

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE FIRST INTERIM EVALUATION REPORT FOR THE EQUAL PROGRAMME IN SLOVENIA

The purpose of this Report is to provide an objective opinion on the quality of the implementation of the Community Initiative Programme EQUAL (hereinafter referred to as the "EQUAL CIP") in the Republic of Slovenia for the period from the beginning of its implementation to the end of the preparation period, i.e. 28 April 2005.

The specific objectives of the evaluation include:

1. Quality evaluation of the first and initial activities aimed at achieving set results;
2. Evaluation of the contribution of activities to the overall EQUAL CIP objectives;
3. Evaluation of the quality of partnerships and their performance: quality of functioning of particular partnerships, processes and products;
4. Evaluation of the programme implementation and management transparency;
5. Evaluation of the programme contents background, potential and initial effects;
6. Establishing a possible added value of the programme to the labour market policies and practice;
7. Determining future feasibility within the context of active employment policy or activities of the European Social Fund and assessing the quality of EQUAL CIP components for the following programming period 2007 - 2013;
8. Assessing the extent to which the Initiative's activities are already included in the national policies and activities;
9. Establishing if the EQUAL CIP activities facilitate learning processes among international participants with the aim of improving skills and capacities;
10. Providing evaluator's comments and drawing up proposals for substantial amendments with the view to improving attainment of measure targets and synergies in partnership;
11. Proposing good practices and comment them; potential transposition of good practices.

This Report presents the findings of the programme implementation evaluation. The point of the evaluation is not only to monitor, but also to create specific and useful proposals for further work in this programming period and for possible inclusion of the EQUAL CIP principles, findings and good practices in the next programming period. An important aim of evaluation is to tell if the right things are done in the right way – identify good practice or efficient and effective methods of both development partnerships and managing authority itself. In evaluating, we comply with the principle "*substance over form*", i.e. the substance prevails over the form.

The evaluation does not intend to duplicate the activities of management authority, which monitors and supervises the work of individual development partnerships carrying out different programmes. It is important to assess the work of the management authority and other bodies participating in the implementation and evaluation of the programme with the aim to contributing to the highest possible quality of the programme implementation.

The evaluation study or assessment, resulting in the present Report, applied the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of social research and used the following approaches:

1. programme approach as a means of systematic collection of information concerning programme features and results and providing basis to improve the implementation of the programme or design new programmes;
2. approach in view of broader targets / purposes – systematic collection of information on the extent to which the programme has attained its objectives and information concerning the achievement of broader purposes;
3. process approach within which the implementation course of the programme and inputs / outputs are analysed.

Specific objective to evaluate the performance quality of individual development partnerships (hereinafter "DPs"), processes and their products was not fully accomplished due to objective circumstances and short time limit provided for in the First Report. Therefore, only a sample of DPs was selected; the subsequent Reports will present in detail the observations concerning all development partnerships.

The major part of the Report relates to the assessment of the implementation of the first phase of individual development partnerships, therefore it would be worth drawing attention to the sampling methodology. In Slovenia, 81 tender notice applications¹ were submitted to the management authority and 26 DPs were selected. Majority of DPs were selected for Measure 1 – "Employability". Most funds were allocated to Measure 1 and the bulk of applications received related to this Measure. 16 DPs were selected. For Measure 5 – "Adaptability", 5 DPs were selected; for Measure 8 – "Equal opportunities", 4 DPs were chosen; and for Measure 9 – "Asylum seekers", 1 DP was selected.

Measure	No. of received applications appropriately supplemented	Number of selected projects or partnerships	No. of partnerships included in the evaluation in the preparation period
Employability	52	16	5
Adaptability	18	5	3
Equal opportunities	6	4	2
Asylum seekers	1	1	1
Total	77	26	11

Table 1: Number of submitted tender notice applications, number of selected partnerships and number of partnerships included in the evaluation of the preparation phase

The small population (26 DPs or units) and the content evaluation made the use of statistical method unreasonable. The aim of evaluation of this period is not to assess every individual DP (such evaluation was carried out by the tender commission and is also foreseen in individual reports and results that DPs submit for respective work periods) but to assess the selected DPs in the light of specific objectives of this evaluation (e.g. evaluate the quality of

¹ The Ministry received 78 applications from various development partnerships; one of the partnerships filed separate copies of application and therefore the first procedure documents mentioned 81 applications or submissions. In addition, a development partnership was eliminated from the procedure because the applicant was not eligible (it submitted a certificate issued by the Tax Office evidencing that he had not settled all taxes and contributions).

the first and initial activities aimed at obtaining set results, evaluate the quality of partnerships and their performance and other specific targets).

In selecting DPs for evaluation, principles of significance and risk are taken into account – a limited number of units to undergo detailed examination were selected from each group. If selected units show significant differences in quality, in set targets and in activities to attain them, additional units are included in evaluation. In the present case this was not necessary since no major discrepancies between units were observed.

Sample units were not selected at random but on the basis of clear criteria. The basic criteria for selection of the DPs were as follows:

- **Amount of allocated funds** (this criterion relies on the assumption that in this manner the evaluation includes the majority of activities foreseen by the applicants to be carried out within the DPs);
- **Substance – partnership** or the number of partners (in this way the process evaluation includes the highest number of beneficiary organisations) and providers;
- **Context or organizational form of the applicant** (development agencies and development centres received most funds and established most partnerships, however, it is reasonable to include other organisational forms, profit organisations and associations in the evaluation as well).

As regards the selection for evaluation concerning Measure 1 – "Employability", an additional criterion was set:

- Regional criterion (thus, the sample includes partnerships covering different parts of Slovenia) to reduce the risk.

Given the above, the following 11 units were examined:

Partnerships selected within Measure 1 "Employability"	
<i>Coordinator</i>	<i>Name of the partnership</i>
Občina Škocjan (SI-1)	Romski zaposlitveni center
RRA Mura d.o.o. (SI-4)	Romski izobraževalno informativni center
YHD – Društvo za teorijo in kulturo hendikepa (SI-7)	UFO – Union for Future opportunities (Partnership for future opportunities)
RRA severne Primorske d.o.o. Nova Gorica (SI-15)	MOST do uspešne vključitve na trg dela
BSC Poslovno podporni center d.o.o. (SI-16)	M-LAB, Laboratorij za mlade

Table 2: The list of selected partnerships for the evaluation of the preparation phase of Measure 1 "Employability"

Partnerships selected within Measure 5 "Adaptability"	
<i>Coordinator</i>	<i>Name of the partnership</i>
EMINES družba za poslovne storitve d.o.o. (SI-17)	Znanje je moč – vseživljenjsko učenje za vse (osveščanje in informiranje)
RRA Sotla (SI-18)	Razvojno partnerstvo Kozjansko
RACIO SOCIAL, Zavod za razvoj	SINTEZA

socialnih in zaposlitvenih programov (SI-20)

Table 3: The list of selected partnerships for the evaluation of the preparation phase of Measure 5 "Adaptability"

<i>Partnerships selected within Measure 8 "Equal opportunities"</i>	
<i>Coordinator</i>	<i>Name of the partnership</i>
Inštitut za ekonomska raziskovanja (SI-22)	Mladim materam/družinam prijazno zaposlovanje
Zavod za razvoj družinskega in ženskega podjetništva META (SI-24)	EQUAL VESNA

Table 4: The list of selected partnerships for the evaluation of the preparation phase of Measure 8 "Equal opportunities"

<i>Partnerships selected within Measure 9 "Asylum seekers"</i>	
<i>Coordinator</i>	<i>Name of the partnership</i>
Fundacija GEA 2000	PROGRES

Table 5: The list of selected partnerships for the evaluation of the preparation phase of Measure 9 "Asylum seekers"

With its structure, the Report – including the evaluation of programming, the assessment of progress made in the implementation by individual measures and the assessment of administrative capacity – follows basic assumptions of mid-term evaluation, set in the Article 42(1) "Mid-term evaluation" of the Council Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 of 21 June 1999 laying down general provisions on the Structural Funds, stipulating that a mid-term evaluation shall examine, in the light of the ex-ante evaluation, the initial results of the assistance, their relevance and the extent to which targets have been attained. The First Report covers the implementation of the EQUAL CIP in Slovenia up to 28 April 2005 when the first – preparation period ended.

The present and other reports in the series are expected to form part of the bases for ex-post evaluation of the entire programming period 2004 - 2006. The quality assessment of the implementation will be carried out examining the following main factors:

- Quality of programming;
- Quality of the programme implementation through individual projects;
- Programme impacts through elements of relevance, sustainability, performance and effectiveness.

Key principles will be examined, namely: (1) innovativeness, (2) linking into partnership network, dissemination of practice and mainstreaming; (3) transnational co-operation, (4) gender mainstreaming; (5) partnership; and (6) strengthening of initiative actions.

Based on the assessment of quality it will be possible to make proposals to improve the EQUAL CIP in the next programming period. The longitudinal evaluation will be carried out in the form of three yearly reports thus enabling to monitor the suitability of its recommendations through their implementation and allowing appropriate modifications.

It was established that the implementation of the EQUAL CIP in Slovenia started by the adoption of the EQUAL CIP programming document in April 2004 and by the adoption of the programme complement in June 2004. A national call for proposal for EQUAL initiative funding of development partnerships was published in the *Uradni list Republike Slovenije* No. 77/2004 of 16 July 2004. The Report comprises the opinion on the implementation of *Action 1* or preparation period – activities carried out by 28 April 2005.

The first, initial activities contribute to the attainment of objectives set by the EQUAL CIP in Slovenia because the respective development partnerships are appropriately selected, adhere to the principle of partnership in terms of joining several partners, competent in the area of respective measures and of different organisational forms; the proposed work programmes of the examined sample of partnerships are feasible. At the same time it was noted that some terminology discrepancies occurred in the programming process between the CIP EQUAL programming document and the programme complement; general and specific objectives of individual activities within particular measures were not clearly defined. These are areas to be improved in the next programming period. Target groups or individuals within particular measures were extensively listed, but the list did not cover all potential groups or individuals. It was also established that the Republic of Slovenia chose 4 measures within the EQUAL CIP, namely: Measures 1, 5, 8 and 9. Measure 8 "Equal opportunities" is partly linked to the horizontal priority of EQUAL; at the same time, the Single Programming Document indicates that Slovenia will implement this priority – regardless of being one of the priorities of EQUAL – through horizontal priorities.

The contribution of activities to the common EQUAL CIP objectives – namely to support new methods of fight against all forms of discrimination and inequality in relation to the labour market through transnational co-operation, account also being taken of social and occupational integration of asylum seekers – is shown through the establishment of development partnership agreements and through the fact that development partnerships have found transnational partners. Potential improvements could be made through the establishment of national support structure or technical assistance on the side of the managing authority; by 28 April 2005, such structure was not yet set up and this can impede the quality of partnerships work programmes execution in the period of implementation and dissemination.

In the preparation period, the EQUAL CIP partnerships functioned in line with set activities, objectives and results. As to the selected Measure, the development partnerships linked the appropriate key players, but the large number of partners (in some partnerships the number is much higher than anticipated) may pose a risk in case no regular and open communication between partners is maintained. The partnerships attained expected quantified results in the preparation period.

The EQUAL CIP and its managing authority have substantial possibilities to improve their respective roles. In the preparation period, the national support structure was not set up in the form envisaged, which can impede the carrying out of partnerships work programmes. In their reports on the implementation of preparation period, certain development partnerships underlined the lack of operational support by the managing authority.

Potential impact of the programme is to be assessed as positive in case partnerships present truly innovative products of their partnership. In the preparation period, the partnerships

attained envisaged objectives or results; however, their actual contribution – measured up to the current labour market policy and active employment policy and also regarding the possible mainstreaming of the Initiative's activity in national policies and activities – will be possible to assess when evaluating the implementation. In any case, the development partnerships themselves plan to mainstream their observations, innovative practices and products into policy measures.

In the preparation period, the EQUAL CIP activities allied, within the development partnerships, many stakeholders with different organisational forms from the area of labour market and groups or individuals facing discrimination and inequality in the labour market. Thus, conditions to set up a learning process among national participants are created, but its actual implementation also depends on communication ways in individual partnerships and on support provided by the managing authority to the development partnerships, according to available resources.

Recommendations based on the evaluation findings are as follows:

- It is recommended that in the next programming period a programming document and a programme complement be drawn up as soon as possible. These two basic documents provide very important information to potential applicants on the nature of projects to be supported; in addition, sufficient time is needed to draw up quality projects or development partnerships.
- Criteria for the inclusion in the group of "registered unemployed" and "survey" or ILO unemployed differ and significantly influence the scope of individual groups, therefore the following programming document should define more clearly who is to be considered as an unemployed person under the EQUAL CIP or measures to be co-financed by the European Social Fund. The same recommendation relates to the description of target groups of unemployed persons for particular measure.
- In view of the principle of transparency, it would be advisable to use same terminology in all documents.
- We recommend forms to be adjusted according to particular reporting period (preparation period, implementation and dissemination period).
- We would recommend that the function of the representative of the MA responsible for the implementation of EQUAL CIP and the function of the chair of MC be performed by two persons.
- Efficient and effective implementation of the EQUAL CIP necessitates the establishment of support structure by the MoLFSa providing actual support to the development partnerships in carrying out activities, so that when experiencing difficulties in the implementation, the DPs will be able to consult the competent body. This is the only way to expect difficulties to be articulated and resolved successfully, thus providing for a high quality of the implementation.
- Potentially high number of partners within individual DPs may jeopardise the implementation because a clear and open communication must be maintained between them. Therefore, the updated evaluation carried out by the internal evaluators is of vital importance, as they monitor and assess if work programmes are implemented as anticipated.
- Individual development partnerships must therefore pay attention to the fact that, in addition to inclusion or participation of vulnerable groups or their representatives, provisions should be made to really strengthen and empower them.
- DPs that identified unemployed persons as target groups are bound to co-operate with the Employment Service of Slovenia. In this respect, thorough controls must be ensured so as to avoid multiple financing of activities from public funds.