programme pursues very demanding goals, even more complicated than the previous programmes. Weak

impacts should not concern policymakers, but they require additional efforts in the mainstreaming process.

Secondly, Equal belongs to a system of social and labour policies whose tasks have been modified towards decentralisation. It is clear that the new actors responsible for these policies are still relatively weak and that institutional cooperation suffers from it. Furthermore, the ongoing budget cuts, due to the effort to reduce public debt, increase difficulties and weaknesses. Equal has worked as an important gym for many actors and potential weaknesses can be deemed significant lessons learned.

Thirdly, Equal stimulates integration and cooperation that can be difficult in hierarchical organisations in terms of adequate procedures, skills, and work practices. This experience is important for promoting new working ways. Labour policies conveyed new programming strategies to social policies; and social policies may also teach something to labour policies in terms of caring and service providing. Complexity in the causes that determine social exclusion requires more personalised interventions and more tools. Equal has made some suggestions.

Fourthly, the national social programme has undertaken transformations which still need to find a niche into public policies: migration, temporary workers, new poverties. The ESF cannot face this challenge alone, yet, it should include them into the new training and technological change policies. Equal has provided some answers to this.

Finally, Equal provided an additional opportunity to generate participatory local policies. The partnership has created different experiences expressing the need for the integration of social and labour policies. This was the main goal of Territorial Pacts and other policies, but they did not touch labour policies too much. A decentralised governance and the need for a larger involvement of local actors will always require this kind of actions. In the future, those actions might be more specific and better focused, as outlined in the second run (between partners and networks), they will be connected to formal pacts. Yet, they will be able to draw on this experience.

2.2.Recommendations

2.2.1. Recommendations to the conclusions of the programme

Considering the advanced stage of the programme, we will be dealing with three main themes: management, mainstreaming and impacts.

2.2.1.1. Management

1. **raising attention to and mobilisation of expenditure** in order to respect the “n+2” rule: this is against the loss of resources. Next months seem decisive and require a significant mutual among the different management actors and the DPs.
2. the “n+2” rule and other European or national financial regulations burden the programme with too many rules and procedures. The Commission can not modify now rules, but it should **facilitate procedures in order to minimise their negative influence in the second run.**
3. **reinforcing the institutional coordination between Ministry and Regions/Aut.Provinces** in the annual expenditure as well as in the up-dating of the monitoring system for the second run.
4. **improving coordination between DPs and regional** authorities with stronger and constant relationships. A ministerial advisor might follow the most difficult regional situation in order to accelerate financial procedures.

2.2.1.2. Mainstreaming

5. **coordinating and integrating all national (action 3, thematic groups, best practices) and European (policy forums) mainstreaming activities.** A debate with policymakers and political representatives should be stimulates, as well as lessons and suggestions from the programme should be better selected and disseminated
6. **devoting a specific session of the Steering Committee for identifying recommendations from Equal to the next programming;** at the end, the Committee should define a document of synthesis with its proposals of innovation to the other policy makers
7. **reflecting quickly on the second run action 3,** trying to involve in them a large number of DPs and actors and to identify the innovation demands from the territories;
8. **broadening the horizontal coordination within national and regional administrations** in order to facilitate transfer of best practice also on the implementation aspect. It is necessary to avoid the dispersion of managing experiences accumulated in the offices. The officials responsible for Equal should implement workshops with other departments on their experience.

2.2.1.3. Impacts

9. **favouring, where is lacking or insufficient, a closer link between DPs (geographic and sectoral) and administrations,** in order to facilitate the tytransfer of contents and know-how
10. **identifying well recognised best practices at the regional as well as the national level,** and in particular identify the component of the projects which is possible to

transfer and standardise. This process is on-going, but it should be reinforced and shared with social partners, key actors and experts.

11. **promoting a more functional relationship between Ministry, Regions and local areas to sustaining impacts**, which are often limited to the local dimension and require a larger dissemination and comparison.

2.2.2. Recommendations to the following 2007-2013 programming

The European Commission intends to cut CIPs so that the innovative experience of Equal will not continue. Efforts towards innovation and the improvement of intervention tools is embodied into the ESF ordinary programming, where there will be room for some innovation activities and the development of transnational projects.

Lessons from Equal deal with two different aspects:

- ESF ordinary interventions
- Ways to the making of innovation and transnational cooperation

2.2.2.1. Lessons for the new ESF ordinary interventions

1. Equal is promoting a large range of suggestions, but we think that an **improvement of ordinary interventions may focus on the following aspects**:
 - *integration of services and creation of new services*, in order to generate a more flexible and complete support system,
 - *networking*, it is some time – not always- necessary to create new interventions or to improve the current intervention;
 - *the social dimension into local development*, this aspect is increasingly relevant because new territorial crisis and new forms of social exclusion independent on labour exclusion;
 - *the caring of particular social “targets”* (migrants, temporary workers, new forms of social exclusion), which are ever more important;
 - *the involvement of new actors*, moreover from third sector, which can represent a “bridge” between social and labour policies
2. **it is necessary to develop, at the national or regional level, workshops between officials responsible for the new programming and those responsible for Equal**, where it is still not happened;
3. **a better involvement of social partners and main stakeholders**, at the moment their attendance at the Steering Committee is not very active.

2.2.2.2. Lessons and recommendations for new innovative interventions

4. **identify clear innovative strategies in each new Operational Programme**, which explicit innovation demands and provide an adequate system of monitoring and support.
5. **do not diffuse resources into too many innovative projects and objectives**, if it is necessary or useful innovation strategy can be changed in the mid-term review;
6. **ensure as much as possible operational freedom and flexibility** for promoting innovative and transnational experiences;
7. **internalise innovation and empower the devoted staff**, which should be able to support projects, to communicate with other departments and disseminated results;

8. **devote specific projects to transnational cooperation**, these projects should be connected with the local innovation projects, but should be developed in autonomous way favouring exchanges and focusing on transferring foreign experiences;
 9. **make information and experience from transnational projects more accessible**, for local operators and institutions.
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