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

MID TERM REPORT

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

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GLOSSARY

Abbreviations used in this report:

ALMP	Active Labour Market Policy
Belgium-FRG; Belgium-NL	Belgium has two separate CIPs: one for the French and German speaking part and one for the Flemish part
CIP	Community Initiative Programme
DP	Development Partnership
ECDB	Equal Common Database
ESF	European Social Fund
ETCIM	Equal Transnational Co-operation Internet Module
ETG	European Thematic Group
MA	Managing Authority
NSS	National Support Structure
NTG	National Thematic Group
TCA	Transnational Co-operation Agreement
TP	Transnational Partnership
UK-GB; UK-NI	United Kingdom has two separate CIPs : one for Great Britain and one for Northern Ireland

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Introduction and State of play of the programme

This Mid Term Report presents the results of the Mid Term EU evaluation of the Community Initiative EQUAL.

The overall aim of EQUAL is to promote new means of combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities in connection with the labour market, through transnational co-operation. EQUAL operates in nine thematic fields based on the four pillars of the European Employment Strategy "EES", adding another priority addressing the specific needs of asylum seekers.

The programme is funded by the European Social Fund for 3,026 million € from 2000 to 2006 and develops about 1,300 projects Development Partnerships (DPs) selected through the 15 Member States on the base of a first call. For the period 2001-2003, Member States made commitments for approximately half the budget allocated to them. However, the late start of the Programme in the Member States in one of the reasons for the low overall volume of payments requested from the Commission so far, e.g. about 36% on average.

The report seeks to provide assessments mainly on the following issues:

- The appropriateness of strategies, i.e. the contextual relevance and policy consistency of the priorities of national Community Initiative Programmes (CIPs) and Development Partnerships (DPs) in the national context,
- The management and implementation systems at the CIP territory¹ level during Action 1, Action 2 and Action 3,
- The effectiveness of the key principles,
- The impact of EQUAL on the European Employment Strategy and other programmes.

The report is based on the analysis of all national Mid Term evaluation reports. Additional information has been collected through: desk research on EU documents and interviews with the EQUAL Unit, thematic experts, other members of the European Thematic Groups and the European stakeholders of other EU programmes and actions.

2. Appropriateness of strategies

2.1. The CIP analysis of inequalities/discrimination and the diagnoses with regard to specific target groups could have been more thorough in most cases.

Our analysis of national evaluation reports shows that in most cases the analysis of inequalities and discrimination in the CIPs is not very thorough and the indicators used too highly aggregated and/or not relevant. However, some Member States are using at least an array of indicators in the CIPs.

2.2. A persisting overall relevance of CIP priorities

Despite some changes in the macro-economic environment since the ex-ante evaluation in some countries, the CIP is generally regarded as still being valid in its main orientations. This is in part because inequalities represent a structural feature and thus also persist during a whole business cycle.

¹ Because of the split of the programme in Belgium and the UK (2 CIPs each), it is more rigorous to talk about CIP territories than about countries. However, for the sake of simplicity, we will sometimes refer to countries for all CIP territories in this report.

Nevertheless, some evaluators are calling for a thematic adjustment for other reasons:

- Because they highlight an insufficient focus on some specific groups;
- Because the focus of some themes is insufficiently specified;
- Because the phrasing of the thematic priority is not conducive to a correct implementation;
- Because the respective weight given to the thematic priorities is partly inadequate and does not ensure the value added of the programme;
- Because some specific issues are not enough taken account of in the formulation of thematic priorities;
- Finally some evaluators call for a clearer focus on regional imbalances.

2.3. A high level of consistency with labour market policies in the national context, but the intended value-added of EQUAL is not always clear

Although, in most cases national evaluators have stated that there is a high level of consistency between the CIPs and the wider employment policy orientations, there are differences across Member States as regards the complementarity of the CIPs and in this respect the value-added of EQUAL.

We could identify the following types of assessments:

- National evaluators stressing a high level of consistency and “complementarity” between the CIP and the national policy framework leading to wide ranging overlaps with a range of national policies (e.g. Belgium-FRG, Greece, UK-NI);
- National evaluators assessing that EQUAL might not bring important value (e.g. Sweden);
- National evaluators pointing to a high level of consistency but also to additionality of EQUAL with respect to national policies (e.g. Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands);
- National evaluators arguing that their Member States are giving attention to new priorities through EQUAL (e.g. Spain, Austria).

2.4. EQUAL prioritises the access to the labour market rather than quality of employment

Labour market access of disadvantaged groups is vindicated as a priority for EQUAL, even though it is a dominant priority of mainstream national policy. This is because raising employment rates is on the top of the political agenda. However, some evaluators are critical of the weight given to the employability pillar, even though the distribution of funds across pillars is more even in EQUAL than in ESF.

But some evaluators point out that the problems faced by some discriminated groups, such as immigrants, are not so much in terms of labour market access as in terms of employment conditions. Our own analysis has shown that, except in a few Member States where unemployment is a structural and serious issue, inequalities were very much in-work inequalities.

In the light of the new European Employment Strategy, quality of employment should feature higher on the agenda (it is one of the ten guidelines). However, neither do the CIPs pay much attention to this issue (except in Sweden), nor do the evaluators critically assess CIP priorities with regard to quality of employment (with few exceptions).

The second Commission Communication on EQUAL (December 2003) has called the attention of the Member States on this lack and has suggested that the second call could emphasise the quality of employment to a higher degree.

2.5. A tension between the need for flexibility and the need for guidance in the definition of priorities and target groups

A lack of clarity has been reported by some national evaluators with regard to the definition of target groups. In contrast, it has also been stressed that it is necessary to leave enough margin of manoeuvre to labour market policies to be flexible.

It thus seems to us that there is a conflict between the openness and the flexibility of the Programme and the need to give clear and precise objectives and orientations in order to be effective.

2.6. Mostly good consistency between the general objectives of the DPs and the CIP but less consistency with regard to the target groups

Our analysis of the national evaluation reports and of the preparatory documents for the Barcelona Conference revealed a great level of consistency between CIP diagnoses and objectives, on the one hand, and priorities taken up by DPs on the other hand. Although most evaluators do not present a systematic evaluation of DPs objectives, work programmes and implementation, this basic appreciation seems to be confirmed.

However, some of the national evaluators highlight inconsistencies between the target groups identified in the CIPs and those identified by DPs.

The Dutch evaluator shows the predominance of the labour market reintegration objective across nearly all Themes. Such a finding is likely to be relevant for other Member States, even though it has not been picked up by evaluators, which may qualify our earlier statement that EQUAL places less emphasis on employability than ESF.

2.7. DPs tend to define their actions by reference to their local environment but spatial inequalities may be insufficiently addressed at the CIP level

In most countries regional differences are not analysed in-depth in the CIPs. It is surprising, however, that even in some countries with a decentralised structure of the EQUAL management no specific in-depth reference is made to the geographical differences.

The smaller countries seem to stress that because of their size, EQUAL is understood as a national programme.

However, it is shown in a number of national evaluation reports that DPs focus their action at the local level. Furthermore, innovation is often defined by DPs in relation to the local level.

3. Management and implementation systems

3.1. The involvement of regional and local actors in the management of EQUAL varies according to the national framework for employment policies

The state of decentralisation of employment policies and the role of the regional level in social, economic and training policies are influencing to an important degree the management structure of EQUAL. Furthermore, it appears that in some Member States EQUAL has been used to reinforce the regional level for the design and implementation of employment and labour market policies.

3.2. Some Member States have organised a regional level of programme management

In a number of Member States, regional and local authorities are involved in monitoring and DP selection. But in only few Member States (France, UK, Italy), a regional level of programme management has been established. The better knowledge of the problems and actors at the regional and local level may be a strong argument in favour of the involvement of local and regional stakeholders. But, at the same time, the possibility of conflicts of interest is increased, as institutions participating in selection committees may also be involved in regional projects.

3.3. Programme management generally involves a variety of government departments, ministries and institutions

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. In most Member States the Ministry of Employment is the key actor; in some Member States, other Ministries are directly involved in the management of the Programme as well. However co-ordination between different policies and in particular between ESF and national labour market policies does not always work in practice.

3.4. The degree of involvement of the social partners differs according to the institutional framework for employment policies

Although the social partners are systematically involved in Monitoring Committees, they have made a greater contribution in those countries where they are active stakeholders of the employment policy (e.g. Austria, Germany, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal and Sweden). There is little data available on the role of NGO networks in the management structures of the programme.

3.5. Action 1 needs to be put to use in a more systematic fashion

The objective of Action 1 was to improve work programmes and to develop partnerships. For this exercise a period of 6 months was planned. Two types of selection processes can be distinguished: in one set of countries Action 1 was used for the consolidation of selected partnerships, while in the other set of countries Action 1 was used as a period to prepare DPs for selection at entry in Action 2.

Concerning selection criteria, two types of countries can be distinguished: countries and CIP territories giving a high relative weight to the thematic approach and political priorities (Belgium-FRG, Germany, Greece and UK-GB range among these CIP territories) and countries where the quality of the DPs and their innovation potential prevail (e.g. France, Portugal).

Problems arising in some countries at the beginning of the implementation phase (Action 2) indicate that the consolidation of partnerships is rather decisive in the conception phase (Action 1), all the more so that CIP guidance to DPs sometimes lacked clarity. Thus, in a number of countries clear target groups have not been identified in Action 1 and this is a weakness which DPs have to address at the beginning of Action 2. The vagueness of CIPs with regard to the definition of the EQUAL principles also appears to have had repercussions on the design of DP actions (Action 1) and their implementation (Action 2). There is also evidence that DPs could be clearer in their expected outputs. In brief, the design of DP projects and their effective implementation thus seems to require more and earlier guidance.

3.6. The implementation of Action 2 is often slower than planned, in part due to the difficulties experienced by DPs

In most countries, budget estimates for Action 2 seem to be appropriate at DP level except in some countries where the programme strategy between Action 1 and Action 2 was revised. However, at the programme level, the development of activities on Action 2 are behind schedule and financial expenditures are below forecasts.

In most member States, DPs have faced difficulties in the implementation of Action 2, which has caused delays. National evaluators have listed the following difficulties:

- Regarding 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.

All these difficulties appear to be magnified in the case of large partnerships.

- Regarding 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;
 - Delays in the approval of Trans-national co-operation agreements;
- Regarding finance and administration:
 - Delays in EQUAL payments;
 - 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;
 - Problems to ask for matched funding to private enterprises;
 - The very time-consuming effort requested from DPs regarding the quantitative and qualitative information that they have to submit to managing authorities.

Guidance to DPs during Action 2 has been very differently appreciated across Member States.

3.7. Action 3 has only started and is being implemented in very different ways from one Member State to the other

Action 3 is specifically dedicated to networking, dissemination of good practice and mainstreaming activities.

Action 3 either was launched simultaneously with Action 2 or was largely separated from Action 2.

Despite those two main strategies, there is a great diversity in the process of preparation and implementation:

- Entry in Action 3:
 - In some countries (e.g. Austria, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland), all DPs have been invited to develop Action 3 work plans and actions.
 - In Denmark, Action 3 is largely implemented through the National Thematic Groups, to which all DPs take part.
 - In Ireland, all projects have a “discrete” Action 3 budget up front.
 - In the other countries, there is a selection process through a call for applications.

- Links with NTGs

- Some Member States have organised close links between Action 3 at DP level and the activities of NTGs : this is the case in Denmark, Portugal, Spain, the UK-GB and UK-NI ;
- In other Member States there are no visible links (France, Germany).

Nevertheless, in most countries, the setting up of the NTGs, considered as part of implementation of Action 3, has preceded the launching of Action 3 at DP level, which may facilitate partially the Action 3 process and perhaps mergers between DPs.

3.8. Overall, the European Common Database is a valuable monitoring tool at the European level

The ECDB gathers, on the one hand, comprehensive data on DPs collected and validated by the Managing Authorities and then transmitted to the Equal Unit at European level and on the other hand specific data on transnational activities provided by the DPs themselves via ETCIM² and validated by the Managing Authorities.

From our point of view, the quality and the relevance of the data provided by the ECDB is highly dependent on the contributions by Member States. As initially agreed between the European Commission and the Member States, the updating of the data is under the responsibility of the Member States. The different Managing Authorities are supposed to check the information as well as to validate and transmit new data. Besides, it should be noted that the EU Commission does not consider itself responsible for any mistakes or omissions which could occur within the information provided by ECDB.

A comparison between DP spread in ECDB (statistics of February 2004) and the data gathered by the EU-wide evaluation (through the national mid-term evaluation report and contact with EQUAL offices in several countries) reveals that there are few differences between the two sources of data for the majority of countries (probably due to differences in the dates at which the data was gathered), although there are important differences in three cases.

Overall the ECDB can be used for the purpose of the EU-wide evaluation and provides the basis for European analyses.

3.9. National Monitoring Systems

In order to monitor the programme at national level, the Managing Authorities and the National Support Structures have developed different tools to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Lists of indicators have been established and DPs have to inform them regularly.

Evaluators have looked at the quality of outputs of the monitoring system (reliability of data, coverage of indicators, scope and relevance of indicators, consistency of indicators, timeliness, periodicity, scope of possible enquiries, accessibility of results). These criteria – which are not used in all the countries - are relevant and could usefully be taken up by all evaluators.

Overall, the analyses carried out in each country are still too partial to allow for a global assessment. However, it seems that there is a need to review the processes for ensuring the reliability of the data, as well as consistency throughout the programme. The relevance of indicators has to be considered too.

² ETCIM: Equal transnational Co-operation Internet Module.

In terms of process (operation of the system), some evaluators have looked at the more or less burdensome character of data entry and at "user-friendliness". They often find that DPs experience the handling of the monitoring system as cumbersome. There seems to be much room for improvement in all of the Member States.

Finally, qualitative monitoring is mainly based on annual monitoring visits and ad hoc visits on DPs' requests. The National (or Regional) Support Structure visit DPs to improve their knowledge of the actions implemented as well as to provide guidance and assistance. Several evaluators mention that this is an aspect which should be reinforced.

3.10 Self-assessment needs to be given more emphasis

Because of the lack, so far, of a proper evaluation of self-assessment activities in most countries, our review of self-assessment is mostly formal, i.e. based on the guidelines provided to DPs, where they exist.

The first question to ask in relation to « self assessment is, for whom? » The question seems to have been clarified in some Member States, although not in the same direction : in some Member States, self-assessment seems to be clearly established as an activity conducted by DPs strictly for their own use, whereas in others, self-assessment seems to be conducted for accountability to the programme as well. Whatever the choice made, we would argue that it has to be made clear from the beginning to DPs.

The second question one can ask with regard to self-assessment is: « Self-assessment, what for? ». All available guides are designed as tools allowing for DPs to take some distance from their daily practice and possibly reorient and adjust their processes and actions. However, not many guides seem to assist DPs with the evaluation of project results and impacts.

The only evaluation of preliminary effects of self-assessment on DPs, carried out by the Spanish evaluator, shows that self-assessment has not been sufficiently seen so far as a tool for increasing the experimental character of the partnerships and their projects.

The third question one can ask with regard to self-assessment is : « Self-assessment, how? ». Resort to external evaluation seems to be quite frequent. Overall the extent to which all partners understand what self-assessment is about and share its results seems to be at issue.

4. Analysis of the effectiveness of the key principles

In general terms, the EQUAL principles (particularly equal opportunities, empowerment and innovation) are understood in quite different ways in the Member States as well as amongst DPs.

4.1. The partnership principle is the main current vehicle to innovation and added value

In several Member States, according to evaluations of both Action 1 and Action 2, the partnership formation can in itself be regarded as a major innovation (e.g. Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, UK-GB). New structures of more efficient co-operation could be identified. In general, the implementation of the partnership principle is assessed as enhancing the effectiveness of the programme. The added value of a good partnership might consist in a better coherence of actions within the sector or the area of implementation, as well as in a demonstrative effect which can be useful to mobilise other actors later on, and finally in increased capacity to face possible difficulties and comply with the foreseen time schedule and budget.

It should be noted that in a few countries, «partnership» is understood as «network» which might widen the partnership approach (Finland, Germany, Italy), as the notion of «network» may include also very loose forms of co-operation that need not even be formalised.

4.2. A high share of DPs are built on pre-existing partnerships, but open their doors to new partners. However, the involvement of small grass-roots partners and private enterprises could be stronger

In a number of countries, a majority of DPs were built on pre-existing partnerships (e.g. particularly in Belgium-FRG, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and UK-GB). The majority of the partners are traditional partners, and in particular public authorities play an important role in DPs. Direct participation of local and regional authorities in DPs has in some cases been favoured both by institutional frameworks and by selection criteria, in which case this reflects a specific interpretation of the policy drive of the EQUAL programme. For the majority of the countries they may count among traditional and in a few countries also as new partners (e.g. France). Direct participation may be both viewed as an asset for the programme, especially with regard to mainstreaming purposes, and as a risk, as existing policy agendas may take precedence over innovation or may limit innovation to the design of tools within the frame of existing policies. Furthermore, training institutions and large NGOs are found among traditional partners. Depending on the institutional context social partners are perceived as traditional or non-traditional partners.

Although there is no evidence in the case of all Member States, there are indications that those partnerships tend to be more effective that build on previous experience but are open to integration and close association of new actors (the Spanish evaluator classifies them as “integrative core” DPs).

In some cases, small and country-specific non-traditional organisations have had consultative roles instead of being equal partners (e.g. in Sweden). While in some Member States a higher involvement of non-traditional partners like small NGOs is called for by the national evaluators, in others a higher presence of stakeholders like government departments or social partners is perceived as increasing the potential impact of DPs and their projects.

Most evaluation reports stress the insufficient involvement of private enterprise. Portugal might represent an exception in this respect, as enterprise involvement was mandatory in DP building, but their role in the implementation phase is not clear yet.

4.3. Participative approaches within the partnerships are likely to enhance effectiveness

In several Member States, national evaluators provide a classification of partnerships with regard to their internal organisation (Portugal, Spain, UK-GB). These can be summarised in two basic models:

- The « hierarchical » model dominated by the lead partner and where other partners are insufficiently involved at a strategic level. This model is marked by a fragmentation and excessive specialisation of partners. The experimental character of the actions is penalised in this model. In some countries this model prevails (e.g. in Spain). However, this model is not static and DPs starting with a hierarchical structure can evolve towards a more equalitarian framework;
- The « participative » model which is based on multiple contracts and is hence more devolved and flexible in nature. This model is assessed as being more effective for the delivery of EQUAL principles and DP actions.

4.4. Success factors for building partnerships: mix of traditional and non-traditional partners, building on experience, common objectives, continuity and participatory approach

First indications of the national evaluations suggest that those partnerships prove to be more effective:

- Which are rather homogenous and have the capacity to formulate a common objective and a common strategy,
- Which build on past experience,
- Which integrate stakeholders but which also open their doors to new entrants. The hypothesis could be formulated that in these cases a compromise between the effectiveness of the DP management, mainstreaming and innovation is found.

In contrast, the following factors can represent a serious threat to partnerships:

- The lack of continuity, with partners leaving and new ones entering,
- The size: too large partnerships may face management difficulties, while for too small partnerships the economies of scale might be too low to be effective and the demonstrative effect too weak,
- An unbalanced involvement of partners might limit the effectiveness. The level of involvement varies from being part of the strategic core of the project to playing a satellite role.

4.5. Empowerment: Added value and innovation may be enhanced when participants are involved in decision-making

The understanding of the empowerment principle varies across countries. Basically, four different understandings have been identified:

- Direct involvement of participants and target groups. The degree of empowerment depends on the degree and the way participants are involved;
- In Spain, the evaluator has found that some DPs had understood empowerment as referring to their own capacity to develop an EQUAL project;
- Empowerment of partners within the DPs;
- Method which permits the users (target groups and individuals) to plan the work themselves within the frame set by the DP.

In the cases where participants have been actively involved, empowerment has been assessed as bringing about innovation and is also regarded as an innovation in itself (e.g. France, Ireland, Sweden). Government, municipalities and other traditional institutional actors seem to be more reluctant to apply the empowerment principle as compared to non-traditional partners.

Furthermore, the empowerment principle may have a demonstrative effect and represent a way to inform and raise awareness concerning the issues addressed in the project and to influence future decisions.

No important differences between themes could be identified except for the asylum seekers, as in general no direct involvement of participants is likely to occur under this theme.

4.6. Defining innovation: Top-down approaches may limit the innovation capacity but give guidance to DPs while bottom-up approaches may permit to open “new ways of thinking” but risk lacking operationality

Basically, during the conception phase (CIP design and Action 1) two approaches to innovation could be distinguished:

- Top-down approaches with a clear definition of innovation or fixing a number of possible types of innovation. This concept might limit the capacity of DPs to develop real new ideas, but may also prove to be a useful guidance to DPs.

- Bottom-up approaches which are more in favour of leaving space for DP interpretations (e.g. in Denmark, Finland and Sweden). There is much insistence on the part of the evaluators in these Member States on the idea of innovation as the creation and development of “new ways of thinking”. However, perhaps paradoxically, this lack of orientation at programme level can sometimes be an obstacle to innovation itself, as DPs may then tend to simply address innovation as a vague requirement without specifying what and whom they are innovating for.

A number of Member States have chosen a way in between these two models. In case of decentralised management structures of the Programme, the understanding of innovation might be more diverse.

There is an inherent tension in the programme between the importance given to innovation and the requirement of policy relevance and mainstreaming and the Member States have to figure out what the right balance is in order to maximise the effectiveness of the Programme.

National evaluation reports stress that innovation is a difficult concept to understand and implement at DP-level. Moreover, it is difficult to set up innovative practices in a short time-frame and even more difficult to assess them as such. Therefore, it is important that the innovation concept is made clear for DPs. There is a reasonably strong (although often unspecified) innovation requirement at CIP level but little evidence is available so far of its implementation at DP level. A general consideration is that the projects are mostly innovative in Action 1 but not necessarily during the implementation phase where DPs tend to implement their work programmes in more traditional ways. National evaluators generally expect to see more evidence for the innovative capacity of the Programme as a result of the dissemination and mainstreaming phase.

4.7. A predominance of process innovation suggests innovation takes place mostly within existing structures. There is also evidence of DPs addressing policy gaps, but new elements for policy design are rare

A clear predominance of process oriented innovation is observed in the majority of countries. Secondly ranked is the context oriented innovation. Goal innovation remains modest. Addressing highly marginalised groups can represent an innovative element in itself.

Despite the early stage of the implementation of the Programme by the DPs at the time of the evaluations, it is already possible to make a first appreciation of whether EQUAL is more likely to enhance the efficiency of existing labour market policy within the existing framework or whether it opens up new areas of policy making. In Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, the UK-GB and UK-NI, EQUAL innovation is more likely to bring an improvement in the delivery structure and within the existing system rather than filling policy gaps.

In more ambitious national programmes such as the ones in Ireland, Luxembourg and Sweden, the innovation envisaged in the projects addresses policy gaps and/or aims at giving new stimuli to policy development.

In other countries, innovations may have both aims.

National evaluators, although generally taking up the classification proposed by the European Commission (goal, process and context innovation) have sometimes proposed variations or new typologies. In particular several evaluators have looked at the source of evaluation, i.e. whether it is by applying existing methods to new sectors, territories or target groups (“exogenous innovation”, or “innovation by transfer”), whether it is a method or approach created by the DP (“endogenous innovation” or “innovation by creation”), or whether it is a combination of both.

In general we would expect “endogenous innovation” to be quite rare, as already emerges from the national evaluation reports which have adopted this typology (Spain, Sweden).

4.8. The programme favours a target group approach rather than equal access for all disadvantaged groups

DPs have focused on specific target groups and therefore each thematic field has not been fully accessible to all discriminated groups. Generally, the evaluation reports point to the compartmentalisation of access. Moreover, it must be stressed that the thematic nature 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. In any case, a clear target group orientation is generally assessed as positive and desirable by national evaluators.

Member States differ with regard to the target groups chosen. While in some countries a special focus is set on highly marginalised social groups (e.g. Denmark, Luxembourg and others) the target groups are larger in other Member States, which in some cases has led to some criticism (e.g. Austria, Belgium-FRG, the Netherlands).

The most common target groups are women and ethnic minorities, and to a lesser extent the disabled. Furthermore, a variety of more specific disadvantaged groups are also targeted. There are indications that mainly Theme A ((re)integration into the labour market) is more likely to include a wide variety of target groups as compared to other themes. It is striking that despite the problem of youth unemployment and the problem of an ageing society discrimination by age is less tackled than other forms of discrimination. Except for Northern Ireland, there is not much evidence of religious discrimination being tackled.

In practice EQUAL is primarily used to integrate target groups into the labour market. However, inequalities and discrimination labour market access are highly complex issues. A doubt is sometimes formulated regarding the capacity of EQUAL to tackle the persistence of numerous deep-rooted problems leading to labour market inequalities and discrimination.

4.9. The horizontal implementation of equal opportunities depends on the level of awareness and the societal perception of inequality and discrimination. Equal opportunities are often understood in a limited way, as meaning equal opportunities between men and women

«Equal opportunities» are defined by the EQUAL Programme in a broad way and concern all disadvantaged groups rather than just women. However, this approach has been understood in the latter sense in a majority of Member States. A range of national evaluators devote a great deal of attention to the implementation of gender equality and do not investigate in depth how other inequalities are dealt with. This indicates that more awareness raising with regard to inequalities and discrimination is still required.

In general, the horizontal implementation of equal opportunities appears to be weak, especially if other aspects than merely equal opportunities between men and women are looked at. The societal perception and understanding of discrimination might be leading to weaknesses in the implementation of equal opportunities in some Member States – e.g. discrimination is in general less regarded as an issue in the Nordic countries than, for example, «diversity».

Conversely the horizontal implementation of equal opportunities is more taken into account at programme management and DP level in countries that have developed a concrete anti-discrimination policy like the UK and in Ireland (but this is also the case for specific target groups in other countries, e.g. for the disabled in Austria).

4.10. Gender mainstreaming and promoting equal opportunities between men and women is often understood as promoting women rather than as taking a more comprehensive approach to gender

Most DPs say that they intend to apply the horizontal principle of gender equality, but not much specific evidence has been presented so far that this is really done and is working in practice. In a number of cases, DPs have no clear concept of how to implement this principle. The implementation of this principle requires a high level of expertise and DPs might lack capacities. Therefore, in some cases the presence of “equal opportunity experts” in the DPs is in itself an innovation.

In many cases it appears that women might be over-represented or are at least equally represented amongst the participants in DP actions, however, this does not necessarily indicate that the gender principle has effectively been implemented as the inequalities by gender are highly complex and measures are also needed to be directed towards male participants and towards companies.

In several Member States equal opportunities for men and women have been treated in quite a traditional way through actions targeted at women under Pillar 4, while the complexity of the problem remains untouched (e.g. in Finland, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden).

4.11. Transnational co-operation: a key principle still producing limited added value and contributing little to innovation

Overall the implementation of the TNC³ principle is still too recent for permitting the development of a specific added value and a significant contribution to innovation. In many cases DPs have encountered difficulties to implement transnational co-operation. However they consider that exchanges of experience and approaches should lead to innovative results. Some of them show a lack of motivation due to the extremely burdensome and costly process of identifying partners.

Among the main difficulties, the differences in timing, processes and rules between Member States are mentioned most frequently. This lack of harmonisation made planning difficult, delayed entry in Action 2 and has slowed overall progress.

The methods and paths for finding transnational partners have been very diverse: personal contacts, traditional institutional links, support by the National Support Structure (NSS) and /or by ECTIM⁴. Support by NSSs is generally considered as quite relevant while the help provided by ECTIM is rather controversial.

In most Member States, transnational co-operation is still in a first stage of “Exchange of information and experience”.

In terms of geographical co-operation patterns, TCAs⁵ appear rather concentrated. In many Member States, the DPs have most of their international partners located in no more than three or four countries. Only few DPs have tried to find partners from the New Member States. Geographical proximity and language proximity seem to have been the basis for the choices made.

³ TNC: Transnational Co-operation

⁴ ECTIM: European Transnational Co-operation Internet Module

⁵ TCA: Transnational Co-operation Agreement

4.12. The link between National Thematic Groups and European Thematic Groups needs to be reinforced

Networking at national level is country specific, although in most cases, it started later than European networking, which provided Managing Authorities with a form of guidance as to how to plan NTGs. Almost all countries have set up several NTGs, except, so far, Belgium-NL, Belgium-FRG, Italy and Luxembourg, but in this case, the small number of DPs (3) accounts for this specific situation.

National networking is focused, in most Members States, on thematic issues relevant to national priorities and to EES pillars. Only a few ones address the EQUAL principles.

The organisation of NTGs varies from one Member State to the other, but some organisational frameworks are more suited for the co-ordination between NTGs and ETGs, whilst in other Member States this link had not been planned. In fact, this is the main question arising from the analysis of networking.

It is quite difficult to answer this question at this stage, due to the fact that European and national networking have only really been operational for a few months and evaluation reports are still very poor on the question of national networking.

4.13. ETGs are proving their effectiveness in giving a voice to DPs at the European level. However their objectives may need to be rationalised

The main objectives of ETGs are to :

- Identify promising practices,
- Capitalise exchanges of experience at both national and European levels,
- To identify clear messages for dissemination to policies makers
- And to disseminate those messages.

We can consider, at this stage, that the effectiveness of ETG as a platform for empowerment, and as a structure for the mainstreaming of practices is real. Their suitability of ETGs for identifying good practice is more questionable (see below). In addition, there would seem to be a tension between the strong process orientation logically taken so far by ETGs and production. Finally, if ETGs are platforms for giving a "voice" to DPs, then the question of their selection and capacity to speak for the wider DP community becomes very important. Perhaps it would be useful, at this stage, to re-think the consistency between objectives and the composition of the groups.

4.14. Serious improvements are required regarding the co-ordination, the information system and the cost of ETGs, especially in view of the enlargement

Most ETG members are very satisfied to be involved in the ETGs even if some improvements could easily be made. The organisation, monitoring and updating of documents on CIRCA and the EQUAL extranet should generally receive more attention. Collective work is organised in a classical way⁶, which gives rise to considerable travelling and time expense. Conference calls or discussion fora could be more used as participants and members asked for more meetings, particularly members of Liaison Groups.

Furthermore, there are clear lacks in the co-ordination within ETGs and between ETGs: as mentioned by members of most Liaison Groups and Working Groups, ETGs appear ill-equipped from this point of view. In this respect, the role of the Mainstreaming Group needs to be reasserted. Involvement of the 10 accession countries next year in EQUAL will impact widely on networking and ETGs, in terms of participants, operational complexity, and needs for co-ordination.

⁶ Meetings, workshops, seminars, events and also e-mail between meetings.

5. Impact of EQUAL on EES and other programmes

EQUAL is expected to have two kinds of impact at the European level:

- Providing good practice to inform the EES, but also the Social Inclusion Process, ESF and other community programmes (notably the Community Action Programmes to combat social exclusion and discrimination) as well as the Framework Strategy on Gender Equality;
- Establishing links between these different strategies and programmes (this also applies at the national and local levels).

So far there have been two main mechanisms in EQUAL for the identification of «promising » and « good » practice to inform policy making at the European level: the European Thematic Groups (ETGs) and a direct call by the European Commission for «promising practices » from the Member States, with a view to inform the second Commission Communication on EQUAL.

5.1. The identification of good practice in ETGs has been delayed. They seem to function better as “empowerment platforms”

ETGs are thus supposed to identify and mainstream good practice at the European level, i.e. with European and cross-national relevance. However the way in which DP selection has been organised and the way in which ETGs operate seem more adequate for them to play a role as “empowerment platforms”, rather than as mechanisms for the identification of good practice.

The preparation for the identification of good practice as such is still at an early stage. Various instruments have been designed for the collection of information with DPs, and to a much lesser extent with transnational partnerships. However the thematic experts engaged in the production of these instruments expressly warn that they are not to be used in an evaluation perspective.

Established European processes for the selection of good practice, such as the Peer Review for the European Employment Strategy, have defined selection criteria including policy relevance, level of concretion, demonstrated and reliable results and transfer potential. In the case of the ETGs, it is quite possible that the participative, bottom-up approach which has prevailed so far clash with a selection procedure based on such criteria:

- first, because a thorough assessment is required to move from promising to good practice, and it is unclear that this assessment is best carried out by DPs themselves – nor, probably, is it fair to require it from them;
- secondly, because the credibility, reliability and effectiveness of the results of the programme as a whole demand that the number of good practice identified at the European and cross-national level be limited and targeted, which contrasts with the high number of DPs involved in the ETGs.

5.2. The “call” for promising practices organised by the European Commission has yielded results of very variable quality

On the other hand, in September 2003, the European Commission (« EQUAL team »), launched a call for Member States to identify « promising practices » in view of the preparation of the second Commission communication on EQUAL. The call, which took place in two stages, finally gave rise to the compilation of 262 “fiches”, i.e. 19% of the total number of DPs in Action 2.

Although the call rightly focused on practices rather than on DPs and was based on relevant criteria (thematic relevance, effectiveness, transferability, innovation), the lack of concretion and guidance, both with regard to criteria and to the selection process, as well as the lack of explicit request for emerging evidence have been serious obstacles to obtaining quality responses. As a result of this lack of specification, the number of fiches is probably too high, and the fiches vary greatly in quality and reliability, as only a minority of the fiches gathered support their claims to effectiveness or innovation with preliminary evidence.

5.3. There seems to be a need for the design of a new and clear strategy for the identification of good practice at the European level

The limited results of both mechanisms set up so far for the identification of good practice at the European level lead us to suggest that there is a need for designing a clear strategy for selecting DP, TP, NTG or ETG practices and products, on the basis of the following criteria:

- Limited in number and targeted to the guidelines of the new EES;
- Evidence of new models for fighting labour market discrimination, bringing added value to the stock of European experience;
- Based on a thorough diagnosis.

The preselection for assessment could take place in the ETG liaison groups but should involve the Commission officials working on the EES guidelines (and possibly others). Assessment could be carried out by independent experts. A form of Peer Review by Managing Authorities could also be envisaged.

5.4. Expected results from ETGs are much wider than the identification of good practice and their variety seems particularly relevant for European mainstreaming

It has to be underlined that EQUAL production at the European level does not limit itself to “case studies” and the identification of promising practice. In many ways, this seems to be a correct strategy – to promote collective production at the European level, and also to avoid focusing too much on good practice. In particular, ETGs have produced or are in the process of producing:

- Diagnoses of discrimination in the labour market and of the difficulties currently faced in tackling discrimination. This activity could however be more systematic, as the identification of quality diagnoses and diagnosis tools, and the capitalisation of their results is a key basis for the development of innovation at the European level.
- Thematic reviews, which allow for the presentation of “promising practice” within a context, which makes it much more meaningful, easy to grasp and interesting, than when it is presented on a case by case basis, and may give rise to useful publications, especially if they can embrace lessons coming from other programmes than EQUAL as well.
- Key messages to policy makers and other European actors: ETGs are a mechanism for DPs to have a “voice” at the European level, and have derived quite a number of messages from DP experience (less so from TP⁷ experience). These messages would gain by being clearly targeted and illustrated. Some of them have been taken up already in the second Commission Communication on EQUAL.
- Awareness raising in mainstream events is especially important to contribute an anti-discrimination perspective in events dedicated to employment policy or entrepreneurship.
- European communication tools, such as web pages and resource banks, which secure some sustainability for the EQUAL outcomes at the European level.
- European benchmarks, models, guidelines and vademecums, useful for the harnessing of local innovation and for the formation or consolidation of European networks.
- Inputs in European normative and legislative work: only one example of such endeavour has been identified, whereas this represents a crucial opportunity for DPs to take part in the European policy process.

⁷ Transnational Partnership

5.6. More efforts are required for EQUAL to produce an impact at the European level

It is still early to assess the impact of EQUAL on the European policy processes and programmes. However, our interviews with Commission officials involved in these policy processes and programmes reveals that there are concerns that more efforts should be made if EQUAL is to have a real impact.

There are important strategic and organisational obstacles to mainstreaming, notably but not only due to insufficient communication between ESF and NAP teams at the national level, where most mainstreaming could take place. In the point of view of the Commission officials interviewed, it is not clear either that the production of good practice by a small-scaled programme such as EQUAL is a sufficient tool for achieving mainstreaming. This confirms that the current dominant orientation of ETGs towards the production of aggregated and targeted results and messages may be the correct one, although strategic co-ordination with European policies and programmes could be improved.

6. Main recommendations

Our recommendations for the second round of EQUAL are based on the main general recommendations by national evaluators and on our own analysis of the programme at the European level. Overall, we would emphasise the need to:

- Reinforce diagnostic activity at all levels, as a good diagnosis is key to innovation.
- Pay more attention to the quality of employment, and not only to the improvement of labour market access, and have more employer-targeted actions.
- Make better use of Action 1, by reinforcing methodological guidance to DPs, so that they can have a quicker and smoother start in Action 2.
- Reinforce the common understanding of the EQUAL principles, particularly empowerment, innovation and mainstreaming.
- Reinforce the link between National and European Thematic Groups.
- Reinforce the role of European Thematic Groups as “voice” of the DPs at the European level and therefore reinforce DP representation.
- Design a clear strategy for the identification of good practice at the European level.
- Reinforce the links between the EQUAL programme and other units and DGs of the European Commission.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of the Mid-Term EU-wide evaluation of the Community Initiative EQUAL.

It is important to stress that, in an innovative and transnational programme like EQUAL, results, at this stage of implementation, can only be preliminary. A full assessment will therefore be possible only at the end of 2005.

1.1. The EQUAL Initiative

The overall aim of EQUAL is to promote new means of combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities in connection with the labour market, through transnational co-operation.

EQUAL operates in 9 thematic fields based on the 4 pillars of the European Employment Strategy (EES), adding another priority addressing the specific needs of Asylum Seekers.

Pillars	1. <i>Employability</i>	2. <i>Entrepreneurship</i>	3. <i>Adaptability</i>	4. <i>Equal opportunities for women and men</i>	<i>Asylum Seekers</i>
Thematic fields	A. Facilitating access/ return to the labour market	C. Opening up the business creation process to all	E. Promoting lifelong learning and inclusive work practices	G. Reconciling family and professional life and reintegration of men and women	I. Helping the integration of asylum seekers
	B. Combating racism and xenophobia	D. Strengthening the social economy	F. Supporting the adaptability of firms and employees	H. Reducing gender gaps	

The projects of the Development Partnerships (DP) are progressively implemented through 3 main actions:

- Action 1 aims at facilitating the consolidation of DPs and to ensure that transnational co-operation will have a real added value;
- Action 2 aims at implementing a common strategy in co-operation with transnational partners;
- Action 3 aims at disseminating and mainstreaming good practice.

When implementing the 9 thematic fields, DPs have to take into account 5 key principles: partnership, innovation, empowerment, transnationality and mainstreaming. A horizontal approach to implement equal opportunities is taken, in regard to disadvantaged groups on the grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation as well as more explicitly in regard to gender.

1.2. Objective and methodology of the Mid Term EU evaluation

A First Interim Report produced on 26. September 2003 presented the first results of the EU-wide evaluation of EQUAL.

This Mid Term Report presents a more comprehensive overview of the situation. As set out in the Terms of Reference, the use of the Mid Term Evaluation is to inform the European Commission's guidance to Member States in preparation for the second call for EQUAL by carrying out the following tasks:

Task 1	Assessment of the appropriateness of strategies (e.g. the contextual relevance and policy consistency of the priorities of national Community Initiative Programmes and Development Partnerships)
Task 2	Assessment of the management and implementation systems at CIP, DP and TNC level
Task 3	Analysis of the effectiveness of the key principles (partnership, innovation, empowerment, transnationality as well as the implementation of the horizontal approach to equal opportunities) across the 9 thematic fields
Task 4	Analysis of the effectiveness of networking, dissemination and mainstreaming at national and EU level
Task 5	Analysis of the impact of EQUAL on the EES, the Social Inclusion Process and other Community programmes

The methodology used for the EU wide evaluation of EQUAL has already been explained in a First Note submitted to the Steering Committee on 4. December 2002. For this Mid Term evaluation the following methodological tools were used: analysis of national evaluation reports, desk research and semi-directive interviews.

1.2.1 Assessments on the basis of the National Evaluation Reports

This report is mostly based on the analysis of the 17 Mid Term national evaluation reports, e.g. those for; Austria, Belgium-FRG, Belgium-NL, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom-GB and United Kingdom -NI).

Account was also taken of a limited number of interim reports received at the end of 2002 and providing information on the selection phase (Action 1) and the management structures of the Programme.

1.2.2 Other data sources

Additional information has been collected through:

Desk research including a review of comparative literature on labour market policy, EU documents, statistics from ECBD;

Semi-directive interviews with the EQUAL Unit, the thematic experts assigned to the European Thematic Groups, other members of the European Thematic Groups, Heads of ESF mission and Commission officials working on the EES, the Social Inclusion Process, ESF and Community programmes;

Participation in different events in Brussels: the European Thematic Groups Seminar (8-9-10 October 2003), the EQUAL Unit Brainstorming Meeting (15 October 2003) and the Evaluation Partnership Meeting (4 November 2003).

1.3. Structure of the report

The report is divided into 8 chapters :

Chapter 1 presents the EQUAL programme and an overview of the objectives, the methodology and the structure of the Mid Term Report

Chapter 2 provides an overview of EQUAL within ESF funding and a balance of the volume of EQUAL payments already received by the Member States.

Chapter 3 is concerned with analysing the appropriateness of strategies developed at CIP and DP level.

Chapter 4 examines and compares the management and implementation systems in EQUAL. This chapter deals successively with Action 1, Action 2 and Action 3. It also addresses the monitoring system at the European level, at the national level, and self-assessment.

Chapter 5 analyses the effectiveness of the key principles of EQUAL: partnership, empowerment, innovation, transnational co-operation and mainstreaming

Chapter 6 examines the first results of EQUAL at the European level and its impact so far on the European Employment Strategy, the Social Inclusion Process and other Community programmes.

Chapter 7 highlights the recommendations made by National Evaluators and presents indicative recommendations for the second call and the next phases of EQUAL at the European level.

Chapter 8 provides a brief overview of the next steps of the EU wide evaluation.

2. STATE OF PLAY OF THE PROGRAMME

The programme is funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) for 3, 026 million € from 2000 to 2006 and has given rise to about 1,300⁸ Development Partnerships (DPs) selected across the 15 Member States and the Czech Republic involving nearly 14,000 partners on the basis of a first call.

2.1. The financial situation

On average, the planned share of EQUAL within ESF funding is about 5% (see Table 2.1. below), but it:

- differs from one Member State to the next, as it ranges from 2.5% (Greece and Portugal) to 16.2% (Austria),
- and tends to be relatively more important in countries with a low share of Objective 1 funding.

Table 2.1. EQUAL, ESF and Structural funds

Member State	Structural Funds €	ESF € (1)	EQUAL € (2)	% EQUAL in ESF (2) / (1)
AT	1,522,200,000	631,400,000	102,000,000	16.2%
BE	1,857,200,000	1,006,600,000	74,100,000	7.4%
DE	29,089,100,000	11,108,200,000	514,500,000	4.6%
DK	568,000,000	433,800,000	29,900,000	6.9%
ES	44,517,800,000	11,400,600,000	515,400,000	4.5%
FI	1,873,400,000	801,600,000	72,300,000	9.0%
FR	14,920,500,000	6,534,200,000	320,000,000	4.9%
UK	16,075,600,000	7,100,200,000	399,600,000	5.6%
GR	21,320,600,000	4,241,200,000	104,100,000	2.5%
IE	3,172,000,000	1,016,500,000	33,900,000	3.3%
IT	26,256,100,000	7,979,800,000	394,400,000	4.9%
LU	80,500,000	39,500,000	4,400,000	11.1%
NL	2,699,500,000	1,783,800,000	208,400,000	11.7%
PT	19,178,500,000	4,415,300,000	113,800,000	2.6%
SE	1,918,500,000	955,900,000	86,200,000	9.0%
Networking			53,200,000	
Total	185,049,500,000	59,448,600,000	3,026,200,000	5.1%

Source: DG Employment and Social Affairs

Member States made commitments for the period 2001 – 2003 for approximately half the budget allocated to them (see Table 2.2. below).

However, Member States had received payments on average for only 35,9% of their commitments by the end of December 2003. The minimum being 19.6 % for Greece and the maximum 54% for Denmark. The late start of the Programme in the Member States is one of the reasons for the low overall volume of payments requested from the Commission so far.

⁸ Corresponding to data transmitted by Managing Authorities of DPs in Action 2. However this data, taken from the ECDB, does not include Belgium-NL. A starting analysis of the ECDB is provided in Chapter 4.

Table 2.2. EQUAL financial allocation, commitments and payments

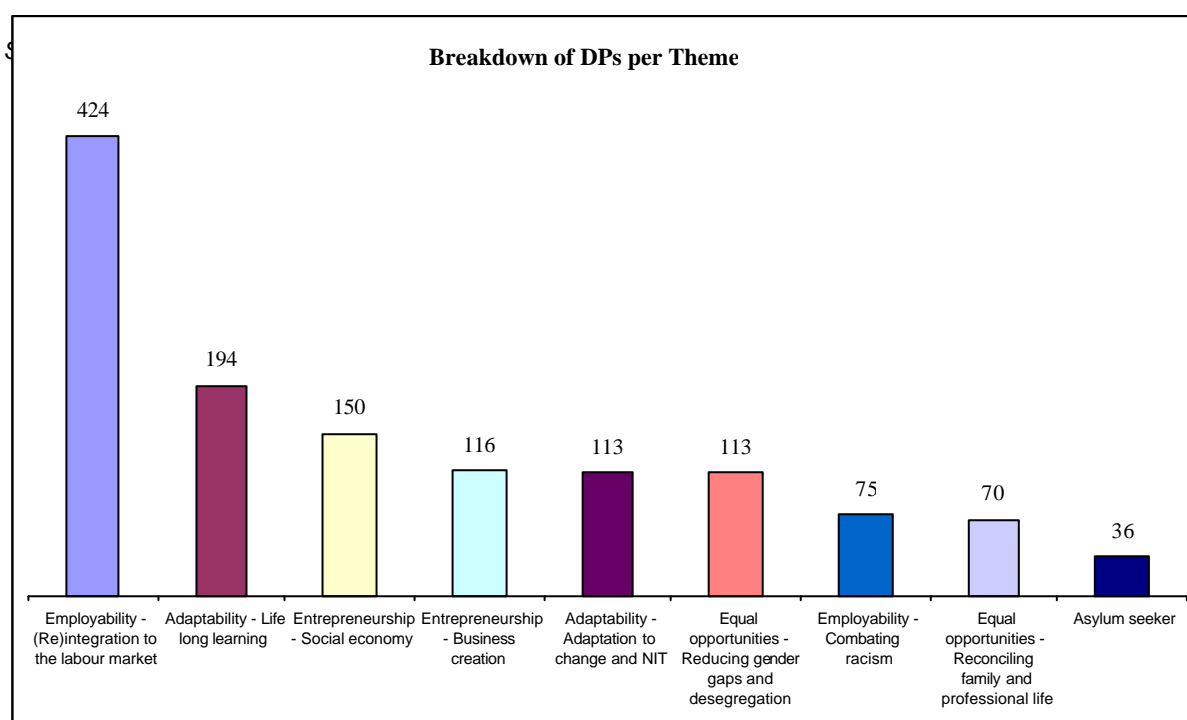
Member State	Commitments 2001-2003 in % of financial allocation	Payments at 31.12.2003 in Mio € (including payments on account)	Payments (situation at 31.12.2003) in % of Commitments
AT	49.1	20.0	39.9
BE-FRG	52.5	7.7	35.1
BE-NL	52.5	5.9	34.4
DE	49.0	108.7	43.1
DK	49.1	7.9	54.0
ES	49.0	87.5	34.6
FI	49.0	11.1	31.4
FR	49.1	56.6	36.0
UK-GB	49.0	59.7	31.4
UK-NI	49.1	1.8	31.2
GR	49.0	10.0	19.6
IE	49.1	5.2	31.3
IT	49.0	79.4	41.1
LU	49.7	0.8	38.1
NL	49.0	29.0	28.3
PT	49.1	17.4	31.1
SE	49.1	15.4	36.3
Total	49.1	523.9	35.9

Source: DG Employment and social affairs. January 2004

2.2. Thematic distribution of Development Partnerships

The breakdown of the 1,291 Development Partnerships (DPs) by theme, provided by the ECDB, shows (see Table 2.3.) the combined results of CIP priorities and planned funding, selection priorities and the “attraction” capacity of the various thematic priorities for the DPs themselves:

- 33% of the DPs concentrate in the theme “Employability-(Re)integration in the labour market”;
- 15% of the DPs are located in the theme “Adaptability-Lifelong Learning” and 11.6% in the theme “Entrepreneurship-Social Economy”;
- About 8.8% of the DPs work within each of the themes “Entrepreneurship-Business”, “Adaptability-Adaptation change and NIT” and “Equal Opportunities-Reducing gender gaps”;
- About 5.5% of the DPs concentrate on each of the themes “Employability-Combating racism” and “Equal opportunities-Reconciling family and professional life”;
- And 2.8% of the DPs address the “Asylum seeker” theme.

Table 2.3. Breakdown of 1291 Development Partnerships per Theme

3. APPROPRIATENESS OF STRATEGIES

An objective of the EU-wide evaluation is to identify how national evaluators assess the clarity of CIPs, their relevance in the socio-economic context at the national and regional levels and their consistency with the labour market policy context. The next question is whether the priorities and objectives of the CIPS are adequately taken up by DPs.

3.1 Relevance of CIP priorities and consistency with labour market policies

3.1.1. The CIP analysis of inequalities/discrimination and the diagnoses with regard to specific target groups could have been more thorough in most cases.

National evaluators were expected to provide an analysis of the CIPs in their national Mid Term evaluation reports. The scope and depth of this analysis vary considerably from one report to the other.

Only some national evaluators analyse the quality of the diagnosis posed at the outset of the Programme.

- The Spanish evaluator considers that the dominant approach by group taken in the CIP does not allow for an analysis transversal factors of exclusion.
- In the case of Germany, the diagnosis represents an important part of the CIP. The national evaluator states that the analysis in regard to gender mainstreaming which represents a special focus of the evaluation is of high quality and very useful.
- In France the evaluator observed an asymmetry in the depth of the analysis made by theme (e.g. in France Themes D, F and G are not really analysed in the diagnosis).
- In the case of Belgium FRG, the national evaluator praises the high quality of the ex-ante evaluation and points to its lack of adequate translation into the CIP priorities, which significantly limits the relevance of the Programme.

Our own analysis of national evaluation reports shows that in most cases their analysis of inequalities and discrimination in the CIPs is not very thorough. In particular, national evaluators are often not commenting on the relevance of the labour market and social exclusion indicators used in the CIPs (e.g. Austria, Belgium-NL, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, UK-NI, UK-GB). When they do, it is sometimes only a partial analysis of some indicators (e.g. the Danish evaluator on gender equality).

Our own analysis of CIPs and the evaluators' analyses, where they exist, shows that:

- The CIP diagnosis was, in some cases, in part directly derived from the NAP and other national programmes. A high consistency with the national labour market approach might thus be ensured. However, there may be 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.

- In many cases, the indicators used in the CIPs are rather aggregated (e.g. Austria, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg). Highly aggregated indicators might be inadequate to grasp the problem of inequalities and discrimination.
- However, some Member States are using at least an array of indicators in the CIPs (e.g. Germany, Portugal⁹, UK-GB, UK-NI).
- Indicators of gender inequalities seem to be particularly problematic in their choice (as reported by the Danish evaluator) or because of an insufficient level of definition (as we found in Greece).

To conclude, a serious analysis for the reasons leading to discrimination and inequalities can generally neither be found in the CIPs nor in the national evaluation reports.

3.1.2. A persisting overall relevance of the CIPs

Despite some changes in the macro-economic environment since the ex-ante evaluation in some countries, the CIP is generally regarded as being still valid in its main orientations. This appreciation made by national evaluators also holds true in the case of Austria, Finland, Germany and Ireland, where at the same time it is stated that the macroeconomic environment underwent major changes.

Our interpretation of the general positive assessment about the persistence of the relevance and appropriateness of the CIPs made by national evaluators would be that the CIPs are dealing with a wide range of topics, forms of discrimination and target groups, and moreover that inequalities are partly representing a structural feature, independent of the business cycle. The situation might be different at the DP-level. Nevertheless, some evaluators are calling for a thematic adjustment for other reasons:

- Because they highlight an insufficient focus on some specific groups faced with some form of disadvantage in the labour market, such as elderly workers in Denmark, the disabled in UK-GB, or women between 34 and 54 in Italy;
- Because the focus of some themes is insufficiently specified, as is the case, according to the evaluator, for theme 1A in Austria;
- Because the phrasing of the thematic priority is not conducive to a correct implementation, as is the case for the themes under the equal opportunities pillar in Germany, Denmark and France;
- Because the respective weight given to the thematic priorities is partly inadequate and does not ensure the value added of the programme (as is the case for adaptability of enterprises and workers and lifelong learning in Austria; or of employability –1A in Greece);

⁹ The Portuguese CIP uses a very wide battery of 75 indicators. Some of these can hardly be considered as such however (ex: "distribution of the persons addressed by the project by type of project, according to their situation in the labour market at the beginning of their participation, by gender")

- Because some specific issues are not enough taken into account in the formulation of thematic priorities, such as the integration of social and labour offices in Italy.
- Finally some evaluators (in Italy and UK-GB in particular) call for a clearer focus on regional imbalances.

Such recommendations are generally less based on an in-depth analysis of the causes for discrimination and inequality of specific groups, than on an analysis of the complementarity and added value of EQUAL with respect to European guidelines and national policy.

3.1.3. A high level of consistency with labour market policies in the national context, but the intended value-added of EQUAL is not always clear.

As EQUAL is defined as a laboratory for policy innovation, it is relevant to locate it within the wider policy environment and assess this positioning against an analysis of the main challenges in terms of inequalities and discrimination as well as against the mainstream labour market policy through national Programmes and the ESF. EQUAL has to comply with a number of conditions, such as consistency with the general labour market policy approach of a country, but also additionality and value added.

Although in most cases national evaluators have stated that there is a high level of consistency between the CIPs and the wider employment policy orientations, there are differences across Member States with regard to the complementarity of the CIPs and the value-added of EQUAL.

National evaluators either:

- Stress a high level of consistency and “complementarity” between the CIP and the national policy framework leading to overlaps with a range of national policies;
- Point to a high level of consistency but also of additionality with regard to national policies;
- Argue that their Member States are giving attention to new priorities through EQUAL.

We develop each of these analyses below:

- In general, national evaluators stress the consistency of EQUAL with the national policy framework, or at least with the NAPs and Objective 3, but some of them point at the same time also to an important degree of overlap, which might be perceived as hampering the innovation potential (e.g. Greece, Belgium FRG). Even if cross-fertilisation can be assumed, the additionality of the measures can be questioned.
 - The Greek evaluator assessed one by one the 4 pillars of the EES in relation to the policy framework of the Greek NAP for employment 2001-2003 and found a very close connection. Our own analysis suggests that Greece is trying to complement the ESF programme with EQUAL, for entrepreneurship and adaptability, by allocating them more resources than does ESF, but at the same time EQUAL still has employability as its main priority¹⁰. The analysis of the Greek national evaluators shows that a high level of “complementarity” is found for Themes 1A, 3F, 4H, meaning that an important number of other national sub-programmes in the same area could be found.

¹⁰ See the First Interim report of EU-wide evaluation.

- The evaluator for Belgium-FRG is rather critical about the choice of the themes in the CIP. The 5 themes selected address problems that are already well covered by other policy measures via national funding or via Objective 3, particularly labour market integration. According to the evaluator, the ex ante evaluation offered arguments permitting to justify other more innovative choices such as e.g. continuing training for women, accompanying the start-up of very small enterprises during the first 5 years, developing approaching for preventing bankruptcy.
 - The evaluator for UK-NI carried out an analysis of the EQUAL priorities and the national programmes and concluded that work within EQUAL necessarily overlapped with a wide range of policy and practice areas and that there were thus opportunities for cross-fertilisation.
- Some national evaluation reports identify both consistency with national policies and additionality, as specific aspects addressed by EQUAL receive less attention in the national programmes.
- The Finnish evaluator has “rated” the complementarity and additionality of EQUAL with regard to the EES and the ESF Objective 3 on a scale. However the criteria for this rating exercise are not explained. Overall they found that EQUAL brought “*some improvement in comparison to other ESF programmes*”.
 - The Danish and Dutch evaluators point to a high consistency with the national mainstream policy, but find that EQUAL is focusing on different, more marginalised groups. The Danish EQUAL initiatives aim at breaking down actual equality barriers and develop new methods and experiences of measures to fight unequal opportunities and discrimination - these issues will receive more emphasis in 2004.
 - Mention should also be made of the German case, where the national evaluator states that the relevance of EQUAL might rise in the context of budget cuts for labour subsidies, the so-called “second labour market”.
- In a couple of Member States, new priorities with regard to mainstream policy are regarded to boost the relevance of EQUAL, particularly for policies towards asylum seekers.
- The Spanish evaluator finds that the selection of the thematic areas has been relevant. In particular, the selection of thematic areas which can be considered as corresponding to “emerging issues” in Spain is positive. Fighting racism and xenophobia, reconciling work with family life, and asylum seekers are such “emerging issues”. The evaluators are more critical of the decision not to choose “reinforcing the social economy” as a thematic area. The main reason provided in the CIP for not choosing this area is that it could be addressed in the thematic area “access to the labour market” (1A). However, the evaluators point out that the social economy is an autonomous sector, which has more to do with the promotion of entrepreneurship than with labour market integration, and whose impact goes much beyond the reintegration of the unemployed.

- The Austrian evaluator also finds that some of the priorities of EQUAL, e.g. combating racism, lifelong learning and the social economy, are completely new features of employment and inclusion policy. Whilst, for example, ESF/Objective 3 has a focus on education and training of the employed within their enterprises (in order to promote their continued employment), EQUAL focuses on marginalised groups (persons with frequent unemployment spells due to their low skills) by facilitating access to education and training in general. On the other hand certain priorities do not feature in EQUAL precisely because they are the focus of attention in the NAP-employment.

It should be mentioned that some national evaluators do not provide an in-depth analysis of the complementarity between the EQUAL CIP and other national and European labour market Programmes. In the Swedish case, the evaluator argues that the lack of diagnosis in the CIP, in particular the lack of any justification for the prioritisation of “development” (sub-thematic) areas and target groups as compared with national efforts, makes such an evaluation exercise difficult.

3.1.4. EQUAL prioritises access to the labour market rather than quality of employment

Labour market access of disadvantaged groups is vindicated as a priority for EQUAL, even though it is a dominant priority of mainstream national policy. This is because raising employment rates is on the top of the political agenda, and in some countries, because some sectors are facing labour and skill shortages (e.g. in Ireland and the Netherlands). Most Mid Term national evaluation reports make reference to the general or target group related priority of labour market policy that is to enhance labour market participation and employment rates (e.g. Sweden, Belgium – FRG, Finland), and others are confirming that the access to the labour market represents the major problem for marginalised groups (e.g. UK-GB, UK-NI¹¹). Furthermore, there are several indications that labour market access also represents a focus under other themes (see section 3.2.1).

However, some evaluators are critical of the weight given to the employability pillar, even though, as we have shown in our first Interim Report, the distribution of funds across pillars is more even in EQUAL than in ESF. In particular, we had shown that the role of EQUAL with respect to other ESF Programmes is more complex than just « taking forward » its priorities. Generally speaking, although Employability is often the first priority of the EQUAL CIPs, the spread of EQUAL funding across pillars is more even than in other ESF Programmes. The more striking difference lies in the Equal Opportunities pillar, to which many Member States dedicate only a very small share of their ESF funding, and which becomes a full priority in EQUAL. However, in some countries, it is stressed that the equal opportunities Theme is still not sufficiently taken into account (see Chapter 5).

Some evaluators point out that the problems faced by some discriminated groups, such as immigrants, are not so much in terms of labour market access as in terms of employment conditions. The Spanish evaluator stresses that immigrants do not face so much unemployment as precarious employment. Yet, maintenance in one's job is not a major focus of EQUAL in Spain. Our own analysis, in the first Interim Report, had shown that, except in a few Member States where unemployment is a structural and serious issue, inequalities were very much in-work inequalities. In the light of the new European Employment Strategy, quality of employment should feature higher on the agenda (it is one of the ten guidelines).

¹¹ In both cases, the focus for EQUAL has been on “employability” which in the UK tends to be equated with labour market (re)integration for disadvantaged groups.

However, neither do the CIPs pay much attention to this issue (except in Sweden), nor do the evaluators critically assess CIP priorities with regard to quality of employment (with few exceptions).

A range of national evaluation reports insist on the fact that the CIP was elaborated in line with the four pillars of the former orientation of the EES (e.g. Greece, France) or with the Lisbon strategy (e.g. the Netherlands). Although EQUAL has been designed in line with the former orientation of the European employment strategy (EES) it is interesting to analyse whether the new orientations of EES have been taken into account. Thus, with regard to the new employment strategy it needs to be stressed that differences in in-work quality, and in particular in employment stability, are rarely mentioned as a source for inequalities in the CIPs¹². This confirms the analysis presented in our First Interim Report. It doesn't appear that EQUAL has much contributed to fill in policy gaps in respect to the quality-in-work, which is one of the major elements of the new EES. The second Commission Communication on EQUAL (December 2003) has called the attention of the Member States on this lack and has suggested that the second call could emphasise the quality of employment to a higher degree.

3.1.5. A tension between the need for flexibility and the need for guidance in the definition of priorities and target groups at CIP level

There seems to be a tension in the Programme between the need for CIPs to clearly define target groups and priorities, and the need to leave a certain flexibility to DPs. National evaluators seem to disagree on this matter.

- The Swedish evaluator is critical of the fact that target groups are not clearly determined in the CIP, with the exception of the asylum seekers theme. The evaluator recommends that Sweden should better define the context in each theme and make the differences between themes clearer.
- The evaluator for Belgium-FRG shows that the lack of selectivity within EQUAL can be observed at various levels: in the choice of themes, in the formulation of objectives and in the identification of target groups. Target groups were very clearly identified in the ex-ante evaluation. However, the programme itself does not translate this analysis into actions. The problems that the measures want to tackle are not clearly identified, which leads to unrealistic expected results.
- Conversely, the Greek evaluator states that, whilst a priori quantification of the CIP goals facilitates the monitoring and evaluation of the programme, the fact that largely indicative actions were adopted makes the programme more sensitive and flexible. Similarly the evaluator for the Netherlands points out that it is necessary to leave enough margin of manoeuvre to labour market policies, as sectoral labour market shortages go hand in hand with unemployment.

¹² Except in Sweden where the expressed aim is to increase employment rates in the domain of regular jobs.

3.2. Consistency between DPs and CIP priorities

3.2.1. Mostly good consistency between the general objectives of the DPs and the CIPs but less consistency with regard to target groups

Our analysis of the national evaluation reports and of the preparatory documents for the Barcelona Conference (May 2002) presented in the First Interim Report revealed a great level of consistency between CIP diagnoses and objectives, on the one hand, and priorities taken up by DPs on the other hand. However, the authors of the preparatory document for the Barcelona conference also mentioned a few important gaps in DP take up, notably in the Entrepreneurship pillar, with respect to combating undeclared work and improving access to finance, as well as in the Asylum Seekers priority¹³.

Although most evaluators do not present a systematic evaluation of DP objectives, work programmes and implementation, this basic appreciation seems to be confirmed in the reports which address this issue.

However there is some evidence that access to the labour market might represent a stronger focus in the DP work programmes than is reflected in the thematic spread of EQUAL. If this proved to be the case during implementation, our initial assessment that EQUAL was more “balanced” than ESF with regard to the weight of employability measures might prove wrong. This is an issue to take further in the next report, on the basis of analyses of actual actions carried out by DPs. In addition, some of the national evaluators highlighted inconsistencies between the target groups identified in the CIPs and those identified by DPs.

We illustrate these points below, by highlighting the results of the comparisons made by some evaluators between CIPs and DP work programmes:

- The Finish evaluator rates the consistency between the objectives set by DPs and the CIP on a scale. According to the evaluator, 30 % of the DPs can be found in the category *“only general compliance, low aspiration level, no significant improvement upon the rest of the ESF”*, while 50 % are located in the category *“makes sense, responds to challenges, takes up gaps to fill them”* and 21 % are found to have *“clear targeting upon the most difficult ones among the target groups and the areas/regions/localities”* ;
- The evaluator for Belgium FRG makes a systematic assessment, by theme, of the consistency between the DPs work plans and the CIP. Generally speaking, DP objectives are found to be consistent with the CIP across all themes (which may not be very difficult given the already mentioned vagueness of the CIP). However, the beneficiaries targeted under themes C, E and G belong to much wider groups, including groups which do not particularly suffer from discrimination, than those targeted in the CIP ;
- In the UK-GB, the evaluator explored the monitoring information comparing CIP forecasts and programme delivery suggests that in all themes, apart from theme I where no specific targets had been set, the number of beneficiaries has been

¹³ According to the author of the document on asylum seekers, despite the very small number of DPs selected for this theme, around three-quarters take forward priorities identified in the CIPs. However, it was inevitable that some sub-themes would not be addressed. In his view, they included “support to traumatised asylum seekers”, “improved support of young asylum seekers”, “legal support”, “skills audit” and “studies and evaluation”. It should be pointed out that “skills audits” are indeed a focus of some DPs and have been taken up as one of the areas of work in the European Thematic Group on Asylum Seekers.

well below expectations. Theme E and F (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%. It should be mentioned that the CIP itself proposes to approach the issue of goal consistency through a focus on target groups ;

- The Spanish evaluator highlights the general overall consistency between the work programmes of the DPs and the CIP. However, he points to the low incidence of planned effects on businesses, except in the thematic areas of business creation, adaptability and reconciliation, which may mean that the labour market integration actions focus on the unemployed, and forget about intermediation and employment creation. This may make these actions less effective. Secondly, the evaluator stresses the lack of integration of the gender perspective in the projects, especially in the thematic areas “Combating racism” and “Asylum Seekers”, thus rendering invisible one of the components of discrimination in these populations (the fact of being a woman disappears behind the condition of immigrant or refugee) ;
- The evaluator for UK-NI states that in terms of target beneficiaries, most groups mentioned in the CIP (drug misusers, “status 0” young people, disabled people, long-term unemployed men) have been catered for. However the evaluator found that some groups deserved more attention (women, older workers, homeless people, people with mental illness and farmers) ;
- The Dutch evaluator shows the predominance of the reintegration objective across all Themes, except under Pillar IV with this objective being present in two thirds of the projects.

3.3. Adaptation to local needs at CIP and DP level

3.3.1. DPs tend to define their actions by reference to their local environment but spatial inequalities may be insufficiently addressed at the CIP level.

In most countries regional differences are not analysed in-depth in the CIP (with some exceptions, such as Portugal). It is surprising, however, that even in some countries with a decentralised structure of the EQUAL management, such as Italy and France, no specific in-depth reference is made to the geographical differences, although, in France, the consultation of regional and local representative bodies in the CIP elaboration process may have made up for this. This general lack of analysis may be due to the willingness to leave as much freedom as possible to the territorial level to shape the programme and adapt it to regional needs. But it may also mean that the national level has not enough control.

In the smaller countries EQUAL seems to be understood as a national programme (e.g. Sweden, Ireland, the Netherlands). However, in general evaluators stress at the same time that the local and regional needs have to be taken into account, in particular in small-scaled projects. Adaptation to local realities is highlighted as a precondition of success by the Finish evaluator.

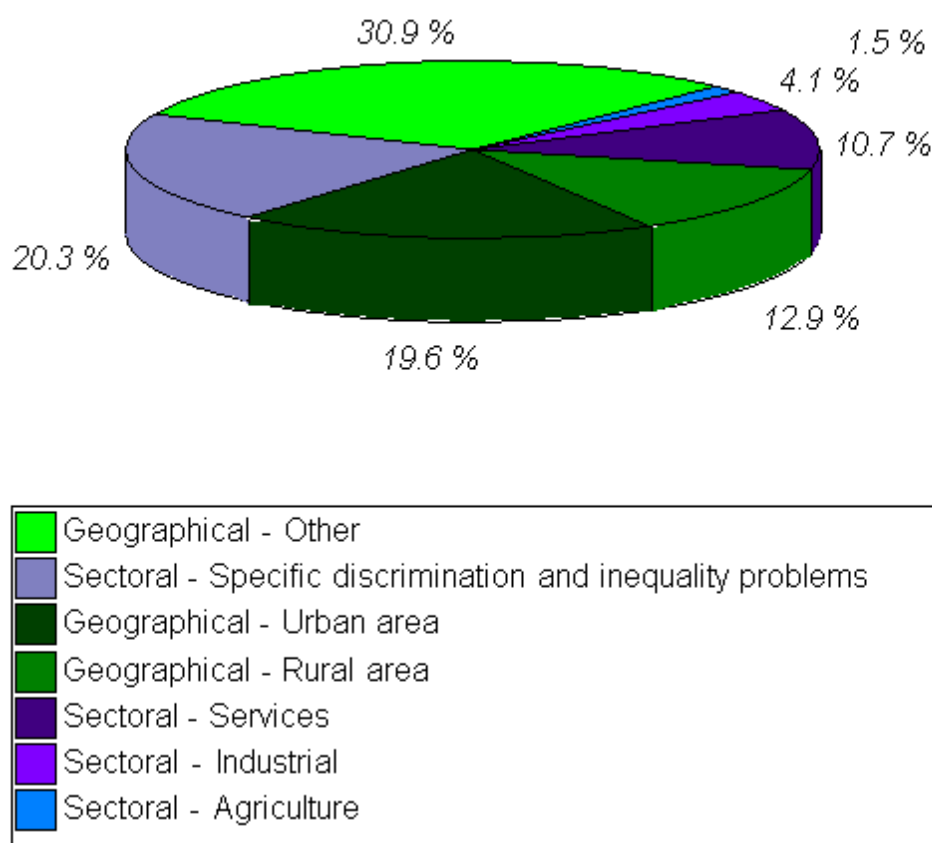
One of the main geographical differences is found between large cities and rural areas (Ireland, Sweden, UK-GB, problems of urban deprivation in the case Northern Ireland). In the case of the UK-GB, the evaluator criticises a too limited orientation of the programme towards rural areas.

However, a number of national evaluation reports highlight that DPs focus their action at the local level. Innovation is even clearly defined by DPs in relation to the local level: this appears in the Mid Term evaluation reports for France and the Netherlands, but also in the Compendium of "Promising Practice" put together by the European Commission. The Austrian evaluator argues that the strong regional focus of DPs is linked to the regional dimension of employment policies¹⁴.

The following graph clearly shows the predominance of geographical DPs (63.4% of the total) over sectoral DPs, although this varies very much between countries. Thus, according to the latest figures available in the ECDB (which omits Belgium-NL and includes the Czech Republic), Spain, Italy and Germany provide together almost 71% of the rural DPs; and Spain and Italy provide 59% of the urban DPs. Again according to the ECDB, 96% DPs are geographical in the UK-GB; 88% in Ireland and Spain; and 85% in Italy. Austria, France, Germany and Portugal have around 60% of geographical DPs. But Denmark, Luxembourg and the Czech Republic only have sectoral DPs.

¹⁴ Thus, in the employability pillar, 62.1% of the DPs (18) have a regional focus and only 37.9% a sectoral one (11). In the adaptability and equal opportunities pillars there is a concentration of regional DPs (66.7% and 90.9%); in contrast, the entrepreneurship pillar as well as the objective of the integration of asylum seekers has in the main a sectoral orientation (58.3% and 66.7% of the DPs).

Graph 3.1 Distribution of sectoral and geographical DPs



Source: ECDB, February 2004

3.4. Conclusions

- In a number of CIPs it appears that a thorough and in-depth analysis of discrimination, and inequalities and the causes leading to it, is missing.
- In general persisting relevance of the CIP is confirmed, but some thematic adjustments have been called for.
- National evaluators stress the overall consistency between the CIPs and the national labour market policies as reflected in the NAP and ESF Objective 3. However, there are differences in the assessment as to whether EQUAL is addressing policy gaps and delivering value-added. In some Member States reference is made to the capacity of EQUAL of bringing up “emerging issues”, as for example the asylum seekers theme, or at least of filling in “gaps on the margins”, meaning that new elements are added to existing approaches. However there are also countries where the strategies and priorities of the CIP are not regarded as contributing many new approaches.

- There is a great variety between Member States with regard to the degree of precision of CIP priorities, which highlights a tension, within the programme, between the need for flexibility (to open grounds for innovation) and the need for clear guidance.
- Overall national evaluators consider that DP objectives are consistent with CIP objectives. However, a number of evaluators observe and to some extent also criticise that the target groups do not always correspond to the set objectives (i.e. discriminated groups) in some themes, or that multiple discriminations (e.g. being an immigrant *and* a woman) are not enough taken into account .
- In most Member States regional differences are not analysed in-depth in the CIP. EQUAL is not perceived in most Member States as a tool to promote regional coherence. Small Member States tend to understand EQUAL as a national programme, while some of the Member States with decentralised implementation structures show a lack of analysis and priorities as regards the territorial dimension. Nevertheless, the regional dimension is regarded as important in the implementation phase.

4. MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATIONS SYSTEMS

4.1. Management system and organisational framework

4.1.1. The involvement of regional and local actors in the management of EQUAL varies according to the national framework for employment policies

According to our analysis, already provided in the First Interim report of the EU-wide evaluation, 3 types of Member States can be distinguished with regard to the level of employment policy decentralisation and the form it takes:

- Member States with significant decentralisation of employment and labour market policy making and/or which have produced separate CIPs for different parts of their countries: the UK – Great Britain (hereafter UK-GB) and Northern Ireland (hereafter UK-NI); and Belgium – Flanders (Belgium-NL) and the Wallonia/Brussels/German community (Belgium-FRG).
 - In the UK, responsibility for employment policy has only been devolved to Northern Ireland. In Belgium, the level of the “Communauté” is responsible for employment policy¹⁵. The NAPs and ESF programming are in both cases the responsibility of the national level, with participation of other policy and administrative levels, but, in Belgium, the management of ESF is devolved and there is complete separation *de facto*.
 - In the UK, co-ordination mechanisms have been set up between the different EQUAL National Support Structures, which include the Irish Republic. In Belgium, there does not seem to be such co-ordination mechanism.
- Member States where competencies in employment policy are shared between the national level and the regional or local level of government, or where policy competencies of the local level are relevant for employment policy.
 - This group includes countries where the decentralisation process is ongoing. This is the case for example in Spain, where many Autonomous Communities now co-ordinate their Public Employment Service, whilst central government retains competence over benefits and labour law; and in Italy, where the ongoing decentralisation of employment policies significantly enhances the role of local and regional actors.
 - However, one should not look only at the competencies over employment policy *stricto sensu*, as the drive towards the territorialisation of employment policy means that more and more fields of policy are co-ordinated, including education, social assistance and local development or regeneration policies. This is the case for Germany, 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” countries, local authorities are in charge of social assistance, and

¹⁵ Although now the Walloon “Communauté” has transferred this competency to the German speaking community on its territory.

they increasingly become actors of the labour market policy. In France, although employment policy strictly speaking is the responsibility of central government, vocational training is mainly the responsibility of regional authorities (*Conseils Régionaux*). *Départements* (County Councils) and *Communes* (Municipal authorities) share responsibilities over social policy.

- Member States with centralised employment policy, although local employment strategies are developing (Greece, Portugal, Luxembourg, Ireland).
 - In Greece, the local authorities have no autonomy in 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 Portuguese 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 involved¹⁶. In fact, even though no regional level of government exists, the territorial dimension of employment policies has become more embedded in Portugal. Thus EQUAL was designed centrally, but the regional offices of Ministries were involved in drafting the CIP.
 - In Luxembourg, 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 Ireland, Regional Assemblies are very recent, and 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 recent Regional Assemblies (Border Midlands and West Region and Southern and Eastern Region) are taking part in the Monitoring Committee.

4.1.2. Some Member States have organised a regional level of programme management

As we have demonstrated in our first Interim Report, another model of regional involvement is 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 countries, the UK-GB, France and Italy, although within a completely different institutional framework. In France the regional level of management of the programme is mostly in the hands of the delegations of the Ministry of Employment, whereas in Britain, it corresponds to elected assemblies, and in Italy, to the regional administration.

¹⁶ 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.

A close involvement of regional level actors in the programme management favours the regional relevance of EQUAL. Selection Committees members know the operators well, and they 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 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. Once again, despite the caution taken in selection mechanisms, the closer links perhaps between regional selection committees and DP actors may account for the lower selection rates and higher numbers of DPs selected than forecasted.

4.1.3. Programme management generally involves a variety of government departments, ministries and institutions

As already stated in our first interim report, 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 (Denmark, Finland, Italy).

Furthermore, in two cases, Austria and Finland, 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. Of course, in both cases, the issues of co-ordination, sharing and possible conflicts of views are crucial for the management of the programme on networking between DPs as well as between DPs and other actors. However national evaluators have not addressed this issue.

A specific case is that of Northern Ireland, 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.

4.1.4. The degree of involvement of the social partners differs according to the institutional framework for employment policies

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 are, as far as we are aware, systematically involved in Monitoring Committees, they are likely to have made a greater contribution in those countries where they are active stakeholders of the employment policy (e.g. Austria, Germany, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal and Sweden).

The participation of the social partners in Monitoring Committees is specifically mentioned in the Annual or National Evaluation reports for Austria, Belgium-NL, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Portugal, UK-NI and UK-GB¹⁷.

¹⁷ We have no information on this for Belgium-FRG, Denmark and Italy.

- In Luxembourg, the organisation of EQUAL closely follows that of the NAPs: the drafting and implementation of the NAPs are a responsibility shared by the government, the unions and employers. This tri-partite system also structures the EQUAL programme, as the social partners are 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 selection level, which were noted by the national evaluator.
- In Greece, the active involvement of social partners in the formulation of employment policy is relatively new. As far as the elaboration of the NAPs is concerned, they are 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 be quite important in the EQUAL programme, where they are involved in the Steering Committee and have played a crucial role of dissemination of information in their own networks.
- In the UK, the Trade Union (TUC) is represented in at least one of the National Thematic Group¹⁸ designed to play a key role in the programme organisation, at the selection stage and in mainstreaming work.

4.1.5. There is little evidence of involvement of NGOs and NGO networks in the management of the programme

As for the social partners, the data available so far on the role of NGO networks in the management structures of the programme is either non-existent or purely descriptive.

As stated in our First Interim report, the UK-GB evaluation report is an exception, as a detailed assessment of the role of NGOs at programme level is provided. In the UK-GB, the consultation phase for the elaboration of the CIP was systematised to a point unknown in other Member States¹⁹ (questionnaire covering policy themes, activities and target groups, 70 responses). It provided ample scope for all interested parties to make sure that their suggestions of adjustments were taken on board. It is interesting to note that the highest response rate to the questionnaire sent out by the government was found with the voluntary sector and local authorities.

The fact that National Thematic Groups (NTGs) in the UK-GB were set up at the very start of the programme and played a role in the selection process is also relevant. NTGs are formed by governmental agencies and non-governmental organisations competent in each theme. Some of the latter have also bid for EQUAL funding, as criticised by unsuccessful bidders. The evaluator's analysis is that this is a strength of the programme (*“leading policy stakeholders involved in guiding and delivering EQUAL”*) but that it may affect “perceptions” of fairness. In any case, this points to the strong organisational capacity and influence of some voluntary organisations, which have been involved in designing the programme, selecting applicants, and are involved in delivery and in mainstreaming “best practice”.

¹⁸ In the UK-GB, National Thematic Groups are called Thematic Networking Groups.

¹⁹ However a similar procedure was implemented in Northern Ireland.

4.1.6. National Support Structures: diverse organisational locations, but similar roles across Member States

Our First Interim report highlighted three models of organisational location of National Support Structures, which can now be confirmed:

- Eight National Support Structures are integrated within the Managing Authority (Belgium-FRG and Belgium-NL, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, Sweden);
- Two are government agencies or units depending on the Managing Authority but exclusively dedicated to technical assistance (the Netherlands and Spain);
- Seven are externalised (Austria, France, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, UK-GB and UK-NI).

Interestingly, a joint support structure has been established between the EQUAL Managing Authorities and NSSs of Northern Ireland, Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland, for assisting with the co-ordination and standardisation of processes and procedures in EQUAL, for example, in relation to DP application forms and assessment.

There is clearly a common body of tasks for NSSs: information and advice to applicants and then to DPs, development of the monitoring system, support to the Managing Authority and sometimes to the Monitoring Committee.

The main difference lies in the role of the NSS in the selection process:

- In some Member States, the NSS is not directly involved,
- In others, the NSS is involved in preparing the files on each applicant without participating in scoring,
- In yet others, the NSS is responsible for the technical assessment.

Interestingly, where NSSs are involved in the selection process, opinions are divided among national evaluators as to whether this is a problem or not, as usually the NSSs have been providing guidance to DPs before. In particular, whilst the French and the Swedish evaluators recommend that regional or national Support Structures should not take part in the selection process, other evaluators do not comment on this issue.

Quite a few national evaluators highlight the double role of NSSs, as they are both supposed to provide administrative and financial guidance to DPs, and help them with their methodology of implementation. These roles of course mobilise quite different competencies, and should probably be allocated to different staff. Evaluators find that administrative guidance tends to take precedence, partly as a response to the most urgent demands from DPs. However, there is a clear need for more methodological support, as the rest of our

report confirms, in particular on the implementation of the EQUAL principles.

The Table in Annex presents our mapping of the NSSs as described and assessed by the different national evaluators.

4.2. Implementation of Action 1

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

The objective of Action 1 was to improve work programmes and to develop partnerships. For this exercise a period of 6 months was planned. Two types of use of Action 1 can be distinguished:

- In one set of countries Action 1 was used for the consolidation of selected partnerships,
- In the other set of countries Action 1 was used as a period to prepare DPs for selection at entry in Action 2.

Consequently, the global assessment of Action 1 differs.

With regard to the selection process itself, one is struck by the great diversity of approaches taken to selection. The number of stages in the selection process varies quite widely (one, two or even three when there was first a call for declarations of interests).

Basically we can distinguish the following groups of Member States with regard to selection:

- Member States in which the most important selection phase is the selection of DPs for entry in Action 1: Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, and UK-GB.
 - For some of these, the pre-selection for Action 1 had already been quite important. Thus, in Germany, the lowest selection rate applied to the selection of declarations of interests to submit applications for Action 1.
 - In this group of Member States, selection rates for passing from Action 1 to Action 2 were above 90%.
- Member States, where both selection stages – for entry in Action 1 and in Action 2 - were important. Austria, France, and UK-NI are found there. In this group, selection rates between Action 1 and Action 2 ranged between roughly 70% and 90%.

The selection rates for Action 1 ranged in most countries between 25% and 35%. The lowest rate could be found in Greece (14%), while in Austria and France (in both countries selection to enter action 2 was important) selection rates for Action 1 were above 50%.

Problems arising in some countries at the beginning of the implementation phase (Action 2) indicate that the consolidation of partnerships is rather decisive in the conception phase (Action 1), all the more so that CIP guidance to DPs sometimes lacked clarity. Thus, in a number of countries, clear target groups have not been identified in Action 1 and this is a weakness which DPs have to address at the beginning of action 2 (e.g. as pointed out in the evaluation reports for Austria, Belgium-FRG, France and Spain). The vagueness of CIPs with regard to the definition of the EQUAL principles also appears to have had repercussions on the design of DP actions (Action 1) and their implementation (Action 2). There is also evidence that DPs could be clearer in their expected outputs. In brief, the design of DP projects and their effective implementation seems to require more and earlier guidance.

The implementation phase reveals that the consolidation of Development Partnerships through mergers sometimes required by Programme managers might not have been efficient as common commitment and common objectives between partners might be missing (e.g. as pointed out in the Mid Term evaluation for Belgium-FRG).

4.2.2. The composition of selection committees varies widely between Member States

The actors involved in DP selection and their respective influence in the selection process vary from one Member State to the other. However, there has generally been both a technical assessment and a final policy-oriented assessment, the latter being carried out by selection committees or equivalents.

As pointed out in our First Interim report, the composition of selection committees, or of the bodies having the final decision, varies from one Member State to the next. They may be rather selective or rather inclusive. Furthermore, the involvement of stakeholders may either be direct or through consultation.

An issue to be addressed is the possible conflict of interest emerging in inclusive selection processes. As already pointed out above, the impartiality of the actors involved in selection might be doubted when these actors are directly involved in DPs. This might be the case for regional and local authorities, for national authorities as well as for social partners and NGOs. Thus, in a number of Member States, regional and local authorities are involved in monitoring and DP selection. The better knowledge of the problems and actors at the regional and local level may be a strong argument in favour of such involvement. But, at the same time, the possibility of conflicts of interest is increased, as institutions participating in selection committees may also be involved in regional projects.

4.2.3. Prioritising compliance with the planned thematic distribution vs. prioritising the quality of the proposals

Concerning selection criteria, two approaches have been identified:

- Countries and CIP territories giving a high relative weight to the thematic approach and to political priorities (as in Belgium-FRG, Germany and the UK-GB. Spain is probably also in this case)
- And countries where the quality of applications and the innovation potential prevail (e.g. Greece, Portugal).

The priority given by to the planned spread of DPs by theme has a clear impact on the selection rates by themes. The variation of selection between countries and themes ranged between 10% and 100%. Thus, the selection rates for Pillar 1 were in general low, meaning that significantly more applications were submitted than DPs finally selected. Theme A 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 the Themes under Pillar 4 were on average significantly higher, especially in Belgium NL, the Netherlands and Spain.

It is difficult to make recommendations as to which of the two approaches should be favoured. When the planned thematic spread is based on clear political priorities resulting from a diagnosis made in the CIP, it seems logical to stick to already agreed thematic priorities. The danger linked to such a procedure, however, consists in not giving sufficient attention to the EQUAL principles, in particular to the principle of innovation.

In any case, the low number of applications under certain themes certainly calls for more proactive approaches by National Support Structures of potential bidders in relatively new fields (e.g. Equal Opportunities), and more targeted support to applicants in those fields.

4.3. Implementation of Action 2

Action 2 is the phase of implementation of DP work programmes. In principle, work programmes have to cover a period of 2 to 3 years.

4.3.1. Guidance to DPs has been differently appreciated

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

Practical guides were produced by the NSSs. The lack of publicity on these guides in Sweden and their late publication in France²⁰ sometimes hampered their use. In various Member States, direct contact with individual DPs – including through visits - was organised, especially in countries with few DPs, such as Belgium-NL, Denmark or Sweden, or in countries with well staffed NSSs like Spain where each technician is responsible for the follow-up of 8 DPs. In some countries, contact was also organised on a collective basis through meetings and conferences on implementation issues (e.g. in France, the Netherlands, and Sweden).

The conclusions of some evaluators are positive concerning guidance to DPs during Action 2, especially in France, the Netherlands and Spain, three countries in which a key role has been played by Support Structures. For example, in France, 90% of DPs stress that technical assistance helped them manage their project and 80%, that the NSS or RSS²¹ helped them to take into account the key EQUAL principles in their projects. However, as pointed more generally above, even in countries where guidance has been positively valued, some evaluators recommended that more methodological assistance should be provided (e.g. in Spain).

Other evaluators are much more critical:

- The lack of direct contact between the NSS and DPs was pointed out by the Portuguese evaluator. Similarly, in Greece and in Belgium-FRG, the evaluators highlighted the need for more frequent meetings between the Managing Authorities and DPs;
- The evaluator for Belgium-FRG highlighted the late start of the “animation” team;

²⁰ For example the guide N° 6 about “The technical and financial monitoring of the projects” would have been very helpful at the beginning of the programme.

²¹ Regional Support Structure

- In Austria, DPs were faced with problems derived from the distribution of roles between the MA and the NSS, as the latter argued that administrative questions were not part of its mandate and that it could not act both as a consultant and as an administrative controller. This is probably a reasonable claim, but the distribution of roles should make guidance more, not less, accessible;
- In Finland, the involvement of three ministries was a factor of delay for DPs;
- In Sweden, the turn-over in the National Support Structure was too high.

The main source of dissatisfaction expressed by DPs in many Member States is the very important administrative burden. In some cases, there have also been some financial/economic problems, notably on the issue of eligibility of expenditure (as mentioned in the evaluation reports for Finland, Greece, Portugal and Sweden). The Greek evaluator recommends a reconsideration of eligible expenditures.

There was no assessment of guidance in the evaluation reports for Belgium-NL, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, UK-GB, and UK-NI.

4.3.2. In most countries, planned budgets seem to have proved appropriate except in some countries, when the programme strategy was revised between Action 1 and Action 2

At programme level, budgets for the implementation of the work programmes seem to be realistic and appropriate in most countries (as stated in the evaluation reports for Denmark, Greece, Netherlands, Portugal and Spain). However Action 2 is behind schedule and financial resources are under-consumed in Belgium-FRG, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Ireland, Portugal, and Sweden. Belgium-NL also faces under-spending but this is due to a lack of promoters.

A change of strategy at programme level took place in Sweden and, to a lesser extent, in France and Greece. In these countries, more DPs were selected for Action 2 than planned²². 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.

At DP level, in some cases like in UK-GB and UK-NI, the evaluators pointed out that forecasts had under-estimated the level of expenditure required, especially for administrative support, which resulted in strains for programme management at DP level and in doubts about the sustainability of activities.

4.3.3. DPs encountered difficulties in the implementation of Action 2 in most Member States

At this stage, it is clear that DPs are delayed in most countries but it is not clear whether these delays are due to the nature of the activities and project management, or to administrative or financial complexity. In Belgium-FRG, some DPs only started their activities at the beginning of 2003.

²² For example, in France, 228 instead of 200.

National evaluation reports have identified difficulties and sources of delay in the following areas²³:

- Transnationality
 - Delays in setting up the transnational partnerships (pointed out in most national evaluation reports);
 - The lack of co-ordination between Member States with regard to the start of activities and payments, which inhibits joint actions with foreign partners;
 - Delays in the finalisation of Trans-national co-operation agreement (e.g. in Belgium-FRG) and in their final approval (UK-GB).
- 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.

All these difficulties appear to be magnified in the case of large partnerships, as pointed out in most evaluation reports. System management is more complex, financial risks are more important, co-ordinating activities are even more difficult and time consuming. This is even more difficult when all partners are not familiar with ESF procedures and/or if the lead partners suffer from understaffing/staff turn-over as was pointed out by the Portuguese and British evaluators, who argue that participation in EQUAL is a learning process for DPs.

- Delivery

Both the Spanish and Portuguese evaluator reported DP difficulties in contacting the target groups.

- Finance and administration

Difficulties there were reported to be significant and included:

- Delays in Action 1 payments (specifically mentioned in Italy), which caused a delay by 3 to 6 months for DPs; however delays in payments are mentioned much more generally by national evaluators.
- 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;
- Problems to ask for matched funding to private enterprises, due to the sensitive information (salaries) handled, as was pointed out by the British evaluator;
- The very time-consuming effort requested from DPs regarding the quantitative and qualitative information that they have to submit to managing authorities. For example, some of the managers and co-ordinators interviewed in UK-GB estimated that 50 to 80% of their time was spent on administration and monitoring. More generally DPs complain of a conflict in priorities, as they claim to focus on the target groups whereas EQUAL would be concerned with "themes and procedures".

²³ There was no assessment specifically on that question in the evaluation report for Luxembourg and only a partial one in the German report.

These difficulties may have consequences on the implementation of Action 3, due to a lack of motivation to disseminate results and products, or a lack in financial resources. The Austrian evaluator for example pointed out that more money than forecasted was being spent during Action 2, which was imputable to the time required for dealing with administration, management and financial aspects.

4.3.4. Rates of expenditure vary across themes, which might be linked to varying organisational capacity

Independently from the consistency between indicative budgets and approved budgets by theme²⁴, thematic variations in the consumption of budgets are reported in a few Mid Term evaluation reports.

The different structure of the partnerships as well as the type of projects under different themes may be explanatory factors. In the case of Northern Ireland for example, DPs in the Employability Pillar account for a higher share of expenditure by the end of 2002 (62%) than those in the Equal Opportunities Pillar (53%). It should be noted, however, that according to the annual implementation report, the low level of consumption of the budget in this period was linked primarily to the slow start of Action 2. The Annual Implementation Report 2002 states that projections for 2003 and 2004 were in line with CIP forecasts.

Other explanatory factors include the greater or lesser experience of DPs in managing projects, in particular in “emerging themes” (e.g. Ireland, Spain). Furthermore, in the case of Spain, the evaluator observed that in 2002, the rate of expenditure in the Objective 1 regions was much lower than in Objective 3 regions (7.4% on average as against 13.2%), which perhaps points to a less developed technical capacity to develop and carry out projects. Another factor is the type of promoter. When the promoter is a department of a regional administration, the rate of expenditure is lower (8.6% instead of 11.4% for other promoters on average), probably due to the complexity of expenditure procedures. But the rate is lowest when the promoter is a union (5.7%).

However, not all Member States show important thematic variations with regard to the rates of expenditure (e.g. UK-GB).

4.4. Implementation of Action 3

Action 3 is dedicated to the organisation of networking, dissemination of good practice and mainstreaming activities. The first communication on EQUAL states that *“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 Managing Authority in such a way as to facilitate maximum input into labour market and employment policy and should involve the social partners”*. These activities will normally involve DPs acting either singly or in groups on the basis of specific expertise and proven capacity. For this purpose, these DPs receive additional funding.

It should be stated that little information was available on Action 3 in the national evaluation reports as the evaluation period sometimes ended before Action 3 had started. At this stage information is rather descriptive than evaluative. Others sources, such as documents issued by Managing Authorities, within the framework of the European Mainstreaming Group, are thus a useful complement in order to form an overall view of Action 3 at present.

²⁴ See first Interim Report of the EU-wide evaluation

4.4.1. Two main strategies of implementation of Action 3

Action 3 was planned in two main different ways in Member States:

- Some Managing Authorities decided to launch Action 3 at approximately the same time as Action 2, considering it as a rolling programme. This was the case in Austria, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland. Finland and Luxembourg also opted for this solution, but were delayed in implementing it ;
- Some Managing Authorities, on the contrary, clearly separated Action 3 from Action 2. This was the case in Belgium-FRG, Belgium-NL, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and UK-GB (England).

The situation in each Member State, as reported by the national evaluators, is summarised in the table below.

Table 4.1. Implementation of Action 3 at DP level

Member States	Implementation of Action 3 at DP level
Austria	Action 3 started in May 2002, together with Action 2.
Belgium-FRG	Action 3 was not operational by the end of 2003 ; it will start on the basis of the results of Action 2.
Belgium-NL	Action 3 was supposed to begin 2 months before the end of Action 2.
Denmark	Action 3 was launched at the mainstreaming seminar (June 2002), but is mainly implemented through the NTGs.
Finland	Action 3 was supposed to start simultaneously with Action 2, but the implementation plan was accepted by the Monitoring Committee only in Autumn 2002.
France	Action 3 will be launched in March 2004 at DP level but the process began in October 03 (submission) ; in some cases only, Action 3 could start simultaneously with Action 2.
Germany	Action 2 and Action 3 are simultaneous. Action 3 was slowly developing by the end of 2003.
Greece	Action 3 was expected to start in December 2003.
UK-GB	Action 3 was launched in November 2002 and the closing date for applications was end May 2003, activities began in Summer 2003. In Scotland and Wales, Action 3 started simultaneously with Action 2.
Luxembourg	Action 3 was supposed to start simultaneously with Action 2, in May 2002, but was postponed to 2003.
Ireland	Action 3 was launched together with Action 2.
Italy	Action 3 was expected to begin in October 2003.
Netherlands	Action 3 was launched together with Action 2.
UK- NI	Action 3 was launched together with Action 2 (and applications may be received until 6 months before the end of Action 2).
Portugal	Action 3 was launched in November 2003.
Sweden	Action 3 was launched by the ESF Council in April 2003.
Spain	Action 3 was launched in May 2003, entry in Action 3 is allowed until September 2004.

Source : national evaluation reports and, in some cases, Circa Documents

4.4.2. There is a great diversity in the preparation and in the implementation of Action 3

Implementation schedules for Action 3 vary widely from one Member State to the other, as shown in the Table above. A specific plan was elaborated by the Managing Authority in some countries (France, Finland, Greece, Italy, Spain) and sometimes submitted for approval to the Monitoring Committee. In others countries, such as the Netherlands, seminars and meetings were organised on this specific issue.

In Italy, the Action 3 plan specifies that national mainstreaming committees and regional/local working groups will be funded to promote transfer of good practice to policies. Only one Member State, Ireland, has established a mainstreaming policy group (which first met in May 2003), with high level representation from relevant government departments, agencies, social partner organisations and other bodies. This group will act as a clearing house for validating mainstreaming proposals, for transfer to policy, and for supporting a capacity within relevant organisations to incorporate good practice. However, the setting up of a specific committee for the selection of Action 3 applications has been planned in Italy and in France.

There is little evaluative information available on the implementation of Action 3 at DP level, with few exceptions. In Finland, the evaluator criticises the way in which Action 3 is implemented, as there has been a clear reluctance of DPs to initiate Action 3 at the same time as Action 2. Similarly, the evaluator for UK-GB reported that initially, an important number of DPs were reluctant to prepare an Action 3 application. Many felt that it was too early to start Action 3. In Spain, the evaluator has identified an expectant attitude in DPs with regard to Action 3.

In those countries where Action 3 has started, it seems that mergers have been an issue and either have caused delays in implementation, as the difficulty of the exercise was underestimated (e.g. in Austria) or have simply not taken place, as DPs felt that the risk associated with financial responsibility was too significant (e.g. in UK-GB).

We know little about guidance on Action 3. In some Members States, a guide for Action 3 was published (Austria, Greece). In Portugal, the strategy for Action 3 is based on the idea that, before dissemination and mainstreaming can take place, promising products and practices must be visible. Thus guidelines and a brochure on how to describe and evaluate promising practices has been prepared and made available in paper form and in the EQUAL web page.

Only a few evaluation reports have made comments on the quality of guidance during Action 3. In the UK-GB, the evaluator has assessed the launching of Action 3, and found that the majority of DPs (three quarters) were satisfied or very satisfied with the support received from the NSS (but this does not seem to have helped them overcome their reluctance).

In other Members States, Action 3 is not operational or had just started and the process of preparation and implementation is not mentioned by the evaluators.

4.4.3. Entry in Action 3 is organised according to different models

The mode of entry in Action 3 has been organised in 4 different ways:

- In some countries (e.g. Austria, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland), not necessarily small ones, all DPs have been invited to develop Action 3 work plans and actions.

- In Ireland, all projects have had a “discrete” Action 3 budget up front, through which they variously develop publicity materials, host conferences, publish research and so on.
- In Denmark, Action 3 is largely implemented through the NTGs, and Action 3 funds are allocated mainly through them. All DPs take part.
- In other countries (France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain), entry in Action 3 happens or will happen by way of a call for proposals. Applications may be submitted by individual DPs or DP groupings. In addition, in Portugal, non-EQUAL stakeholders can be associated in Action 3 applications, especially if they are interested in taking up promising practice. Similarly, in France, new stakeholders will be allowed to present an application if they are willing to take up innovations developed by DPs in Action 2. In Germany, this is only for vertical mainstreaming, as horizontal mainstreaming is supposed to take place through participation in the NTGs, which is compulsory. Selection criteria are only known for Spain²⁵: impact potential, the quality of transfer mechanisms and the quality of diffusion of good practice.

The deadlines for entry have also been set differently: in some member States, a fixed deadline has been agreed, whereas in other Member States, entry in Action 3 may take place at any moment over a certain period of time.

- Amongst countries with a fixed deadline, some chose an early one (e.g. UK-GB, where Action 3 was launched in November 2002 and the deadline for submitting a proposal was May 2003), or a late one, as in France or Portugal.
- However, even amongst the countries having set a fixed deadline, effective entry in Action 3 may take place at a later date, according to DP convenience, but also due to the contracting process (e.g. in the UK-GB).
- In some CIP territories, there is no deadline for submission in Action 3 (e.g. UK-NI). In Scotland and Wales, the implementation of Action 3 is based on rolling programmes. In Spain, the call started on 8/5/2003 but is open until 30/9/2004.

At this stage, in those countries where Action 3 has started:

- All DPs are involved in Austria;
- 9 have been selected in Spain and have started their work;
- DPs selected for Action 3 in the UK-GB began to work in August 2003 but entry in Action 3 is possible until November 2005. Not all DPs had entered Action 3 by November 2003.
- In Northern Ireland, 4 out of 6 DPs have sent draft proposals which were approved and were to start Action 3 at the end of 2003.
- In France, the national evaluator mentioned that 11 DPs were already in Action 3 but Action 3 will be formally launched later in 2004.

All in all there seems to have been quite a lot of flexibility for the modes of entry in Action 3 so that it is not evident to have a clear view on the process of implementation at this stage.

²⁵ Email interview with the UAFSE.

4.4.4. Different models of linkage with National Thematic Groups (NTGs) have been adopted.

In some Member States (e.g. Denmark, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and UK-GB, UK-NI), NTGs are very closely linked to the implementation of Action 3, whilst in others (e.g. France, Germany) there are no visible links. Amongst the Member States having established links between Action 3 at DP level and their NTGs, we can highlight the following examples:

- An interesting, and, as far as we are aware, unique model, has been implemented in the UK-GB, whereby NTGs were set up very early (2001) and took part in the information and guidance for Action 3. Each National Thematic Group developed a thematic mainstreaming plan in the early months of 2003 against which bids could be measured. The plans were used by DPs as a guide for their applications for Action 3 funding, to ensure co-ordination and reduce duplication. Following the final consultation, in March 2003, DPs spent a further 2 months finalising their action 3 work programmes ("Mainstreaming Partnership Agreements") which were submitted to the NSS at the end of May 2003;
- Austria represents another interesting model, whereby all DPs are involved in Action 3, they also all have to opt for one of the 11 National Thematic Groups. DP mainstreaming activities thus appear to be quite guided by the programme. The Netherlands seem to also have opted for this model, although information is lacking ;
- In Denmark, the Managing Authority decided to focus Action 3 on the 4 NTGs, in which all DPs are involved. According to the MA, this will enhance the collaboration between DPs and ensure greater visibility and mainstreaming ;
- In Spain, the NSS person in charge for assessment of DP applications to Action 3 has to belong to the corresponding NTG. DPs can present proposals in the 7 thematic areas selected in Spain, but must try to take into account the priorities of the 3 NTGs National Thematic Networks and address the priorities identified by the Monitoring Committee in its "Transfer and Dissemination" strategy ;
- In Northern Ireland, the NTG met in summer 2003 to consider the four applications received under Action 3.

In most countries, the setting up of the NTGs, considered as part of implementation of Action 3, has preceded the launching of Action 3, which may facilitate, in part, the Action 3 process at DP level, and perhaps mergers between DPs.

However this might not be possible in Belgium-FRG, Belgium-NL, Italy and Luxembourg where important delays have occurred in the setting up of NTGs.

The table below summarises the situation of NTGs in the Member States. More information on NTGs is provided in Chapter 5 (section 5.6.1) and in Annex.

Table 4.2. The situation of NTGs in the Member States

Members states	Implementation of National Thematic Groups
Austria	The process started in 2002 and finalised at the Thematic Networking conference at the beginning of 2003, in which NTGs discussed and finalised their agendas. 11 NTGs started their work in March 2003.
Denmark	The 4 NTGs were set up at the first national EQUAL mainstreaming seminar in June 2002 but had a very low level of activity until the second seminar in August 2003.
Finland	The 5 NTGs were set up in Spring 2003.
France	The NTG "Adaptability" was set-up at the beginning of 2002. The NTG "Reconciliation" was launched in May 2003.
Germany	The 14 NTGs were set up in December 2002.
Greece	The process began in May 2002 with the proposal of 4 NTGs but it seems that they began to work in October 2003.
Ireland	The 2 NTGs began their work at the end of 2002.
The Netherlands	The first 4 NTGs were set up during 2003. The last one was set up at the end of 2003.
Portugal	7 out of 8 NTGs were operational at mid 2003, the last one on "empowerment" was to start at the end of 2003.
Spain	The first core meetings of NTG took place in March 2003.
Sweden	One NTG was set up at the end 2002 (Asylum seekers). 8 other NTGs began to work in April 2003. Their proposals of work programme were then to be examined by the MA and external experts, and the decisions were going to take place in October 2003.
UK-GB	The 8 NTGs were set up at the beginning of the programme.
UK-NI	The NTG was set up during Action 1 (2 NTGs were set up at the beginning but, following a proposal of the evaluator, they merged in February 2003).

Source : National evaluations report – data from Managing Authorities produced for the European Mainstreaming Group

4.5. The organisation of a European level of programme management

The European Commission follows the EQUAL programme through several actions, notably :

- The European Thematic Groups (Cf. Chapter 5)
- The EU wide evaluation of EQUAL
- Participation to the EQUAL Steering Committees at the national level
- The Equal Common Database (ECDB)

Our first assessment of the Equal Common Database (ECDB) relies on the analysis of the national evaluation reports and interviews with the EQUAL team member in charge of the database. This assessment focuses on the objectives and the functioning of the ECDB.

We will provide a further assessment (December 2004 – 2nd interim report) in the context of the case studies we will have to carry out on transnationality at DP level.

4.5.1. A common system involving several actors

The design of the ECDB started from the very beginning of EQUAL in co-operation with the Members States. All the stakeholders in the programme insisted on the necessity of developing a common system to share the information about the projects and to monitor the programme.

The process to implement a common system is quite sophisticated as it involves a variety of actors: the national and transnational partners of the DPs, the Managing Authorities, the European Commission (EQUAL Unit).

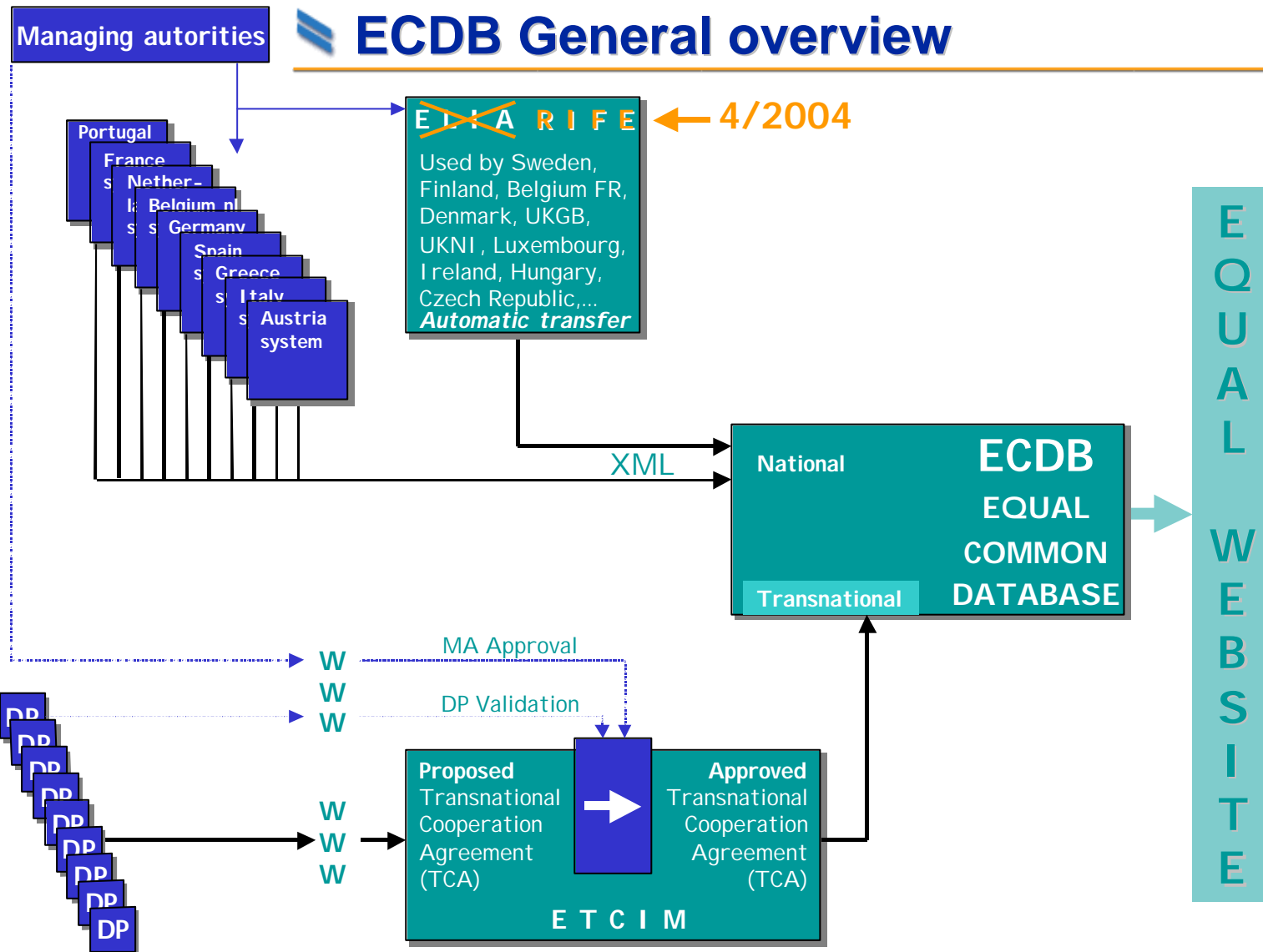
The ECDB includes:

- Comprehensive data on DPs, collected and validated by the Managing Authorities and then transmitted according to a common protocol (XML) to the EQUAL Unit at European level. Member States which do not have a national system to collect and transmit the DPs data can use the ELIA²⁶ database;
- Specific data on transnational activities provided by the DPs themselves via ETCIM²⁷ and validated by the Managing Authorities.

The diagram on the following page explains this process.

²⁶ ELIA: Equal Local Input Application. This European database used from the launching of Equal will be replaced in April 2004 by a new web-based application, named RIFE (Remote Input For Equal).

²⁷ ETCIM: Equal transnational Co-operation Internet Module.



Source : Employment and Social Affairs DG

4.5.2. A large field of investigations for various purposes

The data to be collected by the Managing Authorities and the DPs for the ECDB are presented in a particular Annex of all the CIPs. This Annex appears as an important document of nine pages covering the following eight main fields:

- General information
- Action 1: set up of the Development Partnerships
- Members of the DP
- Action 2: implementation of the work programme
- Transnational Co-operation Partnerships
- Action 3: thematic networking
- Other information for monitoring at DP level
- Other information for monitoring at Programme level.

Each field includes different sub-fields. For instance for the field “Action 1: set up of the Development Partnerships” and the field “Action 2: implementation of the work programme”, they are 23 sub-fields dealing with the partners, the themes, the objectives, the beneficiaries, the EQUAL principles (innovation, empowerment, transnational co-operation) and the budget.

Most of the questions are closed questions with either “One choice” or “Multiple choice”. However, there are a few open questions with a text field.

The data provided by the ECDB up to February 2004 deals with the state of play of Action 2. It may be used for three different purposes:

- Quantitative analyses of the ECDB data. Various statistics may be extracted on three main topics: The Development Partnerships, the DP national partners, the transnational co-operation agreements ;
- Analyses of the text fields of the DPs, which provide qualitative information on projects. Such information was very valuable for thematic groups at European and national level ;
- A specific analysis for thematic demand .

4.5.3. A relevance highly dependent on the level of implication of the Member States

From our point of view, the quality and the relevance of the data provided by the ECDB is highly dependent on the contributions by Member States.

As initially agreed between the European Commission and the Member States, the updating of the data is under the responsibility of the Member States. Every month, the different Managing Authorities are supposed to check the information as well as to validate and transmit new data. Besides, it should be noted that the EU Commission does not consider itself responsible for any mistakes or omissions which could occur within the information provided by ECDB.

The following table is a comparison between DP spread in ECDB (statistics of February 2004) and the data gathered by the EU-wide evaluation through the national Mid Term evaluation reports and contact with EQUAL offices in several countries.

Table 4.4. Comparison of DP spread in ECDB (February 2004) and in the data gathered by the EU-wide evaluation

	Total	Total	1A	1A	1B	1B	2C	2C	2D	2D	3E	3E	3F	3F	4G	4G	4H	4H	I	I
	ECDB	eval	ECDB	eval	ECDB	eval	ECDB	eval	ECDB	eval	ECDB	eval	ECDB	eval	ECDB	eval	ECDB	eval	ECDB	eval
AT	57	58	21	14	6	15	0	0	12	12	3	3	0	0	0	0	12	11	3	3
Be-FRG	36	37	17	17	0	0	5	5	0	0	10	11	0	0	3	3	0	0	1	1
Be-NL	NA	19	NA	9	NA	1	NA	1	NA	3	NA	3	NA	0	NA	0	NA	1	NA	1
CZ	10	NA	5	NA	1	NA	2	NA	0	NA	1	NA	0	NA	1	NA	0	NA	0	NA
DE	109	109	45	45	7	6	8	8	8	8	10	10	13	13	5	5	5	5	8	9
DK	19	17	10	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	0	0	0	0	4	4	1	1
SP	156	159	48	48	7	7	25	25	0	0	0	0	23	24	20	22	32	32	1	1
FI	37	37	14	14	5	5	0	0	6	6	0	0	9	9	0	0	2	2	1	1
FR	228	228	66	66	22	22	23	23	28	28	32	32	29	29	24	24	0	0	4	4
GR	40	40	11	11	3	3	6	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	0	0	4	4	1	1
IE	8	21	8	10	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1
IT	279	279	84	84	7	7	0	0	71	71	81	81	0	0	0	0	34	34	2	2
LU	3	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
NL	93	95	27	30	3	2	12	11	6	6	15	15	5	5	12	12	7	8	6	6
PT	105	109	30	31	5	5	23	25	6	6	5	5	25	25	5	6	5	5	1	1
SE	38	46	14	19	0	0	5	7	0	0	13	13	0	0	0	0	3	4	3	3
UKgb	76	76	23	23	9	9	9	9	8	8	15	15	5	5	0	0	4	4	3	3
UKni	6	6	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Total	1300	1339	429	436	75	82	118	123	150	153	194	201	114	115	71	75	113	115	36	39

Our sources for the countries where differences appear:

Austria: our figures provided by the EQUAL office in Austria

BE-FRG: our figures taken from the national Mid-Term evaluation report

BE-NL: our figures taken from the national Mid-Term evaluation report

Germany: our figures based on German Newsletter 1 (June 2002) and on the fact that 100% of DPs selected in Action 1 entered Action 2

DK: our figures taken from the national Mid-Term evaluation report. The difference with ECDB is that 2 DPs have temporarily been suspended.

SP: our figures provided by the EQUAL NSS in November 2003

IE: our figures taken from the national Mid-Term evaluation report

NL: our figures taken from the national Mid-Term evaluation report

PT: our figures taken from the national Mid-Term evaluation report

SE: our figures taken from the national Mid-Term evaluation report

Our total includes BE-NL and excludes the Czech Republic.

The main differences between ECDB figures and the data collected from national evaluation reports are found:

- In Ireland : 8 DPs are identified in the ECDB instead of the 21 DPs in reality ;
- In Austria : the thematic distribution is different. According to the ECDB, there are respectively 21 DPs for Theme 1A and 6 for Theme 1B, whilst the figures are 14 and 15 in the EQUAL office ;
- The information for BE-NL was not communicated to the ECDB by the Managing Authority, which faces IT problems.

Overall, there are few differences between the two sources of data (ECDB and evaluation/NSS) for the rest of countries. The differences could be explained by differences in dates of data collection. The ECDB can be used for the purpose of the EU-wide evaluation.

4.6. Monitoring systems at the national level

In order to monitor the programme at national level, the managing authorities and the National Support Structures have developed different tools to gather both quantitative and qualitative data.

Lists of indicators have been established and DPs have to inform them regularly. We provide some examples below:

- In Austria, the EQUAL database includes the following areas of information: activities, innovations, favoured persons, favoured systems, list of modules, module description, partners and finance ;
- In Denmark, the OPUS system gathers quantitative output indicators, e.g. on the share of women participants; the age; the labour-market status; and the options of participants ;
- In France, the OLIMPE system gathers minimum common indicators of output for assistance to persons (number of beneficiaries, distribution by age, sex, socio-professional category, labour market status) and for assistance to structures and systems (number of activities, type of activities – business creation, training, research etc., and distribution of expenditure by type of activity). Additional indicators of output have been designed by theme (e.g. for thematic area C: the number of businesses created or being created; and their characteristics: sector, legal status, number of jobs created) ;
- In Greece, the indicators are classified under three groups: indicators of implementation, indicators of results and impact indicators ;
- In UK GB, the output/quantitative monitoring consists of a comparison between the CIP forecast (used as a base line) and the survey undertaken by the Managing Authority and the National Support Structure. The survey includes the following items : numbers of DPs set up, average number of partners in DP, funding, number of individual beneficiaries, number of women receiving support, average number of transnational meetings attended per DP per year, etc²⁸.

²⁸ In addition, as part of their monitoring returns, DPs collect a series of quantitative and qualitative data on beneficiaries such as their contact and personal details, qualifications attained, or employment status and nature of employment. DP staff are required to complete monitoring forms, particularly timesheets which capture attendance, progress, completion and drop-out rates.

4.6.1. The available assessments of quantitative monitoring reveal problems, notably of reliability, coverage and accessibility

Except in a few cases (e.g. Netherlands, the UK-GB where only the operation of the monitoring system was assessed, not the outputs), evaluators have looked at the quality of outputs of the monitoring system but also at the operation of the system. However some evaluators have simply described the functioning of the system without making an assessment yet (Belgium-NL) or do not mention much due to their DP-focus and to the attention paid to qualitative learning (Finland).

In terms of quality of outputs, the criteria used by evaluators are:

- Reliability of data (Belgium-FRG, Ireland, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Spain)
- Coverage of indicators (Germany)
- Scope and relevance of indicators (Spain, Greece)
- Consistency of indicators (Luxembourg)
- Timeliness (Ireland)
- Periodicity (Spain)
- Scope of possible enquiries (Austria, Denmark, Germany)
- Accessibility of results (Austria)

All of these criteria are relevant and could usefully be taken up by all evaluators.

The following are the main conclusions which can be drawn from their analyses²⁹:

- The evaluators assessing the reliability of the quantitative monitoring systems highlight the main problem of these systems, namely the fact that they are entirely dependent on the data provided by DPs and that there are generally no checks. The evaluator for Belgium-FRG, who has a thorough knowledge of DPs, has found that the information provided is sometimes inexact. In the Netherlands, the NSS visits to DPs serve as a check on the data transmitted to the monitoring system.
- The coverage of the indicators has only been systematically assessed in Germany. The German evaluator found that for the majority of administrative indicators, only one third of responses was available. The Danish evaluator also stresses that data collection is not systematic.
- The relevance of indicators has also been little addressed: the Spanish evaluator simply states that they are globally relevant, whilst the Greek evaluator points out that there is little overlap with the indicators used in the Complementary Programme, which of course makes monitoring and evaluation difficult. However, the fact that some evaluators assess the scope of enquiries possible on the basis of the monitoring system also provides indirect information on its relevance. For example, the German evaluator remarks that he has not been able to use the data provided by MEPHISTO³⁰ and has had to conduct independent surveys. Similarly the Austrian evaluator regrets that only a limited number and type of enquiries are possible.

²⁹ For a synthesis of evaluative comments by Member State, see table in Annex .

³⁰ MEPHISTO is the name of the German monitoring system.

- The consistency of indicators has only been assessed by the evaluator for Luxembourg, who points out that the data gathered at the beginning of the programme and later on is not based on the same indicators. To a certain extent this is also a criticism made by the Greek evaluator, regarding the consistency with the Complementary Programme (see above).
- Timeliness and periodicity are not widely reported on either. The Irish evaluator highlights the timeliness of the information provided by the financial and monitoring system (in the case of the financial system, this has been shown by an audit). The Spanish evaluator regrets that the obligation is to present data only annually, which means that a full picture is only accessible at the end of each year. However improvements are planned : the monitoring system will be Internet based and will allow for a more simplified use and for the online and continuous updating of information.
- Finally, the Austrian evaluator points out that (at least some of) the analyses derived from the Monitoring System should be made available to DPs.

Overall, the analyses carried out in each country are still too partial to allow for a global assessment. However, it seems that there is a need to review the processes for ensuring the reliability of the data, as well as consistency throughout the programme. Little can be said so far on the relevance of the indicators used for an innovation-oriented programme such as EQUAL. This seems to us to be an important evaluative task for the future reports.

4.6.2. Use of the monitoring systems needs to be made more user-friendly

In terms of process (operation of the system), some evaluators have looked at the more or less burdensome character of data entry and at "user-friendliness" (Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, Spain)³¹. They often find that DPs experience the handling of the monitoring system as cumbersome. The survey of DPs carried out by the Danish evaluator shows that, despite some progress, still one third of DPs say it is difficult to manage. DPs complain about entering data manually in the database (Austria), about the complexity of the software (France), about the low user-friendliness of the database screen (Luxembourg). There seems to be much room for improvement in all of the Member States mentioned. The Spanish NSS is thus planning to set up an Internet-based system, which will be easier to handle.

4.6.3. Qualitative monitoring needs to be reinforced in some Member States

Finally, qualitative monitoring is mainly based on annual monitoring visits and «ad hoc » visits on DPs' requests. The National (or Regional) Support Structure visit DPs to improve their knowledge of the actions implemented as well as to provide guidance and assistance (France, The Netherlands, Spain, UK-GB, UK-NI). The Dutch evaluator stresses that every DP is visited twice a year by the NSS. This provides a "check" on the information given by DPs. However, several evaluators mention that this is an aspect which should be reinforced (Italy, Spain, UK-NI).

³¹ For a synthesis of evaluative comments by Member State, see table in ANNEX.

4.7. Self-assessment at DP level

4.7.1. Self-assessment has often not been evaluated by national evaluators

Many evaluators do not evaluate guidance and implementation of self-assessment, simply because no guidance has been provided yet or it was provided after the evaluation report was completed, and no self-assessment activity seems to have been taking place yet. This is the case in Austria, Belgium-FRG, Belgium-NL, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and the Netherlands.

In Ireland, the only self-assessment activity which seems to have taken place is the self-rating of innovation proposed by the national evaluator. In UK-NI not much attention has been given to self-assessment in the guidance to DPs, probably because of the role played by the national evaluator in relation to DPs (as there are only 6). In Sweden, an evaluation of self-assessment is being conducted at the moment, but directly by the Managing Authorities (survey questionnaire sent to all DP evaluators).

Conversely, some evaluators have been requested to produce or to contribute to the production of the self-assessment guide. As far as we are aware, this was the case in France, Portugal and Spain.

Because of the lack, so far, of a proper evaluation of self-assessment activities in most countries, our review of self-assessment is mostly formal, i.e. based on the guidelines provided to DPs, where they exist.

4.7.2. Self-assessment, for whom?

The first question to ask in relation to self assessment is, for whom? The question seems to have been clarified in some Member States, although not in the same direction.

In Belgium-FRG, self-assessment seems to have been promoted as an activity DPs may usefully engage in for themselves³². A similar choice seems to have been done in Finland.

In France, according to the evaluator's survey, DPs seem convinced of the use of self-assessment for themselves (i.e. they do not do it merely because it is an obligation) but are unable to define why they find it useful.

In Greece, the question has been addressed by Managing Authorities by setting up two kinds of self-assessment. One is an on-going evaluation of DP activities and results and transnational cooperation, which is done with the help of the external evaluators, whose task is "coordinated and guided" by the Managing Authority in cooperation with the Steering Group. The external evaluators of DPs submit regular reports (4 for the duration of the project) to the Managing Authority. They are also cooperating with the programme Consultant on dissemination and information with respect to the dissemination of good practices and their reflection on national employment policies. The second self-evaluation is designed by individual DPs according to their own particular needs for their own exclusive use.

However the question "for whom?" is perhaps less clear in the Netherlands, as a Mid Term evaluation is compulsory and at the same time it is meant to provide DPs with the opportunity to adapt and improve any flaws in the projects.

³² As the first question of the guide is about making the decision to engage, or not, in self-assessment

Whatever the choice made, whether self-assessment is to be addressed to the Managing Authority or whether it is only for internal purposes within the DP, we would argue that it has to be made clear from the beginning to DPs. However we would also suggest that there is a clear need for DPs to have their own processes for taking distance from their own projects, as this is key to any innovation process.

4.7.3. Self-assessment, what for?

The second question one can ask with regard to self-assessment is: "Self-assessment, what for?". Existing guides for self-assessment of course offer answers to this question. All available guides are designed as tools allowing for DPs to take some distance from their daily practice and possibly reorient and adjust their processes and actions. There seem to be different emphases however :

- The Portuguese guide seems to largely be oriented towards partnership processes. It was also conceived of as a tool for the preparation of Action 3;
- The guide published in Belgium-FRG offers tools for the improved perception of the environment and its evolution, including with regard to the target groups;
- So far the assessment of results does not seem to have been a major focus of the guides produced, except in the UK-GB. In the guide published by the NSS, self-assessment is defined as *'making use of monitoring data to answer questions about what happened, how it happened, why it happened and whether it achieved its stated aims'*. With regard to evaluation of results, it is advised that DPs try not to restrict their evaluation to hard outcomes such as qualifications achieved by beneficiaries, but also include soft outcomes such as increased self-esteem or business confidence.

Interestingly and crucially, the Spanish evaluator has attempted to identify links between self-assessment and the innovation process. According to the 21 case studies, the adjustments in the projects are often limited to budgetary adjustments or corrections of mistakes in the design of some actions, but without questioning the policies that are being implemented. The evaluators consider that DPs limit themselves to a "simple learning process", and carry on applying the routines they know. The limited innovation in projects has not been so far the result of self-assessment, but has come from the confrontation with problems in the implementation of the projects.

4.7.4. Self-assessment, how?

The third question one can ask with regard to self-assessment is : "Self-assessment, how?". Here we have more information from national evaluation reports, as this is about the internal organisation of partnerships for conducting self assessment. Overall the extent to which all partners understand what self-assessment is about and share its results seems to be at issue.

With regard to this question, the Finnish evaluator has analysed the plans for self-assessment and the modalities of self-assessment quite thoroughly and shows that 32% of DPs resort to an external evaluator. Amongst the rest of DPs, which organise self-evaluation internally, 24% only organise it for specific sub-projects, as part of the research, and in 16% of cases of internal self-evaluation (4 DPs), it is carried out by the Steering Committee of the DP. However there is no analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of each approach.

The French evaluator has found that self-assessment is in fact mostly carried out by resorting to an external evaluator, and that this may cause DPs to find it difficult to understand what it is about and how useful it can be to them.

Similarly the Spanish evaluator has found that self-assessment is usually the remit of a technical unit, together, often, with an external evaluator, and there is not enough participation of the other partners.

The UK-GB evaluator has found two models of organisation of self-assessment (although this is based on a small sample of DPs, as not all have started their self-assessment process yet): (1) a shared evaluation, (2) a peer review model. The shared evaluation involves a joint assessment of impact with one partner assessing the meeting of objectives and targets, while an external organisation examines the experiences of beneficiaries. In the peer review model, partners act as "critical friends" to evaluate each other's activities.

Overall, self-assessment activities would seem to need to be given more prominence in the programme, and the link to the experimentation process supposed to be set up in DPs should be highlighted. In that sense it seems important to insist on the need for all partners to be associated in the self-assessment process, in particular when defining the objectives of self-assessment and the way in which it is going to be carried out; and when discussing results.

4.8. Conclusions

- The involvement of diverse actors in the design and implementation of the programme helps in principle to better co-ordinate policies.
- As we noted in the First Interim report, the management structure of the programme varies according to the state of decentralisation of employment policies and in some cases is reinforcing the sub-national level.
- A different use of Action 1 has been made in different Members States, depending on whether or not there was a second selection at entry in Action 2. The composition of selection committees varies widely between Members States, as well as the selection criteria.
- Improvement could be made in a number of Member States in terms of consolidating DP structures and strategies.
- Budgets estimated for Action 2 seems to be appropriate except in some countries where the programme strategy was revised between Action 1 and Action 2.
- Guidance to DPs during Action 2 was very differently appreciated across Members States.
- Partly as a result of insufficient guidance, but also for other reasons, DPs generally encountered difficulties in the implementation of Action 2, which generated delays for the implementation of Action 2 and 3 at DP level.

- Two strategies can be distinguished regarding the implementation of Action 3 across Members States : in some Member States, Action 3 was launched simultaneous with Action 2, whilst in others, Action 3 was largely separated from Action 2.
- Despite those two strategies, there is a great diversity in the process of preparation and of implementation: different models exist for DP access to Action 3, and for linkages between Action 3 at DP level and the activity of NTGs.
- However, only a few evaluation reports have given an assessment of the implementation of Action 3, due to the fact that the evaluation period often ended before it started.
- Although there is a lack of systematic assessment of national monitoring systems, there seems to be a need for reviewing the relevance, reliability and coverage of indicators. There also seems to be much room for improvement with regard to the user-friendliness of monitoring tools.
- Self-assessment needs to be more tightly related to the experimentation process, and thus to be shared between partners. Clarification still seems to be required on the question of “who is the assessment for?”.

5. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE KEY PRINCIPLES

When implementing the nine thematic fields, DPs have to take into account 5 key principles of EQUAL:

- **Partnership:** to bring together key actors in Development Partnerships (DPs) on a geographical or sectoral level to tackle discrimination and inequality.
- **Empowerment:** to strengthen capacity building by making all relevant actors, including beneficiaries, work together on an equal footing.
- **Innovation:** to explore and test innovative approaches in the formulating, delivering and implementing of employment and training policies.
- **Transnationality:** to render it possible for individual DPs and national authorities to learn from each other and co-operate productively across borders.
- **Mainstreaming:** to develop and test new ways of integrating best practices into employment and social inclusion policies.

In addition to these key principles, further transversal principles are followed by EQUAL. Thus, the thematic approach is central to the Programme and within these thematic fields Member States were to ensure that their proposals principally benefitted 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 was to be fully accessible to all these groups. Within this horizontal approach, the promotion of equality between women and men will be integral to the thematic fields in all four pillars (**horizontal approach to Equal Opportunities**).

In general terms, the EQUAL principles (particularly Empowerment and Innovation as well as the horizontal approach to Equal Opportunities) are understood in quite different ways:

- At the European level,
- At CIP level,
- At programme management level,
- At DP level,
- At the level of national evaluators.

The understanding by DPs has not always been analysed by the national evaluators. When it has been done, it has proved valuable contribution, which could usefully be generalised.

For the evaluation of the effectiveness of the key principles the Evaluators have used a variety of methods and methodological tools. There are important differences between evaluators with regard to both the scope and nature of the methods used. In some cases the empirical basis could be wider (see Chapter 7 and more precisely 7.3.3 Effectiveness of Implementation and 7.4 Evaluation methods used). An evaluation of the effectiveness of the key principles by theme is the exception.

Contrary to what was suggested by the European Commission in its guidelines, evaluators rarely make differences between themes in their assessment of the implementation of the key principles, except in obvious cases such as the fact that the gender mainstreaming approach is taken more seriously in DPs working within the Equal opportunities pillar. Some evaluators argue against a comparison between themes, as objectives, target groups, and policy contexts are very different from one theme to the other, and it would not make much sense to evaluate whether one theme scores better than another one on gender mainstreaming or empowerment. Another argument is that, particularly for some principles, obstacles to implementation are common to all themes, and in part due to the programme design.

However, in our opinion, it makes a lot of sense, precisely, to identify in which thematic contexts the implementation of the EQUAL principles was easiest and most conducive to innovative models of combating discrimination. In addition, a perspective by theme allows for more grounded cross-national comparisons. An evaluation by theme does not prevent a more global analysis of common difficulties in the implementation of the EQUAL principles. There are however, concrete obstacles, to such an approach, in particular in small countries, where the number of DPs in some themes is very small. Notable exceptions to this reluctance to compare themes include in particular the Belgium-FRG, the Spanish and the Swedish reports, and, for the partnership principle, the Portuguese report.

5.1. The effectiveness of the partnership principle

At this stage, the analysis of the effectiveness of the partnership principle is still preliminary. A thorough analysis of the impact of the partnership principle on innovation needs to be made once there are more concrete outcomes.

5.1.1. The partnership principle is being a major innovation in itself in some contexts

In several Member States, according to national evaluations of both the preparatory and conception phase (Action 1) and the implementation phase (Action 2), the partnership formation can in itself be regarded as a major innovation, according to the national evaluators (e.g. Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Sweden and UK-GB). The evaluator for the UK-GB states that *"the clearest site of innovation for the DPs has been in terms of the partnerships themselves. Getting organisations to formally work in combination for the first time has been the most commonly articulated success so far"*. Furthermore, the British evaluator provides some good practices amongst the case study DPs demonstrating that EQUAL has contributed to breaking down the usual institutional barriers. For example, by establishing a sub-regional consensus, one DP operating within the Employability pillar has managed to directly impact upon the beneficiaries' perceptions and readiness to travel, thereby altering the habitual travel-to-work patterns amongst the workforce.

Some sectoral DPs from both the manufacturing and service sectors (the creative and textile industries being referred to) and across various themes have benefited from the input of actors who generally do not tend to be directly involved in the delivery of policy. This has included members of the academic and business support communities.

Other evaluators are not stressing the innovative character of the partnership principle, but nevertheless value positively its implementation. Thus, according to the evaluator for Belgium-FRG, the actors themselves find working with partnerships very positive.

In general, the implementation of the partnership principle is assessed by the national evaluators as enhancing the effectiveness of the programme. However, this general positive assessment of the partnership principle is only rarely based on clear criteria and might often represent a general appreciation.

What evaluators can indeed, and do, assess, at this stage, is the added value for project implementation. In this sense, the evaluators stress that the added value of a “good” partnership might consist:

- In a better coherence of actions within the sector or the area of implementation,
- In a demonstrative effect which can be useful to mobilise other actors later on,
- In increased capacity to face possible difficulties and comply with the foreseen time schedule and budget.

It should be noted that in a few countries, “partnership” is understood as “network” which might widen the partnership approach (Finland, Germany, Italy), as the notion of “network” may include very loose forms of co-operation that need not even be formalised.

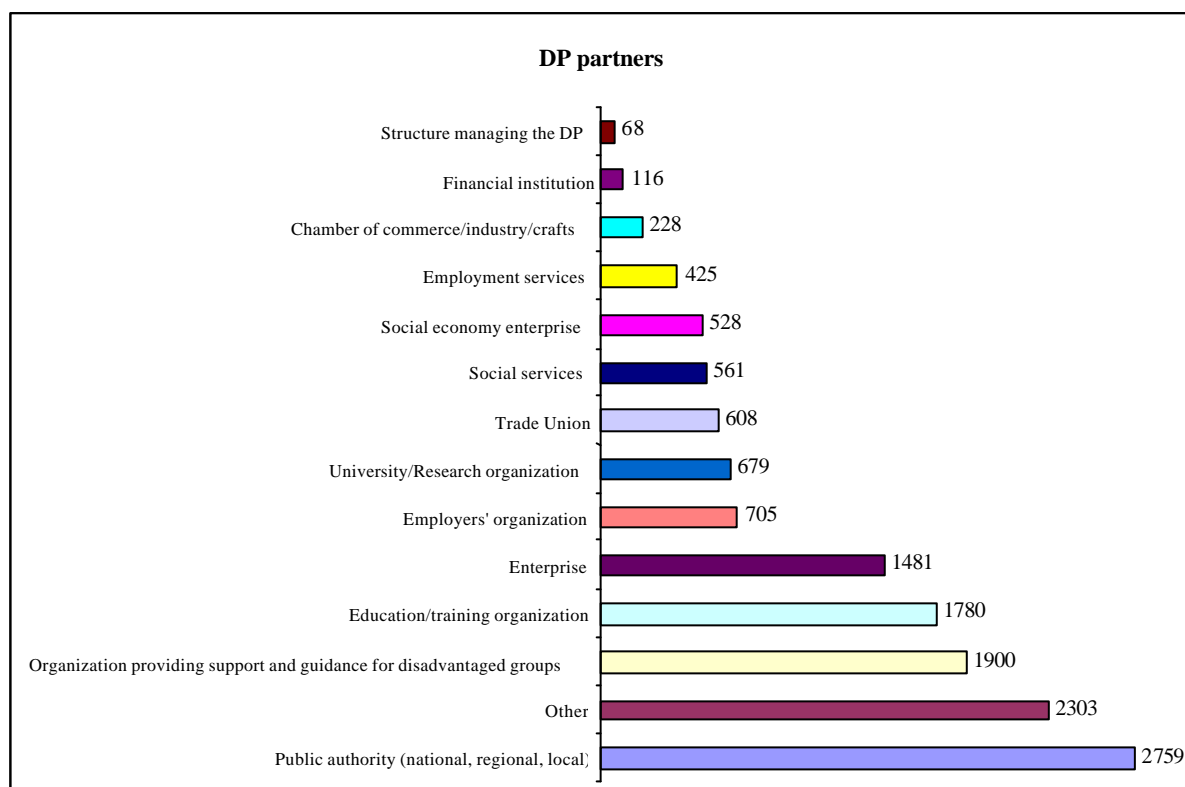
5.1.2. A high share of DPs are built on pre-existing partnerships, but open their doors to new partners. However, the involvement of small grass-roots partners and private enterprises could be stronger

5.1.2.1. A predominance of traditional partners in the composition of DPs

The vast majority of partners are aggregated in the ECDB under the heading “public authority” (see Graph 5.1). The Swedish evaluator points to the fact that most DPs were built by and around some traditional organisation like a municipal, a county council and governmental institutions. One explanation for this was provided in our First Interim report: it appeared from some evaluation reports that the high involvement of public authorities was particularly linked to the need for matched funding. Other explanations included the willingness to reinforce the role of local authorities in the delivery of labour market and social inclusion policies (e.g. Spain) or the specific institutional framework of the Member States. In particular, the “activation drive” of labour market and employment policies means that the authorities in charge of social assistance are increasingly involved in those policies, with the aim of reducing the number of individuals on welfare benefits (Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden).

Thus, the majority of the partners are traditional partners³³, and, as already stated, public authorities in particular, play an important role in DPs. For the majority of the countries local and regional authorities may count among traditional and in a few countries also as new partners (e.g. France). Direct participation may be both viewed as an asset for the programme, especially with regard to mainstreaming purposes, and as a risk, as existing policy agendas may take precedence over innovation or may limit innovation to the design of tools within the frame of existing policies.

Graph 5.1. The different types of DPs partners



Source: ECDB, February 2004

Furthermore, training institutions and large NGOs are found among traditional partners (see the high involvement of training institutions in DPs in Graph).

The involvement of the social partners in the DPs is not very strong, as the Graph shows. Depending on the institutional context social partners are perceived as traditional or non-traditional partners. The involvement of social partners differs widely between Member States with a more important involvement for instance in Austria, Greece and the UK and a poor involvement for instance in France. As has been argued in Chapter 4, our interpretation would be that these variations partly reflect national corporatist cultures and the role of the social partners in the implementation of employment and social inclusion policies at all territorial levels (e.g. Austria) or the interest of trade unions in European Programmes (e.g. the TUC in the UK as mentioned in the UK-GB report). It is interesting to note in the case of Austria, during the first phase of searching for partners, many third sector institutions had difficulties finding the support of social partners, to the point that some DPs could not be established. In those cases in which the social partners agreed to co-operate and DPs could be established, social partners have become important members of the DPs, in particular by

³³ By "traditional partners" we mean partners that were already involved in previous CIP (ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT) mainly national, regional and local authorities, training and vocational institutions, large NGOs, etc. "Non traditional partners" are mainly: SMEs and small NGOs.

providing links to the “establishment”, which is a prerequisite for the sustainability of the innovative measures and projects.

In contrast, in France, a very weak involvement in the DPs was observed, with few exceptions³⁴. However, the French social partners are largely involved in the selection committees, at the national and the regional level, and in mainstreaming (see Chapter 4). The UK-NI evaluator finds that only one DP has a member describing himself as a social partner and therefore recommends that measures be taken to increase the participation of social partners in EQUAL DPs for the second call.³⁵

Most evaluation reports stress the insufficient involvement of private enterprise. Portugal might represent an exception in this respect, as enterprise involvement was mandatory in DP building, but their role in the implementation phase is not clear yet. Only few national evaluators comment on the low involvement of private sector companies. When referring to the private sector, the UK-GB evaluator mentions the difficulty of obtaining match funding from actors in this sector. When the contribution of the private sector comes in the form of time spent by employees/managers who participate in the projects, lead partners felt that it was not always appropriate to ask for salary levels and signatures on match funding certificates to that effect because the information was felt to be sensitive.

We can formulate the hypothesis that the major reason why so few private sector enterprises are involved in EQUAL is that they lack time; to them “time is money” and participation in EQUAL may come in conflict with some of their business activities. It would be interesting to explore which type of private sector employers got involved. We would formulate the hypothesis that mainly those private sector companies might be attracted which assume some social responsibility. In a context of cost cutting, this type of company involvement might be reduced. A further hypothesis is that European Community Programmes might have a “bad reputation” in providing few subsidies for a lot of time spent.

5.1.2.2. Pre-existing partnerships may be more effective especially when they open their doors to new entrants

In a number of Member States, a majority of DPs were built on pre-existing partnerships (e.g. particularly in Belgium-FRG, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and UK-GB).

Although there is no evidence in all Member States, there are indications that those partnerships tend to be more effective in their implementation when built on previous experience but open to integration and close association of new actors.

- In Spain, the evaluator praises the «integrative core» model, especially in the strategy design phase, for making sure that all partners are progressively associated in decision making. The «coalition oriented to participation» model may be slower in the beginning, as it is a new partnership.
- In the case of Portugal case study evidence shows that results are better in DPs working with a network organisation than in symmetrical or pyramidal models of organisation. It would have been interesting if the evaluator had analysed the reasons leading to the different organisational models. Our assumption would

³⁴ The exceptions are Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Provence-Alpes-Côte-d’Azur and Alsace.

³⁵ To give further examples of evidence derived from national evaluation reports, in Spain in most cases, the representative capacity of DPs is considered to be high, as they include representatives of public authorities, social organisations (which represent the interests of beneficiaries), unions and to a lesser extent business organisations and universities. In the case of Germany, three quarter of interviewed DPs stated that DPs were able to integrate actors in accordance with their objectives. But approximately 30% estimate their composition as only partly successful. The insufficient involvement of the economic and social partners (associations, chambers and unions) and enterprises as direct participants were criticised.

be that partnerships with a certain tradition of working together may find it easier to build a network organisation, but there might be further reasons.

- But there is also evidence that EQUAL succeeded in involving new type of partners who are seen as a motor of change, as a facilitator of innovation, as for instance in Austria.
- The Italian evaluator states that the program offers the occasion to increase the networks involving type of actors that were not used to work together (e.g. actors of the social sector and enterprises working together). It is also the occasion to draw more attention from public agencies to the social sector, and to encourage training agencies to interact with other local actors.

5.1.3. Participative approaches within the partnerships are likely to enhance effectiveness

Several national evaluators provide a classification of partnerships with regard to their internal organisation (Portugal, Spain, UK-GB). These can be summarised in two basic models:

- The first one is a *“hierarchical” model*, dominated by the lead partner and where other partners are insufficiently involved at a strategic level. This model is marked by a fragmentation and excessive specialisation of partners. The experimental character of the actions is penalised in this model. In some countries this model prevails (e.g. in Spain). However, this model is not static and DPs starting with a hierarchical structure can evolve towards a more equalitarian framework.
- The second one, which might be called the *“participative” model*, is based on multiple contracts and is hence more devolved and flexible in nature. This model is assessed as being more effective for the delivery of EQUAL principles and DP actions.

The analyses by other evaluators tend to revolve around this distinction:

- The evaluator for Belgium-FRG stresses that the level of involvement of partners varies from being part of the core of the project or playing a “satellite” role.
- The German evaluator classifies 1/3 of the networks are “indirect networks” which means that partnership is arranged around one central partner with a co-ordinating function. Another 1/3 has set up “direct networks” with direct relations among partners. The remaining 1/3 has elements of both. In most cases partnership is co-ordinated by a single institution or by a core group of partners (86 %). In the other cases all partners are equally responsible.

The organisational models might be varying by themes, as the Portuguese evaluator suggests³⁶. According to his case study evidence, networking, as a model giving a more equal weight between partners in decision making, is more frequent in Equal Opportunities (2 out of 4 case studies) and Asylum Seekers (1 out of 1 case). But, it is less frequent in Adaptability (1 out of 8 case studies), Employability (2 out of 8) and Entrepreneurship (2 out of 7). The “Pyramidal model”, referring to the concentration of decision power on a few partners, is more frequent in Adaptability (5 out of 8 case studies) and Entrepreneurship (4 out of 7). The “Symmetrical model”, referring to an organisation form where below the leader institution the partners are all more or less at the same level, is more frequent in

³⁶ The evaluator for Belgium FRG has also provided an analysis of partnership measures by theme.

employability (3 out of 8 cases). Although the empirical basis consists merely in a number of case studies and is thus not representative, the analysis of the differences by theme is an interesting approach and could be taken up by other national evaluators.

5.1.4. Success factors for building partnerships are identified

First indications of the national evaluations suggest that those partnerships prove to be more effective in their implementation when they complete several conditions:

- First, partnerships seem to be more effective when they are rather homogenous and have the capacity to formulate a common objective and a common strategy and to determinate common targets.
- On the other hand, a few national evaluators stress that partnerships built on past experience are efficient (France, Portugal, Sweden), although, as said, at this stage, these are only first assessments.
- But it is important to underline that according to national evaluators, the partnerships seem to be “better” and richer when they both integrate stakeholders and open their doors to new entrants. The hypothesis could be formulated that in these cases a compromise between the effectiveness of DP management, mainstreaming and innovation is found.

In contrast, the following factors can represent a serious threat to partnerships³⁷:

- First, the lack of continuity, with partners leaving and new ones entering, is a difficulty;
- Second, the size of the projects is important. Indeed, too large partnerships may face management difficulties, while for too small partnerships the economies of scale might be too low and the demonstration effect too weak;
- Third, an unbalanced involvement of partners might limit effectiveness;
- Fourth, co-ordination time has sometimes been under-estimated, especially in the case of new partnerships. This tends to magnify internal problems, such as an insufficient focus of partners on common targets, conflicts between partners and competition among partners, as pointed out by the German evaluator.

³⁷ See also Chapter 4.

5.2. The effectiveness of the empowerment principle

5.2.1. Various ways of understanding and evaluating the empowerment principle

In its communication the Commission defines empowerment as:

- Involvement in decision making of those taking part in the implementation of the activities,
- Active participation of those targeted for assistance.

Although national evaluators follow roughly this classification, three different approaches have been taken up in the national evaluation reports, based on the understandings of the national evaluators themselves or based on the understanding of DPs or Managing Authorities:

- Direct involvement of participants and target groups;
- Empowerment as the own capacity to develop an EQUAL Project;
- Empowerment of partners within the DPs

5.2.1.1. Different ways of understanding the direct involvement of participants and target groups.

The degree of empowerment depends on the degree and the ways in which participants are involved. An interesting categorisation has been provided by the British evaluator, who identifies 5 levels of involvement of target groups:

- a. No involvement,
- b. Disadvantaged groups are the recipients of pilot products or services,
- c. Disadvantaged groups are involved in research (surveys, panels) seeking to assess their needs,
- d. Indirect representation of disadvantaged groups on the DP steering group, through intermediaries,
- e. Direct representation of disadvantaged groups on the DP steering group.

From our point of view, empowerment only takes place in the last two cases.

The interpretations by national evaluators of the empowerment of target groups varies a lot:

- The Danish evaluator distinguishes between psychological, political and social empowerment.
- In Finland, the assessment of empowerment of beneficiaries is more loosely referred to the existence of a “client oriented approach” or not.
- Empowerment is analysed as the participation of beneficiaries in decision-making in different project phases (Belgium-FRG, Germany and Ireland; but the Danish evaluator also does it).
- The Greek and Portuguese evaluators equate target group empowerment with target group representation and “active participation”, but the concrete meaning of participation is not explained.
- The Swedish evaluator defines empowerment of the target groups as their capacity to plan and deliver themselves the actions within a framework decided by the partnership.
- An interesting point made by the UK-GB evaluator is that empowerment has also to be looked at in the services and products being delivered (i.e. are they, or not, conducive to empowerment?). For example raising awareness of disadvantaged persons about their rights is indeed empowerment.

5.2.1.2. *Empowerment as the own capacity to develop an EQUAL Project.*

In Spanish, «empowerment» is translated into «capacitation», which was wrongly understood by DPs, as reported by the evaluator, as referring to the own capacity to carry out employment projects and projects against discrimination, rather than the active participation of all partners in the DP. This had important repercussions on the formulation as well as on the implementation of the actions.

5.2.1.3. *The evaluators' grids of analysis of partner empowerment differ.*

- The evaluators' analysis of empowerment of DP partners sometimes relies on an analysis of decision-making processes and their more or less democratic character (Belgium-FRG, Belgium-NL). In the same vein, the French evaluator provides an analysis of the different structures for decision-making and of the different levels of involvement possible (management, implementation etc.).
- Others equate partner empowerment with partner involvement (Greece, Portugal, Sweden). In the case of Portuguese and Greek evaluation reports, empowerment of partners within the DPs understood as active participation. This understanding is leading to a positive assessment by the Portuguese evaluator as the participation of partners in most partnership activities is above 80%. This focus might be related to the perceived value-added of EQUAL in partnership building.
- There is an interesting attempt, by the Italian evaluator, to look at the distribution of partner roles amongst types of partners (administration, enterprises, training organisations, NGOs etc.). However the analysis is based on work programmes, which means that it provides more information as to the DPs' intentions than as to actual implementation.

5.2.2. Different models of involvement, participation, and internal structure of the partnership

In what follows, we analyse the implementation of the empowerment principle in its two dimensions: involvement of beneficiaries and involvement of DP partners.

5.2.2.1. *Contrasted evidence of involvement of beneficiaries*

According to the evaluation reports³⁸, the involvement of beneficiaries differs from one country to another. For instance, in Belgium-FRG, Germany and Portugal, very poor results have been achieved, whereas in Finland, *"DPs where ultimate beneficiaries have not been involved are the exception"*. It appears that for the majority of DPs the involvement of beneficiaries is indeed an objective, but they face a lot of difficulties of implementation.

As said above, the evaluator for the UK-GB considers that empowerment can take place at delivery level or can be an outcome. Indeed the British evaluator finds that for half of the case study DPs, *"the main empowerment activity to date has been through the delivery of pilot products and services"*. This has included, for example, beneficiaries being trained to

³⁸ Some evaluators do not address the question of empowerment of beneficiaries (Belgium-NL, Italy) or only superficially (France).

manage delivery themselves, or raised awareness and knowledge of their rights to employment and training opportunities.

The Swedish evaluator also identified DPs in which the users (groups and individuals) plan the work themselves within the frame set by the DP, and the evaluator considers this to be a best practice.

5.2.2.2. Evidence of involvement of DP partners

As a result of the different approaches to analyse the implementation of the empowerment principle, evaluators emphasise different aspects in their analysis:

- Internal partnership organisation

The internal organisation matters to empowerment.

- The Swedish evaluator observes that some DPs have organised work in different small working groups and that others are resorting to Internet in order to spread information to all of the participants.
- The French evaluator has found that methods to implement empowerment are quite homogeneous across DPs: 80 % of the surveyed DPs have established the same kind of authorities such as steering committees, thematic working groups, and working groups with the partners of the TCA. Circulation of information is organised through an information letter or the exchange of documents.

However, the involvement of partners in DPs varies according to the phase of the project and according to the tasks that has been attributed to them.

It is interesting to mention in the Swedish context, that the evaluator has not identified big differences between the partners on how to look upon their own possibility to influence on the planning, the realisation and the spread of the work done within the DP. However co-operative and social enterprises are consistently more positive regarding the possibilities to participate than governmental organisations and municipals. The reason for this may be that the more traditional groups in society are used to power and therefore feel a bit threatened when new groups knock on the door.

- Participation in decision-making

The Spanish evaluator has particularly assessed decision-making structures and processes. He finds that the weight of the lead partners and their technical structure is overwhelming in decision-making, in the majority of DPs. The evaluator notes a difference in the level of empowerment existing at the time of the constitution of the DP, when various key actors and representatives of the target group are associated, and that existing in the implementation phase. In that phase, hierarchical relationships prevail, where those organisations with a major weight in institutional or financial terms³⁹ are the ones in command. It seems that partners accept the hierarchical model without protest because they think it is inevitable at the beginning. However, the evaluator remarks that such strategies tend to lead to features - corporatism of the «hard core» of the partnership, fragmentation etc.- which are totally opposed to the empowerment principle.

³⁹ Who are often the same and are the lead partner as well

In a similar vein, according to the French evaluator, for more than half of DPs, empowerment has two speeds, as all the partners are not involved in the same way. The leader of the DPs usually has a key role, alone or with a “limited circle” of partners. This limited circle of partners usually comes from previous projects (often ADAPT or EMPLOYMENT projects). In many cases, empowerment has not been really achieved to build the project. Old partnerships existed and new comers were invited to join the partnership in order to make the DPs eligible or to realise some specific tasks of the project. But empowerment has usually a reality concerning the implementation of the different activities of the project and progressively concerning the management of the project.

5.2.4. Empowerment may be regarded as an innovation in itself

It needs to be said that the added-value of empowerment as compared with other approaches is not often directly assessed by the national evaluators. Exceptions include the French report, which looks at the impact of empowerment (of partners) on creativity and problem-solving, and on mainstream approaches to partnership.

Nevertheless, national evaluators provide some assessments of the effectiveness of the empowerment principle. In the cases where participants have been actively involved, empowerment has been assessed by national evaluators as bringing about innovation and is also regarded as innovation in itself (e.g. France, Ireland, Spain, Sweden). It is interesting to note, that evaluators mention that Government, municipalities and other traditional institutional actors seem to be more reluctant to apply the empowerment principle as compared to non-traditional partners.

Furthermore, the empowerment principle may have a demonstrative effect and represent a way to inform and raise awareness concerning the issues addressed in the project and to influence future decisions (as pointed out in the French report).

In some Member States, the evaluator assesses positively the impact of the empowerment principle on the effectiveness of EQUAL. To give an example, for the Austrian evaluator, a major step forward is the integration of the target groups in the development of measures be they education and training measures or work experience measures; one positive result is the understanding that traditional teaching methods and teachers are not accepted by marginalised groups of people. Also the teaching, learning and work environment has to be adapted to the special needs of the participants, in particular, note has to be taken of their aspirations and their negative experience with traditional school, work and values.

No important differences between themes could be identified except for the asylum seekers, as in general no direct involvement of participants is likely to occur under this theme.

5.3. The effectiveness of the innovation principle

The interpretation of the innovation principle varies across Member States and DPs. Moreover, the Commission itself uses different concepts while classifying types of innovation. It seems important to recall the different understanding of the innovation principal at CIP level, which leads to different approaches taken by the National Evaluators.

5.3.1 Varying understandings of innovation at CIP level: Top-down approaches may limit the innovation capacity but give guidance to DPs while bottom-up approaches may permit to open “new ways of thinking” but risk lacking operationality

As showed in our First Interim Report, different types of CIPs can be identified as regards the specification of the concept of innovation and the way the clarification of the concept is dealt with:

- In Germany, the CIP is giving a detailed definition and orientation of different types of innovation (goals-oriented, process-oriented, context-oriented and structure-oriented innovation, and thus mainly geared to the EU level typology).
- The French CIP proposes a variation of the EU level typology: innovation has been classified in the content of the action, the way to formulate a problem and the strategies developed. However, the implementation of the principle of innovation is uncertain. 19 regions debated about the concept of innovation. A specificity in France consists in the fact that innovation is assessed by regional criteria: 30% of the regional authorities and support structures consider that an action is innovative if it does not exist in the specific region.
- The dominant approach in the Nordic countries seems to have been “bottom-up”, i.e. leaving it to DPs to progressively provide a tangible meaning to the term. In Denmark and Finland, the evaluators themselves take an active role in supporting the development of innovation as is consistent with their overall role in the animation of the programme.
- In some cases, the implementation of partnerships is perceived by the Programme designer as a sufficient prerequisite for the implementation of innovation.

The different approaches to innovation taken in the conception phase have repercussions on the way DPs adopt and implement the innovation principle. As can be concluded from the previous section, during the conception phase (CIP design and Action 1) basically two approaches to innovation could be distinguished:

- “Top-down approaches” with a clear definition of innovation and types of innovation. This concept might limit the capacity of DPs to develop real new ideas, but may also prove to be a useful guidance to DPs.
- “Bottom-up approaches”, which are more in favour of various interpretations (e.g. Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and to some degree Greece). There is much insistence on the part of the evaluators in these Member States on the idea of innovation as the creation and development of “new ways of thinking”. This approach is leaving it to DPs to progressively provide a tangible meaning to the term. However, perhaps paradoxically, this lack of orientation at programme level can sometimes be an obstacle to innovation itself, as DPs may then tend to simply address innovation as a vague requirement without specifying what and whom they are innovating for⁴⁰.

A number of Member States have chosen a way in between these two models. Generally, there is an inherent tension in the programme between the importance given to innovation and the requirement of policy relevance and mainstreaming and the Member States have to figure out what the right balance is in order to maximise the effectiveness of the Programme.

⁴⁰ Not only DPs in Nordic countries may face difficulties in interpreting the innovation principle. The evaluator for the UK-GB also gives the impression that innovation is the principle which DPs have most difficulties in interpreting. They frequently view that “innovation is inherent in the structure of the programme itself”. The fact that contrary to ESF there is no “output” measure (in numbers of beneficiaries reached) is seen as positive for experimentation.

5.3.3. A variety of approaches to classify and evaluate innovation

National evaluators generally take up the distinction between goal, process and context innovation, although some are quite critical about it (Finland, Netherlands), in particular because they use it in self-rating exercises by DPs whereas DPs find these concepts very difficult to understand. But, in addition, some evaluators have proposed models to understand and assess innovation, and in doing this, make a substantial contribution to the future of European Community Initiative programmes.

- The evaluator for Belgium-FRG proposes a classification according to 2 dimensions: whether innovation is context-, process- or goal-oriented, on the one hand, and whether innovation takes place at the development, launch, diffusion or networking phases, on the other. Furthermore, they always relate the innovation implemented with the target groups concerned, so that in the end an assessment by target groups will be possible (basis: DP activity reports).
- The evaluator for Denmark proposes an assessment of innovation according to 6 criteria (idea and goal, organisation, method, target groups, technology, and geography) and, as in Belgium-FRG, according to the development phase of the project. However, if one takes the 6 criteria together, all DPs are found, by construction, to be innovative. In our view this is interesting to classify DPs according to these criteria.
- The Finnish evaluator assesses DP innovation at different levels (individual, process and systems).
- The French evaluator seems to distinguish between innovation related to methods and innovations related to the contents of the project. Furthermore they take up the DPs' (and indeed the programme management actors') conception that innovation has to be situated with reference to a given territory.
- A few evaluators make an analysis of the sources of innovation in DPs, and particularly distinguish between experimentation of methods already tested elsewhere, or experimentation of new methods per se (Finland, Spain, Sweden). The Spanish evaluator thus talks about "endogenous" and "exogenous" innovation, whilst the Swedish evaluator talks about "innovation by creation", "by transfer" or by "combination". This has been probed through an exhaustive DP survey in Finland, and through case studies in Spain.
- The evaluator for the Netherlands takes up the categories of goal-, process-, and context-innovations, but adds transferability as a criterion for innovation. In addition, he also uses criteria for the absence of innovation: when a project already exists in any form or has been part of an earlier experiment; when activities are or have already been financed from other sources (even if these sources run dry); when the project is a mere follow-up of any earlier project.
- It should be added that in Greece, the evaluator relies on DPs' own characterisation of innovation activities and products, showing a great variety of interpretations.

Some evaluators have preferred to assess the "innovation potential" of DPs at this stage, which is a reasonable posture in our point of view. However the criteria for assessing this potential are not always explicated. The Portuguese evaluator for example has assessed case study DPs according to the criteria of "operationality, incidence, intensity and domain"⁴¹.

⁴¹ There is no explanation of these criteria.

In Sweden, most DPs considered that they produced innovation by combination. Innovation by creation is least likely to be implemented. Similarly, in Spain, the exogenous innovation model is dominant. These findings might also apply to other Member States.

National evaluation reports stress that innovation is a difficult concept to be adopted and implemented at DP-level. Moreover, it is difficult to set up innovative practices in a short time-frame and that it is even more difficult to assess them as such. Therefore, it is important that the innovation concept is made clear for DPs. There is a reasonably strong (although often unspecified) innovation requirement at CIP level but little evidence is available so far of its implementation at DP level. A general consideration is that the projects are mostly innovative in Action 1 but not necessarily during the implementation phase where DPs tend to implement their work programmes in more traditional ways (e.g. as pointed out in the Danish and Spanish national evaluation reports). National evaluators generally expect to see more evidence for the innovative capacity of the Programme as a result of the dissemination and mainstreaming phase.

5.3.2. A predominance of process oriented innovation

The Commission classifies innovation as:

- Context-oriented innovation,
- Goal-oriented innovation, and
- Process-oriented.

A clear predominance of process oriented innovation is observed by the majority of national evaluators. Secondly ranked is the context oriented innovation. Goal innovation remains modest. Addressing highly marginalised groups can represent an innovative element in itself (e.g. Luxembourg).

The process oriented innovation is found in all thematic fields. It focuses on management and organisational processes, on approaches for the employment of specific groups of beneficiaries (e.g. Greece), the development of new professional profiles (e.g. «employment dynamisor», «employment manager» in Spain) and in the use of new technologies, both for the management of actions and for their diffusion, the training of beneficiaries (e.g. as developing new course materials and new ways of learning in Sweden or the UK-GB; examples are also provided in the case of Greece).

At this stage of the programme implementation, the DPs have been concentrating on finding and establishing constructive forms of co-operation. This may explain the major concentration on process oriented innovation. Whether other types of innovation may be realised can often only be identified at a later stage of the implementation process. In addition, as pointed out by the Swedish evaluator, process oriented innovation might be a springboard to the other forms of innovation, and may make them more effective.

However, in two Member States, the national evaluators stress that innovation is target and context related rather than process related. Thus, in Germany most of the DPs prefer to work on a combination of improvements of regional labour market policy and target group oriented measures for job seekers, and in the UK-GB, DPs are mainly engaged in context innovation.

The thematic variations of the innovation are merely examined by national evaluators and generally no cross- thematic segmentation is noted in the reports.

5.3.4. Innovation mostly takes place within existing structures

The predominance of process oriented innovation suggests innovation takes place mostly within existing structures. Despite the early stage of implementation at the time of the evaluations, a number of national evaluators provide a first appreciation of whether EQUAL is more likely to enhance the efficiency of existing labour market policy within the existing framework or whether it opens up new areas of policy making.

In Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland and the UK-GB, EQUAL innovation is more likely to bring an improvement in the delivery structure and within the existing system rather than to address policy gaps. Often innovation is defined in terms of realising concrete goals for a specific group: e.g. opening educational facilities for prisoners or asylum seekers, creating new opportunities for women to start a small firm, broadening policy initiatives traditionally limited to particular target group. In Portugal the evaluator clearly stresses that innovation is focused on getting more performing partnerships and better empowerment of partners among DPs.

In more ambitious national programmes such as the ones in Ireland, Luxembourg and Sweden, the innovation envisaged in the projects is aimed at addressing policy gaps and/or giving new stimuli to policy development.

Other countries are in an intermediate position and focus on both elements i.e. innovations are meant partly to fill in policy gaps (e.g. in the domain of reconciling family and professional life) and to improve existing structures/delivery mechanisms (e.g. the improvement of existing models for labour market integration) (e.g. in Austria, Belgium-FRG and Greece).

5.3.5. Only first indications on the achievements and the added value of EQUAL can be given at this stage

Given the low execution rate of Action 2 when the national evaluations were carried out, it was difficult in most Member States to identify actual achievements in terms of combating discrimination. Given the time at which the evaluation took place and the nature of DP life-cycles, these effects are not in terms of labour market integration (which is the most common general objective of the DPs), but rather in terms of enhanced «sociability», and improving career guidance and qualification. Evaluators have looked at disperse areas of DP activity in their search for achievements:

5.3.5.1. New co-ordination mechanisms and methods

Results related to the institutional achievements concerning the DP itself are identified in Spain in the fields of co-ordination and management methods (e.g. raising the «relational capital» within the DP, using quality methods and criteria). The evaluator also notes “improvements” in the mechanisms for the delivery of services (multidisciplinary teams, creation of new professional profiles, some of which can be considered as «innovative»).

In the Greek context the joint involvement of social partners, the government and NGOs in producing policies on issues such as racism, xenophobia and inequality is defined as a “substantial innovation”.

However, the extent to which these new mechanisms are really “improvements” will have to be tested on the basis of their capacity to address labour-market discrimination and inequalities.

5.3.5.2. *New groups are being reached*

Innovative ways of learning, such as work-life training and re-skilling, are tested in Ireland and the UK-GB in their capacity to address usually ignored target groups. Different types of flexible work and recruitment of vulnerable populations are developed in the Irish DPs and awareness on vulnerable groups is further encouraged.

5.3.5.3. *First evidence of new models being developed*

The approaches and models developed for combating labour-market inequalities often vary according to the type of discrimination. However, some tools emerge as common in the Member States. Although it is too early to have an overview, two methods have often been pointed out: integrated training and public awareness campaigns targeting the inclusion of vulnerable groups and creating a multiplication effect. In some cases, it seems that these methods may be conducive to new “models” for combating discrimination.

- The evaluator for Belgium-FRG has studied, for example, a training programme coupled with tailored guidance of the target group and an integrated approach coupling training with labour-market integration.
- In Luxembourg a model was developed to tackle the reduction of different forms of multi-dimensional discrimination through an integrated process, from prevention to inclusion, the establishment of structures, the development of training programmes (*form-action*: learning and doing), action plans and support projects, and the involvement of governmental bodies.
- The Austrian, British and Spanish evaluators point to the fact that awareness raising and promotion may be efficient tools for combating discrimination. Awareness raising campaigns are mainly targeted at employers (and particularly SMEs), since employer discrimination and lack of awareness have traditionally been major hurdles for the implementation of equal opportunities. Encouraging “diversity management” is another approach. These are ways to limit the over-emphasis on supply side policies, already pointed out earlier in this report, and address also the demand side (employers). However awareness raising may also consist in boosting the confidence of the target groups (which links into the empowerment principle).

5.3.5.4. *First assessments of the overall added value of EQUAL*

Even though an assessment of the added value of EQUAL is premature, several evaluators venture early assessments.

- The design of the programme seems to be a source of innovation in some Member States

For the French evaluator, the added value of EQUAL lies in the implementation of the partnership, empowerment, mainstreaming and transnationality principles. The evaluators for Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK-GB also consider Development Partnerships as an innovation despite of the fact that impacts on the target groups are not yet demonstrated⁴².

⁴² This is why it is probably more correct to talk about innovation here, than about added value.

On the contrary, some critical judgements are formulated in Austria as far as the innovative content of EQUAL is concerned.

- Some evaluators point to emerging policy impacts

The Irish evaluator identifies impacts on some existing policies. The Danish evaluator considers that EQUAL has is bringing “additionality”, as EQUAL actions are evaluated as complementary to existing programmes. This is all the more true now, as the employment policy system has been harmonised, which makes it more difficult to offer socially excluded groups special tailored programmes.

The evaluator for Luxembourg explains how the partnership principle might bring added value to the national policy process. The involvement of numerous actors in the implementation of EQUAL projects has created a dynamic in terms of development of the sectors concerned at national level, and has favoured a sustainable co-operation between usually competitive actors. The effect could be the transfer of good practice from local/regional to the national and the transnational level, which could contribute to the development of links between social actors at national level.

- Making the difference with other programmes?

So far there are only general expectations that EQUAL will be a major opportunity for developing innovations for increasing inclusion and reducing barriers to inclusion. Existing programmes are more focused on delivery than on testing innovative materials, methods, approaches or processes. However, some evaluators (e.g. for Denmark and UK-GB) remain sceptical concerning the capacity of EQUAL to produce much more policy flexibility than other EU programmes. The Irish evaluator also voices doubts as to the capacity of EQUAL to tackle persistent and deep-rooted labour market inequalities and discrimination.

5.3.5. Institutional obstacles and difficulties to implement the innovation principle

The national evaluation reports point out several obstacles to the implementation of the innovation principle:

- As already said in Chapter 4, the time spent by DPs on management and administrative tasks limits the time available for working on the project itself and particularly on innovative aspects.
- Another difficulty is linked to the need for a stronger focus on team building activities for adequate delivery (as reported in Denmark, France, Netherlands and Portugal).
- A lack of research on labour market disadvantages at DP level might hinder the development of innovation (this has been mentioned in the case of Spain but is likely to be relevant for many more countries).
- In the case of Ireland, it has been mentioned that many of the Irish DPs would be very familiar with labour market disadvantages, but may be less familiar with the different innovations possible.
- As already mentioned, insufficient enterprise involvement in active and innovative measures is seen as another major obstacle and the Spanish evaluator recommends additional effort on awareness campaigns.

5.4. Effectiveness of transnational co-operation

Transnational co-operation is one of the key principles distinguishing EQUAL from the other ESF Programmes. In order to support this principle the Commission produced a Transnationality Guide before Action 1 began. Generally the guide is well received by the national evaluators and the DPs but not much is said about it.

5.4.1. Various models of organisation of TNCs⁴³ have been implemented

The three most frequent models of organisation of TNCs are:

- A model in which the TNC is co-ordinated by a partner, generally the lead partner and where there is not much shared experience of transnationality;
- A model in which there are different co-ordinating partners for different parts of the project;
- A model in which all the partners co-operate equally without any of them having any co-ordinating responsibilities.

5.4.2 A geographical concentration of TNCs

In terms of geographical co-operation patterns, TNCs appear rather concentrated. In many Member States, the DPs have most of their international partners located in no more than three or four countries. Only few DPs have tried to find partners from the Candidate Countries. Geographical proximity and language proximity seem to have been the basis for the choices made.

One should note that co-operation between DPs from Ireland and Northern Ireland has not been very much improved through the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB⁴⁴). In the case of Ireland, the level of knowledge of the SEUPB among DP project managers is rather low.

5.4.3 Difficulties encountered in the setting up of TNCs

In many cases DPs have encountered difficulties in the implementation of transnational co-operation. However they consider that exchanges of experience and approaches should lead to innovative results. Some of them show a lack of motivation due to the extremely burdensome and costly process of identifying transnational partners.

Among the main difficulties, the most frequently mentioned are the linguistic barriers and the differences between Member States in:

- Timing (the selection dates, for example),
- Phasing of Actions,
- Levels of transnational budgets,

⁴³ TNC: Transnational Co-operation

⁴⁴ The SEUPB is supposed to improve cross-border activity and North/South co-operation.

- and the national rules.

This lack of harmonisation, despite the efforts made by the Commission to agree on timing and to harmonise the rules, made planning difficult, delayed entry in Action 2 and has slowed overall progress.

The methods and paths for finding transnational partners have been very diverse: personal contacts, traditional institutional links, support by the National Support Structure (NSS). The support provided by NSSs is generally considered as quite relevant.

Moreover, an internet module called ETCIM⁴⁵ has been established by the Commission in order to make easier for the DPs to engage in a transnational co-operation agreements and to allow all Managing Authorities to view and notify their approval of transnational co-operation agreements.

5.4.4 The implementation stage of the Programme does not allow to evaluate added value, however, first results of transnational activities can be identified

Overall the implementation of the TNC principle is still too recent for permitting the development of a specific added value and a significant contribution to innovation.

The standard classification of transnational activities by the European Commission is based on the following five dimensions:

- (i) Exchange of information and experience
- (ii) Parallel development of innovative approaches
- (iii) Import, export or adoption of new approaches
- (iv) Joint product or system development (division of tasks with a common objective)
- (v) Organised learning (exchange of trainees, trainers, key players)

Some national evaluators have entirely relied on the existing classification of transnational activities existing at the European level. Others have characterised the type of work carried out in transnational partnerships, refining or regrouping the usual categories, which may be a contribution to future evaluations of transnationality.

E.g. the evaluator for Belgium-FRG distinguishes:

- Exchange of information and expertise;
- Working groups;
- Comparative research;
- Transfer of know-how and tools;
- Training in concertation;
- Exchange of trainees;
- Development of joint products;
- Study visits, seminars;
- Internet or intranet site.

⁴⁵ ETCIM: EQUAL Transnational Co-operation Internet Module

The French evaluator distinguishes:

- Mutual discovery of partners;
- Exchange of practices and know how;
- First common actions, including common tools; exchanges of beneficiaries or trainers; and building common training actions or common surveys.

In most Member States, transnational co-operation is still in a first stage of "Exchange of information and experience". The sharing of information most commonly relies on the following methods or tools: workshops with transnational partners, study visits, electronic communication and, to a lesser extent, teleconferences.

But evidence is provided in a number of Member States (e.g. France, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden and the UK-GB) that the expectations of transnational cooperation go further.

- About half of the DPs have a more ambitious plan foreseeing "Parallel development of new methods" and the sharing and pursuing of a common concrete objective;
- About a third of DPs expect a "Joint Development", but the evidence of joint innovative products is rare.

Generally, it is too soon to appreciate or forecast the relevant or possible added value of transnational co-operation. Moreover, it seems that most DPs tend to consider the basic exchange of experience as an innovation in itself, irrespective of whether the content of the experience is innovative or not.

There is only little evidence of innovative activities resulting from transnational co-operation. For example, one should note:

- in the UK-GB one DP is developing, with five transnational partners, common resources for the creation of new social enterprises including a new European certificate in community entrepreneurship;
- in Spain a DP has taken up an assessment system to evaluate gender mainstreaming in its project from a transnational partner specialised in equal opportunities.

5.5. Implementation of the horizontal approach to Equal opportunities

5.5.1. The programme favours a target group approach rather than equal access for all disadvantaged groups

DPs have focused on specific target groups and therefore each thematic field has not been fully accessible to all discriminated groups. Generally, the evaluation reports point to the compartmentalisation of access. Moreover, it must be stressed that the thematic nature 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. In any case, a clear target group orientation is generally assessed as positive and desirable by national evaluators. In the case of Denmark, for instance, the clear focus on specific target groups appears to be a source of added value as compared with other policies and programmes.

Member States differ with regard to the target groups chosen. While in some countries a special focus is set on highly marginalised social groups (e.g. Denmark, Luxembourg) the target groups are larger in other Member States, which in some cases has led to some criticism (e.g. Austria, the Netherlands).

The most common target groups are women and ethnic minorities, and to a lesser extent the disabled. In the case of Luxembourg it has been positively received that new flexible forms of child care are developed, as well as new ways of organising work in order to facilitate reconciliation between 'family' and working life. On the contrary in Sweden and France, the evaluators highlight the limited interest at DP level towards the gender issues which is often seen as women's issue. This approach is due in the first case to the general idea that the gender aspects are tackled by the government authorities and in the second case it may be strongly linked to the French cultural practices.

Furthermore, a variety of more specific disadvantaged groups are also targeted. There are indications that mainly Theme A ((re)integration into the labour market) is more likely to include a wide variety of target groups as compared to other themes. It is striking that despite the problem of youth unemployment and the problem of an ageing society discrimination by age is less tackled than other forms of discrimination. Except for Northern Ireland, there is not much evidence of religious discrimination being tackled.

In practice EQUAL is primarily used to integrate target groups into the labour market. However, inequalities and discrimination are highly complex issues. As already mentioned, a doubt is sometimes formulated regarding the capacity of EQUAL to tackle deep-rooted problems leading to labour market inequalities and discrimination.

5.5.2. A principle often understood in a limited way, as meaning equal opportunities between men and women

«Equal opportunities» are defined by the EQUAL Programme in a broad way and concern all disadvantaged groups rather than just women. However, this approach has been understood in the latter sense in a majority of Member States. A range of national evaluators devote a great deal of attention to the implementation of gender equality and do not investigate in depth how other inequalities are dealt with. This indicates that more awareness raising with regard to inequalities and discrimination is still required.

In general, the horizontal implementation of equal opportunities appears to be weak, especially if other aspects than merely equal opportunities between men and women are looked at. The societal perception and understanding of discrimination might be leading to weaknesses in the institutional and organisational framework for the horizontal implementation of equal opportunities in some Member States – e.g. in the Swedish context "diversity" is used rather than discrimination, and discrimination is in general less regarded as an issue in the Nordic countries. Similarly, in Finland, the notion of "gender neutrality" is sometimes interpreted in a way which hampers any pro-active measure.

It can be observed that the horizontal implementation of equal opportunities is more taken into account at programme management and DP level in countries that have developed a concrete anti-discrimination policy like the UK and Ireland (but this is also the case for specific target groups in other countries, e.g. for the disabled in Austria).

5.5.3 The requirement for equal opportunities for men and women is generally implemented in a formal way

Gender mainstreaming and promoting equal opportunities between men and women is often understood as promoting women rather than as taking a more comprehensive approach to gender.

Most DPs say that they intend to apply the horizontal principle of gender equality, but not much specific evidence has been presented so far that this is really done and is working in practice. In a number of cases, DPs have no clear concept of how to implement this principle.

The implementation of this principle requires a high level of expertise and DPs might lack capacities. Therefore, in some cases the presence of "equal opportunity experts" in the DPs is in itself an innovation (e.g. in Spain). Similarly, in Denmark, the gender aspect is regarded as a background variable in all Danish DPs, which often get advice from sex discrimination experts.

In many cases, it appears that women might be over-represented or are at least equally represented amongst the participants in DP actions. However, this does not necessarily indicate that the gender principle has effectively been implemented as gender inequalities are highly complex and measures are also needed towards men as participants and towards companies.

In a set of Member States, equal opportunities for men and women have been treated in quite a traditional way through actions targeted at women under Pillar 4, while the complexity of the problem remains untouched (e.g. France, Spain, Sweden, but general deficiencies have also been highlighted in the case of Finland, Germany and further countries). Only those DPs with partners with a special interest in gender issues include the gender perspective in a different way than just pointing to women as a (or one of the) target group(s). In pillar I to III women have 'to compete' with members from other 'weak' or disadvantaged groups (as pointed out by the Dutch evaluator).

5.6. Effectiveness of mainstreaming at national and EU level

5.6.1. Networking at national level

The following analysis is based on different sources:

- Documents available on CIRCA from the mainstreaming group about the implementation of Action 3 at the national level;
- National Mid-term evaluation reports;
- Email interviews with the Heads of mission (14 responses out of 17).

5.6.1.1. Networking at the national level is country specific

National Thematic Groups⁴⁶ (NTGs) have been established in almost all countries, and implemented during the mid 2003, except in Greece where NTGs began to work at the end of 2003.

Four Members States, Belgium-FRG, Belgium-NL, Luxembourg and Italy, have been delayed in the setting up of the National Thematic Groups, which were not ready by the end of 2003. In the case of Luxembourg, no NTG is foreseen due to the small number of DPs. For Italy, there is some confusion with regard to the number of operational NTGs. There would be no NTG at the moment according to the evaluation report, whereas other sources (CIRCA documents and the email interview with the Managing Authority) point to the existence of an Observatory on Equal Opportunities, operational since June 2002, and which seems to function as an NTG⁴⁷.

A table describing the structure, objectives and activities of NTGs in the Member States is provided in Annex 2.

The organisation of Networking at the national level basically follows two models:

- In the first model, the pillar or theme structure is kept: thus UK-GB and Portugal chose to relate NTGs to the EQUAL themes (8 NTGs) whereas the Netherlands set up five NTGs, one per pillar and one on «asylum seekers ». In Finland, NTGs are working on a specific issue for each of the 4 pillars;
- In the second model, specific issues and priorities have been defined, giving rise to a large number of small dedicated groups (e.g. 11 in Austria, 14 in Germany), or to a smaller number of groups, i.e. between 2 and 5 (this is the case of France, Spain, Greece, Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Denmark).

A mix of those two models is observed in Sweden where one NTG is focusing on Asylum seekers and the 7 others on specific issues and priorities.

Most NTGs are focusing on the identification of good practices on the one hand and on dissemination and mainstreaming on the other hand.

Managing Authorities set up different strategies concerning the involvement of DPs in NTGs.

On the basis of our current knowledge, we can distinguish three kinds of strategies :

- Participation in NTGs is obligatory (mainly in Germany, Austria);
- A selection of DPs has been carried out (mainly France and Spain);
- Involvement of DPs is on a voluntary basis (Greece, Portugal, Sweden, Finland, Denmark).

⁴⁶ Various denominations are used in the Member States: National Thematic Groups, Thematic Networking Groups, and National Thematic Networks. We have opted for using only one denomination (National Thematic Groups).

⁴⁷ In what follows we have considered that there was one NTG in Italy.

Some National Thematic Groups address EQUAL principles and approaches, but this is concerning only 4 Members States : Portugal on Partnership and Empowerment, Sweden on Partnership, Austria on Gender Mainstreaming, Germany on Empowerment and Gender Mainstreaming. Others address specific national issues, such as rural development in France and Portugal, or the constitution of a dedicated NTG in the case of the *Départements d'Outre Mer* in France.

The organisation of NTGs varies in the following aspects :

- In some countries (Finland, Portugal, Greece), the co-ordination has been left to some DPs nominated for this role. One evaluator remarks that DP resources may become over-stretched in such a bottom-up approach;
- In other countries (France, Portugal, Greece, Spain), the model of the European Thematic Group has been adopted to some extent and expert support has been organised, which, in the case of Portugal and Greece, may alleviate the burden of co-ordination for the nominated DPs.
- Finally, as far as the involvement of non-EQUAL actors is concerned, Spain, UK-GB, the Netherlands, Portugal, Ireland and Northern Ireland have involved relevant national policy makers, social partners, NGOs etc. Some of them were nominated as NTG co-ordinators. In other countries, involvement of non-Equal actors will take place later.

Some Member States (Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark) have organised Mainstreaming Conferences, mixing NTGs together. In Germany, an internet platform was set up as a support to networking.

Only one accession country, the Czech Republic, has set up National Thematic Groups: 6 NTGs had been set up at mid 2003 (3 in the Employability Pillar, 1 in the Entrepreneurship Pillar, 1 in the Adaptability Pillar and 1 in the Equal Opportunities Pillar). Their composition is quite similar to that of NTGs in Members States. However they will also have an active role in the preparation of the second round, a model which, amongst the Member States, has only been found in UK-GB.

5.6.1.2. Networking between Members States is quite rare

Networking between Members States, on their own initiative, is only taking place:

- Between Southern Ireland and Northern Ireland, as a North-South working group was formed in 2002 with representatives of Managing Authorities, National Support Structures and Equality bodies from both parts. Two joints events involving all the DPs on the island of Ireland were held (one in May 2002 and a second one in November 2003).
- Between Ireland, Northern Ireland and Great Britain, but only at the programme management level, through bi-monthly meetings between National Support Structures to exchange information (particularly on technical and administrative matters). There have been not joint activities so far between NTGs.

5.6.1.3. Links between NTGs and ETGs need to be clarified

Different types of links between National Thematic Groups (NTGs) and European Thematic Groups (ETGs) have been developed across Members States but, in most of cases, links need to be clarified and strengthened. As most evaluation reports did not make any assessment on that question, we conducted our own analysis on the basis of e-mail interviews with Managing Authorities.

In the table below, we review the link between NTGs and ETGs from a double point of view:

- From the factual point of view, by reviewing the participation of NTG co-ordinators and members (DPs or others) in ETGs;
- From the point of view of Managing Authorities (Heads of mission).

Table 5. 1. Analysis of the links between NTGs and ETGs and assessment

Members States	Selection of NTG members for ETGs	Assessment by Managing Authorities
Austria	All NTGs selected at least one DP to participate to the corresponding ETG	The organisation put in place can ensure co-ordination
Belgium-NL	NTGs did not participate in the selection. It was carried out by the MA and the NSS.	N/A
Denmark	NTGs were not consulted in the selection of DPs for ETGs, which was carried out by the MA and the NSS.	The NTGs have so far not been prominent in the Danish context due to the fact that DPs had a huge workload. The link is actually missing and the role of MA/NSS has to be more proactive in creating the link.
Finland	NTG co-ordinators (DPs) have to take part in the corresponding ETGs.	The interaction and exchange of experiences between ETGs and NTGs works well thanks to this mode of organisation.
France	NTGs did not take part in the selection and the MA and NSS selected DPs which were not involved in NTGs.	N/A
Germany	All the DPs nominated by the MA and NSS for the ETGs also take an active role in NTGs on the same or similar thematic issue.	N/A
Greece	According to the "Guide to implementation Action 3", NTGs were supposed to take part in the designation of DPs for ETGs. In fact, DPs were nominated by the Managing Authority. NTGs did not participate in the selection because they have only started working on 1 st October 2003.	The connection between Greek NTGs and ETGs is guaranteed by the fact that members of the Managing Authority commissioned to supervise and coordinate a specific NTG have been also nominated to act as the contact person for the corresponding ETG.

Members States	Selection of NTG members for ETGs	Assessment by Managing Authorities
Italy	The only NTG actually set up, an Observatory on Equal Opportunities, participated in the selection of DPs in ETG 4	N/A
Ireland	7 of the 21 DPs involved in ETGs are also involved in NTGs	DPs taking part in the ETGs are required to represent their NTG rather than just themselves ⁴⁸ .
Northern Ireland	5 of the 6 DPs are involved in ETG1 and one in ETG 4. They are also involved in the NTG.	As all DPs take part at both levels, the co-ordination is ensured.
Netherlands	The NTG chair or secretary participates in the corresponding ETG.	The organisation put in place can ensure a certain level of co-ordination.
Portugal	Facilitators (external to EQUAL) were nominated by each NTG to participate in Liaison and Working Groups of ETGs	The connection between NTGs and ETGs is quite good, thanks to the organisation set up.
Spain	17 DPs have been selected in the NTGs to participate in the corresponding working groups on the basis of their work on the priorities tackled in the ETGs. These DPs are responsible for feeding back to their NTG the activity of the ETG, and so is the NSS staff.	N/A
Sweden	The same person who is in charge of the secretariat of the NTG on Asylum seekers (the only on-going NTG), also chairs the Asylum seekers ETG.	For ETG 5, the connection is very good.
GB-UK	NTGs were not involved in the selection, which was carried out by the MA and the NSS.	The lack of sufficient notice for ETG meeting dates has made it difficult so far to plan DP participation so that they may represent their theme.

Source : National mid-term evaluation reports, e-mail survey with Managing Authorities.

Some Members States have set up a mode of organisation which ensures a strong link between ETG and NTG work. Furthermore, in some countries, the link is easier to establish due to the fact that NTGs are organised according to a similar thematic and organisational structure as at the European level.

In some countries like Ireland, Spain, UK-NI and UK-GB, links between NTGs and ETG are made directly by DPs, because they participate in both NTGs and ETGs. It has been noted by some MA or NSS that, in European event, DPs tend to represent themselves rather than the wider community of DPs in their theme. This is to some extent avoided in the cases of Austria, Finland, Ireland and Sweden, where the DPs sent to the ETGs have some form of mandate to talk about DPs in their NTG.

In most countries, from the point of view of Managing Authorities, the links between NTGs and ETGs must be reinforced in various ways:

- By increasing the information flow between the national and the European level : for example, by developing links between websites, reports of ETG results in national publications, discussion of ETG topics in NTGs. Furthermore, there should be a "bi-directional" exchange of information on their respective activities.

⁴⁸ Interview with the National Support Structure representative. Brussels. 21.10.2003.

- By clarifying what the ETGs expect from NTGs, asking for special contributions from NTGs, for example, as most Managing Authorities think the work done within NTGs should have more visibility at the European level.
- By systematically nominating NTG representatives to participate in the WG meetings of ETGs, and by maintaining consistency in NTG representation to the ETGs. Conversely, ETG members should nominate representatives to participate in activities organised by NTGs.
- By ensuring a tighter co-ordination between the work plans of NTGs and the work plans of ETGs.

5.6.2. Networking at European level

The analysis is based the following sources:

- Documents available on CIRCA from the ETGs;
- Directs interviews to EQUAL Team and participants at Brussels Meeting 8-10 October 2003;
- Email interviews with the Heads of mission (14 responses out of 17), with non-EQUAL stakeholders (21 answers⁴⁹), and the thematic experts of each ETG.

According to the first EQUAL Communication to Members States, three kinds of actions have to be implemented at the European level : thematic reviews, a data base of good practice and the use of existing and new Discussion Fora. By the end of 2003, Networking at the European level was mainly happening in the horizontal and thematic groups (ETGs) set up within EQUAL. The good practice data base was not ready but the process was on going. However, there has been almost no discussion of EQUAL in the discussion fora identified in the Communication.

5.6.2.1. Two majors forms of European networking : horizontal and thematic networking

Five horizontal groups have been set up, four of them to address EQUAL principles/approaches: Mainstreaming, Partnership, Transnationality and Gender Mainstreaming. Except the mainstreaming group, which includes all Members States, these groups involve only some Member States, and more specifically those without a lead role in an ETG⁵⁰. The “cross-pillar” group, composed of the EQUAL team and thematic experts, is concerned specifically with the co-ordination and implementation of the ETGs. The role of these five groups is mainly operational.

⁴⁹ By non-EQUAL stakeholders, we mean those actors involved in the ETGs but not involved in DPs, TCAs, Managing Authorities, NSSs or EQUAL team. They include, for example, European Commission officials, European and National social partners, European NGOs or social networks etc.

⁵⁰ Such as Portugal in the Partnership group or Austria in the Transnationality group, or, more recently, Finland and Hungary in the new “Gender EQUALity” group.

Table 5. 2. Description of the “horizontal groups” at European level

Group	Function	Composition	Production
Cross pillar Meeting	Harmonise the work around ETG	DG Empl-unit B4 All Thematic Experts (IFAPLAN, GHK, AEIDL)	Screening fiche for their visits to DPs Analysis of TCAs
Mainstreaming group	Co-ordinate the ETGs and ensure coherence	DG Empl-unit B4 Member States	Promising practices checklist Synthesis of all national thematic networks
Partnership group	Provide guidance for partnerships	DG Empl-unit B4 Portugal, Sweden, France + other MS (4) + expert.	In parallel, Working Group to be created of 8 DPs + expert In preparation: a brochure for the second call + research on partnership methodologies
Transnationality horizontal group	Provide guidance for implementation of Transnationality	DG Empl-unit B4 Spain, Austria, Germany, Italy + other MS + expert TCA's and national experts also invited	Transnationality guide (a second version is in preparation)
Gender Equality (new group)	N/A	DG Empl-unit B4 Finland, Hungary + others	Aim to produce a guide for DP

The five ETGs, one by pillar (employability: “Building on diversity”, entrepreneurship: “Entrepreneurship for all”, adaptability and equal opportunities⁵¹) and one for Asylum Seekers, were launched at the Barcelona conference in May 2002. The main objectives of the ETGs are to identify promising and good practice, to capitalise on national and European exchange of experience, to identify and disseminate clear messages to policy makers.

Each ETG includes:

- A Steering Group which has to define and co-ordinate the work of the ETG.;
- A Liaison Group which has to ensure co-ordination between ETGs and NTGs and validate the work of the ETGs; and
- Between 1 and 5 Working Groups, depending on the ETG, which have to produce outputs for mainstreaming and dissemination.

5.6.2.2. ETGs: a slow start, production in progress

European thematic Groups started in May 2002 with the Barcelona conference, one year after the beginning of the programme, at the end of action 1. The first workshops of the production oriented Working Groups generally took place one year later, i.e. in June 2003 (for some of them, in October 2003).

⁵¹ There may be overlaps between this ETG and the new horizontal group on Gender Equality.

One of the main explanations for this late start is that national thematic groups were not really working before. This is what led the Liaison Group of ETG 2 (Entrepreneurship for All) to think that perhaps national authorities/NSSs found it difficult to organise their NTGs and, hence, to produce a guide explaining “how to settle a thematic network”⁵². The fact that an ETG had to produce this guide, which is relevant to other ETGs, reveals co-ordination gaps⁵³. Nevertheless, one of the major benefits of the ETGs has certainly been the stimulation effect it has had on the implementation of national thematic networks. Most of Managing Authorities were very interested to see how ETGs are organised and operate.

Generally speaking, the architecture of European networking⁵⁴ was only stabilised very recently, i.e. in October 2003.

In total, it involves nearly 400 participants. According to EQUAL actors, this process constitutes a real platform for empowerment, and this also shows in the methods used by the ETGs⁵⁵. Furthermore, for the participating DPs, “the message has been that the work in the ETGs is interesting in stimulating discussing and sharing ideas with others dedicated people. ETG offers an opportunity to compare and share problems and good practices and innovative experiences. Additionally, the meetings have also opened possibility for new transnational cooperation⁵⁶”. In fact, ETGs have a real role as facilitators of European learning. For most of the Managing Authorities, the clearest value added of ETGs is mainstreaming, which is very important, in their point of view, to improve labour market inclusion of disadvantaged people, and to strengthen co-operation within Europe.

On the other hand, the number of groups operating is very high and some participants, especially those who are members of various groups (Mainstreaming Group, Steering Group, Liaison Groups, Working Groups) think that “there are too many groups and some rationalisation will be required”⁵⁷.

The Commission leaves a lot of autonomy to the ETGs, expecting an active role from lead Member States. Nevertheless, the financial resources for ETG implementation have to abide by a general framework :

- Each ETG has an independent expert in charge of animating and monitoring the work of Steering, Liaison, and Working Groups (i.e. technical assistance) and of carrying out DP and TCA analyses. The technical assistance contract was signed for the whole period covered by EQUAL (at around 200 000 € per year). Experts were chosen on the basis of a call for tender and have to submit service orders regularly. Expected tasks have been defined by Steering Groups and generally include drafting a number of reports on the basis of DP and TCA analyses, conducting case studies, preparing and animating workshops, producing publications, liaising with DPs, European stakeholders and the Commission.

⁵² Available on the EQUAL Web Site

⁵³ From our point of view, writing up such a guide should have been the responsibility of the Mainstreaming Group (but the latter stopped working between November 2002 and September 2003).

⁵⁴ This architecture now consists of 5 Steering Groups + 5 Liaison Groups + 14 Working Groups + 9 subgroups (concerning 3 Working Groups) + 5 Horizontal Groups.

⁵⁵ Such as « open space », « metaplan », homework etc.

⁵⁶ As said by an interviewed DP representative.

⁵⁷ As expressed by one of the Managing Authorities (email interview).

- The EC covers the expenditure of 2 meetings per year for Working Groups, the logistic part of which (i.e. meetings, travel arrangements) is subcontracted to CIT (1.7 millions €), a specialised organisation. For events and seminars organised by the Working Groups, the expenditure can be shared between the EC and the Member State where the event is taking place.

According to some Managing Authorities, the ambitions of the Commission regarding ETGs, i.e. the production of outputs and key messages for mainstreaming of EQUAL innovations in European policies, are very high. As expressed by one of the Managing Authorities, “networking at European level is a big challenge, i.e working with a huge amount of topics and persons”. But most Members States do not have all the resources yet to tackle the work implied by the ETGs. It seems to be particularly difficult for smaller countries.

On this issue, some of them consider that the effectiveness of ETGs could be improved by increasing resources or by introducing individual budgets for each ETG, which would then be more geared to their specific needs. The limitation at two meetings a year by Working Group is considered as an important constraint for most participants with regard to the objectives and expectations. However this criticism could be in contradiction with the fact that some Managing Authorities do not have enough resources to be active participants.

Nevertheless, the implementation of Action 3 can already offer some more resources for the selected DPs participants except in the case when all of Action 3 resources are devoted to national networking (Denmark).

5.6.2.3. Whilst the ETGs have a common structure they work according to different methods⁵⁸

Steering and Liaison Groups operate in a different way depending on the frequency of their meetings, the type of actors involved and the processes put in place.

a. ETG on employability : « Building on Diversity »

ETG 1 is maybe the most important network in terms of number of participants involved.

⁵⁸ Largely elaborated by the Steering Group.

Table 5. 3. ETG 1 Employability

Type of Groups Type of Members Ø	Steering Group	Liaison Group	Working Groups
Member States	UK and Denmark are Lead Member States	All the MS are represented	5 Working Groups emerged from the 1 st workshop in June 03 : WG 1 : involvement of employers WG 2 : role of trade unions WG 3 : people with disabilities WG 4 : strategies for networking WG 5 :ethnic minorities and migrants Composed of 20 to 30 persons from Liaison Group and DPs from different Members States and the Czech Republic. Each group has a chairman (designated on the basis of volunteering) Participation of DPs, IFAPLAN, members of Steering Group and Liaison Group Some social partners at national or European level and some European NGOs have participated in the initial workshop in June, less in October.
EU Commission	DG Empl-Unit B4	DG Empl-Unit B4	
Other European Organisations	NO	NO	
Technical Support	IFAPLAN Europs	IFAPLAN Europs	
Other National organisations	NO	NO	
DPs	NO	NO	
Involvement of candidate countries	NO	Czech republic	
Others	NO	In some case, Chairmen of Working Groups	
Number of meeting and participants until end 2003	3, starting in March 03	4, starting in January 2003 - 20 participants	2 Working Groups (June 03, October 03) with around 90 participants in June, and more than 100 in October

The purpose of the Working Groups is, according to the expert, “to identify and give visibility to innovative outcomes from EQUAL that have the potential to make a positive impact on European policies and practices (recommendations, tools)”. They should be based on the “experience of EQUAL DPs, TCAs, and NTGs or of other enterprises and organisations that are building on Diversity”.

The Steering Group has defined, with the experts, a very “participative” method as showed by the initial workshop in Birmingham which was animated according to the open space method. The 5 Working Groups emerged from this initial workshop with a voluntary start-up team for each, involving the thematic expert. The final composition of Working Groups was based on expressions of interest by each participant but also according to recommendations by the ETG1 Liaison Group, the NTGs, and the NSSs. Whereas expectations had been that there would be about 20 participants by Working Group, the first meetings (October 2003) of the Working Groups were very successful with nearly 30 participants by group.

In the run-up to October meetings, each start-up team was responsible for producing a draft mission statement; a work programme for analysing, developing and presenting promising outcomes of EQUAL; and a first outline of priority areas for recommendations that could be presented to policy makers and other key actors. It was also responsible to make propositions to the group on the method. In fact, the method adopted by each group was quite similar in the Brussels meetings, with debates on the intended outcomes of the Working Group, and an important moderating role for the experts in spite of the designation of chairs.

However, the intended outputs and schedules are quite different from one group to the other:

- WG1 and WG2 outlined their contribution to the Commission communication on EQUAL during the October meeting, and planned a presentation of promising practices from DPs and TPs (in Spring 2004), policy recommendations for Members States (Autumn 2004), and proposals/recommendations for supporting action at European level (end 2004).
- WG3 planned a contribution to the communication on EQUAL and a contribution to the closing conference of the European Year for Disabled Persons. Longer term results will emerge from 3 subgroups (comprehensive services for employers, improved interagency co-operation in services and support, empowerment).
- WG4 planned a practical tool kit on the techniques and benefits of networking based on the experience of EQUAL DPs, TPs, and NTGs.
- WG5 planned a report on EQUAL's contribution to the full implementation of the two Commission Directives on discrimination, an action to promote the contribution of "new Europeans" through the use of the press and media, measures to ensure the active participation of ethnic minority and migrant groupings in the related activities, and, finally, possible recommendations on sensitising or training professional journalists and students of journalism and promoting multi-cultural programming.

Most of interviewed participants⁵⁹ consider that the method adopted is very interesting for mobilisation, group dynamic, fostering personal commitment and "democratic" (participative) approaches. They praise the important inputs by the experts and other members, the wide representation, the relevance of WG themes and the very good organisation of meetings. However, there is criticism regarding the number of participants and the number of issues to be addressed.

Regarding the objective and the intended outputs of each Working Group, some overlaps with other ETGs could emerge, especially with ETG 2 and ETG 5.

b. ETG on Entrepreneurship : « Entrepreneurship for all »

The specificity of ETG 2 is to have involved an important number of non-EQUAL stakeholders from quite early on, even in the Steering Group, of which DG Enterprise is a member. Furthermore, this ETG organised visibility events very early on, as the first one took place in June 2003 when the process had just started.

⁵⁹ Interviews with Managing Authorities, non EQUAL stakeholders.

Table 5. 4. ETG 2 Entrepreneurship

Type of Groups Type of Members Ø	Steering Group	Liaison Group	Working Groups
Member States	Belgium NL and Germany are lead Member States	All the MS except Austria are represented	<p>One event (June 03) on “making Entrepreneurship accessible for all” with more than 100 participants from : DP’s, candidate countries, policy actors, banks, social services, national and EU experts, NGOs</p> <p>3 Working Groups emerged from this event dedicated to business creation (business services, culture, finance) : the first workshops of the WGs took place in October 03</p> <p>3 other Working Groups dedicated to social economy were also set up : the first workshops of the 3 WGs (partnership, skills, support structures) took place in October 03.</p> <p>Participation of DPs, AEIDL, members of Steering Group and Liaison Group and other stakeholders.</p>
EU Commission	DG Empl-Unit B4 DG Enterprise	DG Empl-Unit B4 DG empl- EES DG Enterprise	
Other European Organisations	NO	NO	
Technical Support	AEIDL	AEIDL	
Other National organisations	NO	NO	
DPs	NO	NO	
Involvement of candidate countries	NO	Czech republic	
Others	NO	New Economics Foundation	<p>Around 100 participants in the different events, WS organised by the ETG</p>
Number of meeting and participants until end 2003	11, starting in Sept 02 9 to 12 participants	3 starting in January 03 25 to 35 participants	

The ETG2 defines its mission as double : firstly, to remove the key barriers or obstacles that prevent disadvantaged groups and deprived areas from being able to set up viable businesses and secondly, to promote the social economy as a tool for market integration and for developing new systems for meeting social needs.

The method adopted by this ETG is very process-oriented (like ETG1) and the ETG is functioning like an extended network of stakeholders, as a communication platform. Activities are balanced between analyses by experts and the organisation of thematic events with workshops. The high number of Steering Group meetings can be explained by the preparation of events. It was agreed that the first two events⁶⁰ would take the form of an agora, an open place for exchanging information on emerging issues on the political agenda, and on relevant action, with the purpose to allow actors to present their point of view and find out about each other’s activities and priorities. The next following events were supposed to be more production or output oriented, taking the form of peer reviews. All events have to lead to the production of a practical manual laying down the state of the art, the obstacles and opportunities for vertical and horizontal mainstreaming, accessible on the web site together with other materials that will contribute to resource centre or library.

Whilst the method adopted by the Steering Group was found satisfactory, in terms of the actors involved and the mobilisation and motivation of participants, which showed in the quality of exchanges, it is time consuming and requires considerable organisational rigour. However, dedicating so much attention to processes may leave little human resources for the

⁶⁰ The first one took place in London in June 2003 on integrated business support for disadvantaged groups, the main output was the identification of the 3 main focuses which gave rise to the October Working Groups.

actual production of outputs. In addition, the process is iterative, which makes unclear what the next step will be. According to some participants⁶¹, the involvement of experts specialised in the issues addressed in Working Groups would be necessary, as thematic experts are more engaged in facilitating the activity of the groups, a role which is very much appreciated.

c. ETG on Adaptability : « EQUAL @ Work »

The main specificity of this ETG is, like ETG 4, to have set up two Working Groups from the beginning (whereas ETG1 and ETG 2 set them up as a result of the process): one on lifelong learning, led by Ireland and the other one on ageing, led by France. Those two groups function as if they were two ETGs. As far as we can judge, each theme is dealt with independently (as showed in the documents produced and accessible on Circa) even if the Steering Group operates for those two themes, and even if two transversal priorities have been identified (ICT literacy/access and development, accreditation of qualifications).

Like ETG1 and ETG2, ETG 3 made the choice to open very early to non-EQUAL actors, even if no visibility events will take place before “there is something to show”.

The work plan for 2003 included structural activities (adapting the good practice screening fiche, thematic background papers for each Working Group, communication strategies, evaluation and employer/employee involvement) and thematic activities (ETG launch event organised in France, case studies, national thematic visits postponed to 2004, and consultation seminars). The method adopted by the Steering Group is mixing seminars, workshops and preparation work by experts.

⁶¹ Mainly non-EQUAL Stakeholders

Table 5.5. ETG 3 Adaptability

Type of Groups Type of Members Ø	Steering Group	Liaison Group	Working Groups
Member States	France and Ireland are Lead Member States	All MS except Luxembourg are represented	2 Working Groups were set up from the beginning : lifelong learning (co-ordinated by IRE) ageing (co-ordinated by FR)
EU Commission	DG Empl-Unit B4	DG Empl-Unit B4 Others representatives of DG Empl Unit	The first workshop took place in June 03 for LLL WG where 3 sub-groups emerged : putting the learner at the centre supporting employers and employees validation of learning
Other European Organisations	NO	UEAPME	The second workshop of LLL took place in October 03 by subgroup
Technical Support	GHK	GHK	The first workshop of "ageing" took place in in October 03, leading to two sub-groups : the reactive approach and the preventive approach
Other National organisations	NO	NO	Participation of DPs, GHK, members of Steering Group and Liaison Group; Participation of social partners (like Irish Congress of Trade Unions), other units of DG Empl (unit E A/2) and other institutions
DPs	NO	NO	
Involvement of candidate countries	NO	Czech Republic	
Others	NO	Co-ordinator of the corresponding thematic group for Portugal	
Number of meeting and participants until end 2003	6, starting in September 02 - 15 participants	2, starting in March 03 20 to 30 participants	June WGs : 30 participants October WGs : 60 participants

In the life long learning theme, the first workshop identified three main issues, corresponding to three sub groups : the first one is concentrating on the key question of motivation of the learner and focuses on new methods of promoting learning, the second one, more strategic, is focused on SMEs and the third one is more concretely concerned with tools for validation. In the ageing theme, the first workshop identified two main approaches, reactive and preventive, to the challenges presented by age management. The intended outputs are, for both of the Working Groups, two promising practices documents, media toolkits and contributions to conferences in 2004 (one in Ireland and one in France).

In the point of view of some Managing Authorities, the role of the Liaison Groups was not clear from the beginning, because priorities seem to have been decided beforehand and therefore only details could be discussed. Furthermore, there were only a few meetings of the Liaison Group in 2003. LG members express the need for closer co-ordination and exchange. In terms of organisation, some improvements could be made to strengthen the preparatory phase (circulation of draft documents and of a detailed agenda, planning longer-term work programmes in order to produce more effective contributions to the ETG). This ETG seems to have been delayed in its work, as shows in the document on lessons learnt in 2003, a highly reflexive document of self-evaluation.

d. ETG on Equal Opportunities

The Working Groups of ETG 4 have the peculiarity of involving only DPs whereas the other ETG Working Groups made a different choice and involved other actors from the beginning, such as non-EQUAL stakeholders. But this will change when the final output is ready (the living document, see below) and key actors will be invited to visibility events. Some participants find this group closure a good working method, whereas others consider it a handicap.

Table 5.6. ETG 4 Equal Opportunities

Type of Groups Y	Steering Group	Liaison Group	Working Groups
Type of Members Ø			
Member States	Italy and Spain are lead Member States France joined the Steering Group later	All MS are represented	2 Working Groups emerged at the beginning conciliation professional/family life (co-ordinated by Italy) desegregation (co-ordinated by Spain)
EU Commission	DG Empl-Unit B4	DG Empl-Unit B4	the first workshop took place in May 03 with participation of DPs, IFAPLAN The second workshop took place in October 03 with participation of DPs, IFAPLAN The 2 WGs were organised on the same way : plenary session (to discuss transversal issues) and workshop by Working Group (to discuss specific issues)
Other European Organisations	NO	NO	
Technical Support	IFAPLAN Europs	IFAPLAN Europs	
Other National organisations	NO	NO	
DPs	NO	NO	
Involvement of candidate countries	NO	Czech Republic	June WGs : 50 participants October WGs : 40 participants
Others	NO	NO	
Number of meeting and participants until end 2003	4, starting in September 02 (15 participants)	2, starting in March 03 20 to 30 participants	

The purpose of the Working Groups of ETG 4, as reported by the thematic expert, is to “create and promote a European Model of Comprehensive Approaches to Equal Opportunities, in relation to the EQUAL Themes of Reconciliation and Desegregation”.

The Steering Group has endorsed a methodological approach to its work, which is both process and output oriented: a “living document”, a text that grows and develops over time, thanks to the contributions of committed working groups and their continuing efforts to improve its quality during, and also before and after, their meetings (with homework). The methodology, a bottom up approach, of the “living document” ensures contributions from DPs which are very detailed and focused on the different sub-themes and aspects, as well as a collective ownership of the final product⁶².

⁶² See also Chapter 6.

Out of the 32 DPs selected to cover the 2003 sub-themes, 31 participated in both meetings, so 90% of the DP representatives present in Rome also attended the Brussels meeting. Continuity was thus ensured, as was, according to the thematic expert, a real team spirit and positive impact on the commitment to and quality of the “homework” participants are required to deliver.

New DPs will be selected according to the 2004 sub-themes, work life balance, vertical desegregation, reducing gender gaps in employment and valuing and upgrading female work.

This ETG operates in a different but relatively clear way (in terms of method, output and participants). However, the developed method generated some frustration, especially for members of the Liaison Group who regret not to be involved enough in Working Groups. Also, the way the ETG operates, at this stage, with no anticipation of mainstreaming actions, could be a handicap.

e. ETG on Asylum Seekers

Three main characteristics can be noted in the way this ETG operates: firstly, the Liaison Group involves DPs, secondly, and due to the number of DPs on this theme, Working Groups are composed of a small number of participants, which can be a strength to produce outputs. Thirdly, one of the Working Groups (during 2003) was devoted to dissemination, consisting in the organisation of practical events, which marks the rhythm for the work of the ETG.

Furthermore, as far as we are aware, more attention is given to the TCAs than in other ETGs.

Table 5.7. ETG 5 Asylum seekers

Type of Groups Type of Members	Steering Group	Liaison Group	Working Groups
Member States	The Netherlands and Sweden are lead Member States	All MS except Luxembourg and Belgium NL	3 workshops took place in the first meeting of the Liaison Group (January 03): advice, education and training employment capacity building TCA Event took place in June 03 with participation of members of steering and Liaison Groups + representatives of TCAs : focus on Trans-national partnerships and other Trans-national activities The second meeting of 2 Working Groups took place in October 03 with members of steering and Liaison Groups, representatives of the TCAs and DPs skill audits dissemination (particular purpose to assist in the organisation of an event in the Netherlands in October)
EU Commission	DG Empl-Unit B4; DG Empl-ESF unit DG JHA (Justice and Home Affairs).	DG Empl-Unit B4; others Unit DG JHA (Justice and Home Affairs).	
Other European Organisations	European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)	Employment Refugees Found (ERF) European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) European Communities Refugees Organisation (ECRO)	
Technical Support	GHK	GHK	
Other National organisations	NO	Asylum Seekers national network representative	
DP's	NO	Yes or their representatives	
Involvement of candidate members	NO	NO	
Others	NO	NO	
Number of meeting and participants until end 2003	6, starting in Sept 02 7 à 12 participants	2, starting in January 03 20 to 25 participants	TCAs event in June 03 : 50 participants Workshops in October 03 : 30 participants

The work programme was elaborated very early and in a very detailed fashion (ETG5 is the only ETG which has such a detailed time schedule). By comparison with the other ETGs, the work programme includes a lot of practical events (in 2003 : one focused on Transnational activity, one focused on education and training and one in 2004, on engaging employers), and early dissemination events (the first one, due to take place in April 2004, will include a practice-oriented event on capacity building, learning days for Managing Authorities and NSS, international conference with a policy focus and a showcasing exhibition with 500 participants, especially from new Members States). The method is very oriented to mainstreaming. The work programme also consisted in more classical work, such as visits to DPs, collecting information, background research, finalising the screening fiche and Working Groups.

Among the outputs already identified, ETG 5 was the only ETG to propose some priorities for the second round of EQUAL.

Most of participants interviewed are very satisfied with the way the ETG operates, involving other DGs and external stakeholders, producing highly informative comparative analyses (i.e.: overview of TCAs, legislative overview across MS, etc.), organising events, involving DPs which have a significant input etc. However, assessment also varies according to the situation of each Member State. For example, the Italian Managing Authority thinks that the work done by the ETG 5 is very important in view of the fact that there is no framework law in Italy on the reception of asylum seekers and in view of the very limited number of selected DPs (2). In this case, the EU level appears to provide the necessary inputs to promote much expected legislative developments. On the other hand, the Managing Authority of the Netherlands would like ETG 5 to be more focused on how to encourage mainstreaming because the policy context in some Members States such as the Netherlands (where stricter AS regulations have been adopted) can limit the mainstreaming potential. Another weakness identified by some Managing Authorities is that ETG 5 has a very Northern European face.

5.6.2.4. The current networking architecture raises some important questions concerning the role, composition and management of ETGs

The Mainstreaming Group (also call ETG 0) originally received a mandate to act as a co-ordination body for the ETGs (firstly, to set them up and secondly to co-ordinate them), essentially by delivering common guidelines and operational tools with a view to ensure both a comparable approach and the opportunity to organise the transversal themes emerging from the various ETGs. In practice, the group did not meet on a regular basis and consequently failed to fully deliver what was expected. This may be due, in part, to the fact that this group does not have any technical assistance contrary to the other ETGs, but also to the fact that the EQUAL Unit did not call for meetings during more than one year.

As a result, each ETG legitimately has made its own strategic choices, which nevertheless appear at times quite different (in terms of membership, organisational arrangements, expected tools and products...) and hardly comparable. For some Managing Authorities, the Mainstreaming Group is offering currently "*little extra benefits*".

This was particularly visible in the selection of DPs for participation in the ETG Working Groups. Two main problems have been encountered. First, the time schedule in the nomination of DPs for participation in ETG activities was problematic for some Members States, where implementation of Action 2 had only begun at DP level, which meant that the data available on DPs was very poor. Secondly, Liaison Groups generally selected participating DPs on the basis of their nomination by Member States, although in ETG 4 (equal opportunities), the experts were asked to carry out this selection of the nominated DPs, and in ETG 2 (social economy theme) a call for tender open to all DPs was organised. Some DPs asked directly to be involved in the Working Groups⁶³. This variety of selection methods may make it more complex for ETGs to work on transversal issues. Furthermore, this lack of co-ordination was also visible, for example, in the number of fiches produced to collect information on DPs (widely different models).

At the Steering Group level, the involvement of lead Member States in the management of ETGs could be improved because a huge part of the work and of the pressure falls on the EQUAL team (and the thematic experts). In the recent period, it has not been easy to combine the closing of the former generation of Community Initiative Programmes with implementing the ETGs.

⁶³ By email, through the EQUAL website.

The composition and role of Liaison Groups is unclear and Member State representation on the Liaison Groups is ambiguous, as it is sometimes taking place through Managing Authorities, sometimes through National Support Structures, and, to a much lesser extent, through NTG co-ordinators (many of them have not been nominated yet) or nominated experts. The role of the Liaison Groups is also unclear : they are supposed to act as an interface between NTGs and ETGs, but NTGs have produced little so far, and, as many Liaison Group members also participate in the ETG Working Groups, there may be a lot of overlap. Also, most of Managing Authorities are engaged in the 5 Liaisons Groups, and thus sometimes have to deal with the same questions, such as the organisation of meetings, several times. This means that some transversal questions have to be solved in the Mainstreaming Group and not in the Liaison Groups. The lack of ETG co-ordination is particularly visible here.

According to most of Managing Authorities, the role of the Liaison Group as interface between ETGs and national DPs is necessary, particularly because DPs involved in ETGs are not always known by Managing Authorities. More generally, most of Liaison Group members would like to be more informed about the ETG developments ; this means that the interface between Working Groups and Liaison Groups may need to be reinforced, not necessarily by increasing meetings. The already mentioned reduction of the activities of the Mainstreaming Group during 2003 leaves each ETG Liaison Groups working on its own without a “driver”.

On the logistical side, there are some weaknesses :

- There is a need for information in time before and after meetings (especially for some ETGs) : in order to allow for better exchanges during meetings, the preparatory phase needs to be strengthened (circulation of draft documents and of a detailed agenda, planning longer-term work programmes in order to produce more effective contributions to the ETG). This proposal is not concerning all ETGs: as is apparent in CIRCA, information on ETG1 is updated on a regular basis and preparation documents are available in most cases. Some improvements may be done also in clarifying future steps of Working Groups, a task for the thematic experts.
- There is some confusion between Circa, the Extranet technical platform for ETGs and the EQUAL site, normally dedicated to public information. ETG information on the EQUAL site is not always up to date and the classification of documents on CIRCA is in some cases deficient, maybe due to some gaps in the info-manager role, normally under the responsibility of thematic experts. This could be a problem at the dissemination stage.
- Whilst thematic experts are highly appreciated by participants of all ETGs (and by a very wide majority of Managing Authorities), there could be some improvements on the communication framework. At this stage, it may be important to give more visibility to ETGs for participants, but also for external stakeholders. In the same range of ideas, the process orientation of the ETGs is not reflected in the written production, which, although of a generally high quality, is probably too rich to allow for a correct appropriation by participants.
- Work in-between Working Group meetings seems to be an issue. There is a need to give some thought to the way in which Working Groups could operate between meetings, as most participants consider current arrangements insufficient. This question has a direct link with resources and funding.

Furthermore, given the selection processes, DPs are bound to represent themselves and speak about their experience, rather than for a wider DP community. This sometimes leads DPs to find it difficult to understand what is expected from them. In the same range of ideas, DP participants are not systematically the same from one Working Group to the next (except in the first year of ETG4), which might be an obstacle to produce outputs. In some ETGs, members change for each event. In this context, would it not be better to select a few DPs or NTG co-ordinators as representatives of wider national groups of DPs to the ETG Working Groups, so that they could take a more global approach ? This would make it easier to keep the number of participants at a reasonable level (some Workings Groups have 30 participants).

In fact, the European networking experience so far shows that it is quite complicated to satisfy both short-term and medium term objectives when there are co-ordination gaps. Thus, as an example, in view of the fact that ETGs were not in a position to identify promising practice yet, the Commission invited Member States to send fiches of what they considered promising practice, for the production of the December Communication on EQUAL (see chapter 6 below). This, to a certain extent, questions the work of the ETGs whereas it could have been done more in partnership with them. Similarly, the preparation of a "visibility" event in November 2004 may require ETGs to adapt their work plans to a tighter schedule.

5.6.2.5. A very limited involvement of accession countries in the ETGs

The current involvement of accession countries in the ETG process can be qualified as very limited. Only one country, the Czech Republic, is involved in the Liaison Groups of four ETGs, i.e. all ETGs except ETG 5 (asylum seekers). Some DPs of the Czech Republic were selected for participation in some Working Groups (for instance, ETG1 - employability). There is no Czech Republic representative on the Steering Groups or on the horizontal groups. Hungary, as the Czech Republic, was involved in the first round of EQUAL in 2001/2002 (through the PHARE programme), but has no representative in any group⁶⁴. However Hungary will be involved in the new horizontal group on « gender equality ».

Since the beginning of the ETG process, accession countries were invited in a few cases to specific events⁶⁵. Whilst some ETGs expect to involve them in 2004 (by inviting them to specific events, workshops etc.)⁶⁶, there have so far been few events with accession country participants. One example was the Copenhagen Conference in November 2002, organised by the Commission, which focused on 3 main issues : the preparation of the EQUAL programme in accession countries, implementation and financial aspects of EQUAL. In the conclusion of the conference, the representative of the Commission proposed to organise seminars for the exchange of good practice between old and new Members States but no such seminar has been organised so far. In view of the fact that accession countries are particularly concerned by employability, equal opportunities and asylum seekers⁶⁷, their low level of participation in the corresponding ETGs is problematic.

⁶⁴ However, proposals were made by one ETG

⁶⁵ Such as the one organised by ETG2 in June 2003 « Making entrepreneurship accessible for all » (representatives of 8 of them took part to this event).

⁶⁶ For example the April 2004 dissemination seminar organised by ETG5, and the next ETG 4 Liaison Group meeting will be open to accession countries.

⁶⁷ Which constitute their main priorities in their CIPs.

5.6.2.6. A networking process open to non-EQUAL stakeholders

Contacts between the EQUAL programme and European policies and processes have so far taken the following forms:

- Requests by the Commission to national ESF Monitoring Committees that they proposed good practice emerging from EQUAL as examples to include in the NAPs and requests by the Commission to the Member States taking part in the Peer Review on Active Labour Market Policies that they should tap into EQUAL DPs for good practice; in both cases, the results are scarce and unsystematic;
- Participation of EQUAL DPs in transnational exchange projects funded by the programme to combat social exclusion;
- Participation of a few projects funded under other programmes (e.g. anti-discrimination) in the EQUAL ETGs;
- Participation of Commission officials, European social partners, European organisations, and national-level institutions and organisations in the ETGs.

Other informal contacts are taking place between the EQUAL unit and other units, directorates and DGs of the European Commission. However the main concern seems to be to avoid overlaps between EQUAL and other programmes. There appears to be no contact at all with the Gender equality unit.

Of all these mechanisms, the only one used systematically is the participation of non-EQUAL actors in the ETGs, although very differently from one ETG to the other. Most of those who answered our questions (especially on ETG1, ETG2 and ETG5) are very satisfied with their involvement even if they propose some improvements.

The following table maps out the various external stakeholders involved in each ETG in the last meetings of their Working Groups (Brussels 8-10 October 2003).

Table 5. 8. The participation of Non-EQUAL stakeholders in the ETGs

	EU Commission (Other DGs, directorates and units)	EU social partner s	EU and international NGO platforms and organisation s	National agencies and public authorities (except managing authorities)	National social partners	National institutions and organisations	Total
ETG 1 (Employability)	2		6	1		4	13
ETG 2 (Entrepreneurship)	7	1	8	5		4	25
ETG 3 (Adaptability)	5	4			3	1	13
ETG 4 (Equal Opportunities)							0
ETG 5 (Asylum seekers)	1		1				2

Most ETGs have decided to open to external stakeholders from the start, but to a greater or lesser extent according to whether they wanted first to be in a position to “have something to offer”. However the fact that ETG 2 has already concrete proposals to make within a mainstreaming strategy is probably linked to its early opening to external stakeholders.

Some participants think that the process could usefully be more open, as both Liaison and Working Groups are speaking to “converted people” and there is not enough interface with policy makers/ influencers at European level. For example, involvement of the national associations of local authorities or the European Parliament could be interesting in most of groups; furthermore, making resources available for a full involvement of some organisations like NGOs could be relevant. According to the interviews with non-EQUAL stakeholders, « *WGs should inform decision makers at each stage of the working process and not only once there are final outputs*⁶⁸. *More decision makers should be involved in the meetings themselves* ». It has been pointed out (in the WG on disability) that the impact potential could be improved by involving employers.

In terms of mainstreaming, some improvements could be in the participation of more policy makers in the Mainstreaming group and/or ETGs, as EQUAL members in ETG 5 are very satisfied with the participation of another DG of the European Commission. According to an interviewed stakeholder, « *WGs should address policy makers in different policy areas, and not only those involved in the Employment Strategy* ».

Some non-EQUAL stakeholders are themselves taking part in mainstreaming, as they plan to disseminate ETG products to their own members (as mentioned e.g. by FEBEA⁶⁹, EASPD⁷⁰ and the European Microfinance Network).

5.7. Conclusions

Partnership

- Although there is no evidence in all Member States, there are indications that partnerships tend to be more effective when built on previous experience but open to integration and close association of new actors. But there is evidence that EQUAL succeeded in involving new types of partners who are seen as motors of change, as facilitators of innovation. The reason for pre-existing partnerships to be more effective might be that they have more capacity building.
- A majority of DPs act locally, although at CIP level the territorial dimension is often not taken into account.
- Some national evaluators point to the importance of defining a common and shared goal as a precondition for an effective partnership. As the implementation of the partnership principle as a whole is mostly valued in a positive way, we assume that most DPs have succeeded in defining common problems and common goals, although failures in this respect are mentioned in the national evaluation reports.

⁶⁸ This was said for 2 Working Groups of ETG1 but is likely to apply to more Working Groups.

⁶⁹ Federation of European ethnical bank and local financiers

⁷⁰ Federations and individual agencies providing services to people with disabilities throughout Europe

- Public administration is often taking a leading role. This is linked to the need for match funding, but also to the role of regional and local authorities in the area of employment and / or social inclusion policies. The role of social partners varies widely across the Member States. While in some countries the social partners are nearly not involved at all, they play a more strategic role in other Member States or even the role of an initiator in some cases. In a number of Member States, EQUAL succeeded in involving “non-traditional partners”. It should be noted that depending on the national context these “non-traditional partners” might also be social partners and local authorities. One critical point in the composition of partnerships is the low share of private sector companies.
- A classification of partnerships with regard to their internal organisation was provided by a number of national evaluators . These can be summarised in two basic models:
 - The first one is a “hierarchical” model, dominated by the lead partner and where other partners are insufficiently involved at the strategic level. This model is marked by a fragmentation and excessive specialisation of partners. The experimental character of the actions is penalised in this model. However, this model is not static and DPs starting with a hierarchical structure can evolve towards a more equalitarian framework.
 - The second one, which it calls the “participative” model, is based on multiple contracts and is hence more devolved and flexible in nature. This model is assessed as being more effective for the delivery of EQUAL principles and DP actions.

Empowerment

- The empowerment principle is more or less vague in the CIPs, and therefore has been interpreted in quite different ways by DPs and by national evaluators.
- The involvement of beneficiaries is regarded as an innovation in itself. Furthermore, as a first assessment of national evaluators, target group involvement is regarded as enhancing the effectiveness of the measures. The stronger involvement of other partners and a high degree of transparency has been assessed positively. While public authorities have been found to be more reluctant to implement empowerment, mention is made that new possibilities of participation have been valued positively by non-traditional partners.
- In most cases, criticism has been formulated by national evaluators regarding the poor involvement of target groups. This is not surprising as this method is quite new. The involvement of DP partners was in general higher than in most other partnerships in other programmes. The maturity of the partnership approach developed in a Member State may shape the degree of involvement of DP partners. The degree of involvement of the partners varies also with regard to the different phases of a project.

Innovation

- As compared with other EU and ESF programmes, EQUAL is expected to be a major opportunity for developing innovations for increasing inclusion and reducing barriers to inclusion. Existing programmes are more focused on delivery than on testing innovative materials, methods, approaches or processes.

- There is a variety of understandings of the innovation principle at all levels: the CIP level, the DP level and finally at the level of the national evaluator.
- A clear predominance of process oriented innovation is observed by the majority of national evaluators. Secondly ranked is the context oriented innovation. Goal oriented innovation remains modest. Addressing highly marginalised groups can represent an innovative element in itself.
- The process oriented innovation is found in all thematic fields. It focuses on management and organisational processes, the development of new professional profiles and in the use of new technologies, both for the management of actions and for their diffusion, and new methods of delivery. A number of evaluation reports stress that the implementation of the partnership principle and of the empowerment principle represent an innovation in itself. Whether other types of innovation may be realised can only be identified at a later stage of the implementation process.
- National evaluators have identified some obstacles to the development of innovative approaches. The time spent by the DPs on management and administrative tasks limits the time available for working on the project itself and particularly on innovative aspects. More initial research on labour market disadvantage is recommended. The insufficient enterprise involvement in active and innovative measures is seen as another major obstacle. Furthermore, there is evidence in some cases that DPs may have difficulties especially in implementing innovation. Short time frames as well as a lacking understanding of the innovation principle at DP level might be the cause. Difficulties in understanding the principle might be heightened when an open concept of innovation has been adopted a Programme level.

Transnational co-operation

- In terms of geographical co-operation patterns, TNCs are rather concentrated. In many Member States, DPs have most of their international partners located in no more than three or four countries. Only few DPs have tried to find partners from the candidate countries. Geographical proximity and language proximity seem to have been the basis for the choices made.
- Overall the implementation of the TNC⁷¹ principle is still too recent for permitting the development of a specific added value and a significant contribution to innovation. In many cases DPs have encountered difficulties to implement transnational co-operation. Some of them show a lack of motivation due to the extremely burdensome and costly process of identifying transnational partners. The main obstacles consisted in the different phasing of the Actions, the low budgets for transnational cooperation and differences in national rules.
- In most Member States, transnational co-operation is still in a first stage of "Exchange of information and experience". The sharing of information most commonly relies on the following methods or tools: workshops with transnational partners, study visits, electronic communication and, to a lesser extent, teleconference.

⁷¹ TNC: Transnational Co-operation

Equal Opportunities

- Equal opportunities are defined by the EQUAL Programme in a broad way and concern all disadvantaged groups rather than just women. However, this approach has been understood in the latter sense in a majority of Member States. A range of national evaluators devote a great deal of attention to the implementation of gender equality and do not investigate in depth how other inequalities are dealt with.
- A target group approach has been adopted by most Member States which renders the equal access of all discriminated in each thematic field impossible.
- The horizontal implementation of equal opportunities is more taken into account at programme management and DP level in countries which have developed a concrete anti-discrimination policy.
- Most DPs say that they intend to apply the horizontal principle of gender equality, but not much specific evidence has been presented so far that this is really done and is working in practice. In a number of cases, DPs have no clear concept of how to implement this principle. The implementation of this principle requires a high level of expertise and DPs might lack capacities.
- The approaches and models developed to combat labour market inequalities often vary according to the type of discrimination. However, some tools for combating discrimination emerge as common across Member States, such as integrated training and public or employer-oriented awareness campaigns targeting the inclusion of vulnerable groups and creating an multiplication effect.

Mainstreaming at the national level

- Networking at national level is country specific, although in most cases, it started later than European networking, which provided Managing Authorities with a form of guidance as to how to plan NTGs. Almost all countries have set up several NTGs, except, so far, Belgium-NL, Belgium-FRG, Italy and Luxembourg, but in this case, the small number of DPs (3) accounts for this specific situation.
- National networking is focused, in most Members States, on thematic issues relevant to national priorities and to EES pillars. Only a few ones address the EQUAL principles.
- The organisation of NTGs varies from one Member State to the other, but some organisational frameworks are more suited for the co-ordination between NTGs and ETGs, whilst in other Member States this link had not been planned. In fact, this is the main question arising from the analysis of networking: how to develop a mode of organisation which allowed on-going exchanges of information between both (national and European) levels? How to disseminate issues and results from one level to the other? How to ensure that both levels are "irrigated"? It is quite difficult to answer all these questions at this stage, due to the fact that European and national networking have only really been operational for a few months and evaluation reports are still very poor on the question of national networking.

Mainstreaming at the European level

- The main objectives of the ETGs are to identify promising practices, to capitalise exchanges of experience at both national and European levels, to identify clear messages for dissemination to policies makers and to disseminate those messages.
- At this stage, it can be said that the effectiveness of ETGs as a platform for empowerment, and as a structure for the mainstreaming of practices is real. Their suitability for identifying good practice may be more questionable.
- There would seem to be a tension between the strong process orientation logically taken so far by ETGs and production.
- If ETGs are to be platforms for giving a “voice” to DPs, then the question of DP selection and of the capacity to speak for the wider DP community becomes very important. Perhaps it would be useful, at this stage, to re-think the consistency between objectives and the composition of the groups.
- Most ETG members are very satisfied with their involvement in the ETGs.
- Some improvements could easily be made. The organisation, monitoring and updating of documents on CIRCA and the EQUAL extranet should generally receive more attention. Collective work is organised in a classical way⁷², which gives rise to considerable travelling and time expense. Conference calls or discussion fora could be more used as participants and members asked for more meetings, particularly members of Liaison Groups.
- Furthermore, there are clear lacks in the co-ordination within ETGs and between ETGs: as mentioned by members of most Liaison Groups and Working Groups, ETGs appear ill-equipped from this point of view. In this respect, the role of the Mainstreaming Group needs to be reasserted. This is especially important as the involvement of the 10 accession countries in EQUAL will impact widely on networking and ETGs, in terms of participants, operational complexity, and needs for co-ordination.

⁷² Meetings, workshops, seminars, events and also e-mail between meetings.

6. IMPACT OF EQUAL ON THE EUROPEAN EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY, THE SOCIAL INCLUSION PROCESS AND OTHER COMMUNITY PROGRAMMES

6.1. Expected impact of EQUAL at the European level: mainstreaming good practice and fostering policy co-ordination

According to the Communication from the Commission to the Member States (C(2000) 853), « *if EQUAL is to fully play its role as a testing ground for developing and promoting new ways of delivering employment policies, there will need to be close co-operation between Member States and social partners, and the Commission, to successfully exploit the potential for impact on the European Employment Strategy of good practice identified all over the Union.* »

In addition, EQUAL will « *play a key role in linking together the EU supported actions under Article 13 and 137, the ESF supported programmes and the political objectives pursued in the framework of the European Employment Strategy* ».

Thus EQUAL is expected to have two kinds of impact at the European level:

- Providing good practice to inform the EES, but also the Social Inclusion Process, ESF and other community programmes (notably the Community Action Programmes to combat social exclusion and discrimination) as well as the Framework Strategy on Gender Equality;
- Establishing links between these different strategies and programmes (this also applies at the national and local levels).

The EU-wide evaluation is required to assess the impact of EQUAL, on the EES, on the Social Inclusion process, on ESF as well as on other Community programmes. At the same time it is asked to help improve that impact by detecting and analysing good practice.

In this first impact assessment, we will not provide any examples of good practice (it is too early to do so), but rather an assessment of the selection of promising and good practice (section 6.2), results so far and impact potential (section 6.3). In the section on results, we will highlight other results than the expected good practice and links with other programmes, as the European Thematic Networks have taken a broader view of their remit than just selecting good practice. Finally we present conclusions (section 6.4).

These assessments are based on:

- Email interviews with all 5 thematic expert teams assigned to the European Thematic Groups (ETGs);
- Email interviews with the Heads of mission (14 responses out of 17);
- Email interviews with actors involved in the European Thematic Groups but not directly involved in the management of the programme nor in DPs (21 responses);
- Analyses of the instruments for collecting good or promising practice, of the examples of promising practice sent by the Member States, and of the “case studies” and promising practice collected in the ETGs;
- Interviews with 10 Commission officials working on the EES, the Social Inclusion Process, ESF and other Community Programmes.

6.2. Good practice at the European level

6.2.1. The concept of good practice at the European level: relevance, concretion, demonstrated evidence, transfer potential

Good practice, or «best practice» has become a central component of a key governance mechanism at EU level: the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC), which is meant as a methodology for the co-ordination of Member State policies, compatible with subsidiarity and with the quest for instruments providing alternatives, in some cases, to «hard» legislation. The OMC is based on five key principles⁷³: «*subsidiarity, convergence, management by objectives, country surveillance and an integrated approach*». «*Country surveillance*» involves «*the identification of possible best practice among Member States*», which is supposed to create «*peer pressure to improve the quality and effectiveness of policy*»: «*Exchange of experiences and peer pressure are meant to steer policy debate and enhance the effectiveness of policies*».

As a «laboratory of innovation», EQUAL is supposed to produce good practice with mainstreaming potential, alongside other instruments such as the Peer Review Programme for the EES and the one which is now starting for the Social Inclusion process.

What constitutes «good» practice? It is useful to start from the criteria used in the Peer Review Programme for the EES, which now has quite established criteria and procedures:

- First, good practice is not defined in a vacuum: it is considered good practice if it can inform current and future policy. Thus a key criterion is that the practice should be *relevant to current and emerging policy priorities*;
- Good practice should bring *concrete responses* to problems targeted by current and emerging policy;
- Good practice is declared «good» on the basis of *demonstrated evidence* – this implies both, that *evidence should be available*; that there should be some form of *assessment*; and that the conclusions of the assessment should be that the practice selected evidences *quality results*, which are *reliable*;
- Finally a submitted practice is assessed as «good practice» if other Member States judge that they could take up that practice, in other words, there is also an assessment of the *transfer potential*. This assessment is carried out by the potential receptors or «transferees».

These criteria (policy relevance, level of concretion, demonstrated and reliable results, transfer potential) have guided us in our analysis of the mechanisms set up at the European level in EQUAL for the identification and mainstreaming of good practice.

So far there have been two main mechanisms in EQUAL for the identification of «promising» and «good» practice to inform policy making at the European level: the European Thematic Groups (ETGs) and a direct call by the European Commission for «promising practices» from the Member States, with a view to inform the second Commission Communication on EQUAL. In the future, a good practice database should be set up, which may be fed by Member States, National Thematic Groups (NTGs), and by the

⁷³ europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social, Presentation of the European Employment Strategy.

European Thematic Groups (ETGs). This database will thus presumably present good practice not only of possible European scope, but also at the national, regional and local levels. This remains to be confirmed.

6.2.2. The identification of good practice in the European Thematic Groups

The mandate of the ETGs, as defined by the first Commission Communication on EQUAL, is to « disseminate good practice and disseminate the achievements ». In order to do this, the ETGs were supposed to be organised as a «series of 'thematic reviews' with clusters of Development Partnerships ».

6.2.2.1. The selection of DPs for ETGs is considered as a first step in the selection of good practice

In the European Thematic Groups, it has generally been understood that the Working Groups were responsible either for the identification of good practice and for proposals for mainstreaming it, or for the illustration of their « products » with good practice.

In a way, then, the selection of DPs (and transnational partnerships) for the ETG Working Groups already constituted a first step in the selection of good practice (i.e. they are supposed to offer « promising practice »).

As has been explained above (Chapter 5), the selection procedure generally consisted in a first stage of nomination by Member States on the basis of criteria provided by the ETG steering groups, and then a further selection by the experts and/or steering groups⁷⁴.

Criteria for individual DP selection generally included:

- Thematic relevance to themes and sub-themes;
- Feasibility as evidenced by the implementation rate and first results;
- Criteria for assessing the potential for active participation (motivation for European work, capacity to work in between meetings, fluent English and good knowledge of the DP of the person representing the DP...)

In addition:

- The mainstreaming potential, assessed through the resources committed to mainstreaming, was also a criterion in the Social Economy call and in ETG 4 (Equal opportunities);
- Innovation was also a criterion in ETG 1 ("Building on Diversity") and 3 (Adaptability).

Criteria for finalising the DP composition of working groups included:

- Geographical spread (adequate representation of a good number of Member States); in ETG 4 (Equal opportunities), the experts also paid attention to having a good mix of rural and urban areas;
- The mix in target groups (across DPs) was also looked at to establish the final sample in ETG 4.

⁷⁴ In the « Social Economy » group, the selection was carried out on the basis of the results of an open call to all DPs.

Despite the variety in selection procedures already pointed out in Chapter 5 above, there is thus a certain consistency in the criteria adopted across ETGs, and these criteria are indeed key for the future selection of good practice.

However, there are three main problems with this first stage of selection:

- First, the selection took place at a time (first semester 2003) when DPs still had little results to show, and thus it would seem that the «feasibility» criterion was often more assessed on the basis of work programmes than on the basis of first results.
- Second, the mainstreaming potential is a crucial criterion, but it was not systematically taken up for DP selection, and when it was, it has not necessarily been adequately measured. ETGs are supposed to mainstream the identified good practice into European policy and processes. This means that what has to be assessed is the potential to make an impact at the European level, by providing concrete examples of how challenges identified at the European level, e.g. in the Joint Reports, can be addressed. Although an important background work has been done by thematic experts to identify current policy issues at the European level, and although Managing Authorities on the ETG steering groups were generally involved in the final selection of DPs, it thus would have been important to involve, in addition, European Commission experts working on the European Employment Strategy, the Social Inclusion process, the Strategy for Gender Equality, and the programmes against social exclusion and discrimination, in this first DP selection. This seems to already be the case in ETG 5 (Asylum Seekers), where the representative of DG Justice and Home Affairs is a member of the Steering Group.
- Third, the transfer potential of DP practices has not been taken up as a criterion, which is not surprising given the stage of development of DP actions, but which, again, limits the possibilities for assessing whether the selected DPs can inform a cross-national mainstreaming of good practice.

6.2.2.2. The current objectives and process of the ETGs may be more suited for DP empowerment than for the selection of good practice

There are two conflicting objectives for the ETGs:

- On the one hand, they have been designed as platforms for DPs to learn to work at the European level, exchange and learn from each other, and to produce collectively. Furthermore, ETG working groups can be seen as European fora in which DPs can have a voice, and from which they can make policy recommendations on the basis of their own experience. In short, as said before, there is no doubt that ETGs can play a role for some level of association of DPs to the European policy level. This supports the current choice of involving quite a large number of DPs in European networking.
- On the other hand, ETGs are supposed to lead to the identification of good practice with European and cross-national relevance (as opposed to local regional or national relevance, which is what National Thematic Networks look at). This necessarily entails a much more reduced number of DP practices being selected, as not many DPs are likely to bring innovations with regard to the experience already accumulated in previous Community Initiatives or to the one recorded in the NAPs.

In this sense, the challenge ahead is to move from the selection of DPs for participation in the European Thematic Groups to the selection of practices with European and cross-national policy relevance and representing an innovation with regard to the already available body of experience. It is quite possible that the participative, bottom-up approach which has prevailed so far will clash with this objective.

6.2.2.3. Sophisticated instruments have been designed in the ETGs for the collection of good practice, but postpone the question of its evaluation

The preparation for the identification of good practice as such is still in its early stages. Thematic experts have all developed various instruments on the basis of a preliminary good practice checklist established by the Mainstreaming Group, of their own experience of past Community Initiatives, and of the results of tests of these instruments in the «field» - by meeting DPs. The «examples» or «case studies» currently available on the web-site of each ETG are presented according to different formats:

- The “fiches” prepared in ETG1 and ETG5 focus on a given DP measure or set of measures, whilst the others focus on the DPs themselves;
- The ETG1 and ETG5 fiches are very descriptive and short, the other fiches are longer and more explanatory, and, as far as we could see, only the ETG3 fiche insists on the evidence to be presented;
- ETG1 and ETG5 fiches are filled in by DPs themselves; others serve as interview guidelines with DPs (e.g. ETG 2 and 3).

The ETG 2 expert was asked to draw a common «good practice interview guide» from all these instruments⁷⁵. The fiche is designed to illustrate how the DP contributes a new model for fighting against discrimination on the labour market and thus looks at:

- Relevance to EU policy and the priorities of the ETG;
- Visibility of achievements;
- Innovation⁷⁶;
- Partnership⁷⁷;
- Empowerment⁷⁸;
- Transnationality and its added value for the local project;
- “Gender and equality”⁷⁹;
- Outcomes or products⁸⁰, results⁸¹ and impacts⁸²;

⁷⁵ « Equal good practice interview guide », 28/11/2003

⁷⁶ DPs are asked whether their actions “add or build on what existed before in the area or sector”. Examples of types of innovation are provided: new action in the territory or sector, new project content, new methodologies, new delivery mechanisms, new mainstreaming strategies. DPs are also asked whether their actions add value to national and European policies; whether they have made any innovative use of ICT; and how does this help to solve specific problems of discrimination faced by target groups.

⁷⁷ DPs are asked whether the most relevant actors within the territory or sector have been involved; about complementarity of partners; and whether there is a clear definition of roles and responsibilities.

⁷⁸ Empowerment is here understood as involvement, both of partners and of beneficiaries

⁷⁹ The questions are whether the specific needs of the most disadvantaged are being addressed; whether a “gender dimension” is integrated in all activities; and whether “gender outcomes” can be expected to be lasting.

⁸⁰ e.g. number of training courses, trainees, people provided with technical assistance, publications, websites, exchanges, meetings etc. These are called outputs in the national monitoring systems.

⁸¹ e.g. number of people who achieve a particular qualification, the number of firms created etc.

⁸² e.g. start-up rates or death rates, numbers employed, employment and unemployment rates, etc.

- Sustainability of “outcomes”;
- Transferability⁸³;
- Mainstreaming⁸⁴;
- Finally the fiche is supposed to provide the data for a “preliminary assessment” of “*relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and potential impact*”.

A very interesting aspect is that the innovation has to be seen as contributing to solving specific discrimination problems, and this should indeed be a crucial element in the assessment of innovation in EQUAL: innovation has a value insofar as it makes a difference for the target groups.

Similarly, the fiche considers the EQUAL principles as “tools” whose contribution to the outcomes has to be assessed. In other words, does the implementation of the partnership, empowerment, transnationality principles, and of a “gender and equality” approach make a difference for fighting against discrimination and how? In doing so, the fiches provide a basis for identifying truly new “models” for fighting against discrimination on the labour market, and more generally for assessing the extent to which the design of the programme has been conducive, or not, to such models.

The fiche could however be more systematic in this endeavour. For example:

- There is no specific question about the contribution of the partnership and the empowerment principles to solving concrete problems of discrimination, as if this was evident, which it is not.
- The fiche, also designed as a pedagogical tool, could contribute more to a clarification of terms. In particular, there is a certain confusion with regard to how innovation can be assessed – with regard to local or sector-based state of the art, and/or with regard to national and European policy? The empowerment principle is equated simply with “involvement”, which is very vague and does not refer to participation in decision-making, which was the meaning given to it in the Commission communication.

It is expressly said that this instrument cannot serve as the sole basis for evaluation or benchmarking, although it may serve as a basis for collecting part of the information required in a later evaluation exercise. The experts recommend that the interview guide be used as a support for a case study (rather than be filled directly by DPs). Finally, they expect that 10 case studies per year would be produced by each ETG using this guide, which would amount to a total of 300 cases over 6 years.

More generally, thematic experts are careful to exclude a direct evaluation, benchmarking or assessment purpose for these various fiches. The reasons for this caution have been explained by the ETG 2 experts⁸⁵: an evaluation purpose would, according to them, demand the prior definition of a common set of indicators. In addition, such a purpose may limit DPs’ openness and willingness to participate.

⁸³ DPs are asked what is transferable, under which conditions, and what aids to transfer are being designed.

⁸⁴ Questions are here about the strategy (contact with relevant actors, partners’ commitment, detailed character of the strategy).

⁸⁵ See EQUAL Entrepreneurship. *Developing the good practice screening fiche*. Annex 3. (7/03/03).

6.2.2.4. The preparation for the identification of good practice is still at an early stage in the ETGs.

This rapid presentation of the currently available instruments shows that ETGs have not set up a process for the identification of good practice yet, since the instruments they have developed so far are not to be used in an evaluation perspective. In this sense it is more correct and consistent with their own approach to designate their instruments as « case study guidelines⁸⁶ » than as « good practice screening fiches ». Some material has already been gathered through these instruments, as far as we could judge from the web-site (see table below), but should be considered as illustrative and on-going, to be mobilised by the working groups according to need. The clearest and further advanced example of such use is the « Living document » produced by ETG 4, which incorporates examples of DP actions in the text (see below, Results so far).

Table 6.1 – Number of fiches in CIRCA by ETG and working group

ETG	Working group	Denomination	Number
Employability (ETG1)	Employers (WG1)	"Case study examples"	30 (draft) + 4 (finalised)
	Trade Unions (WG2)		11 (draft) + 1 finalised
	Disability (WG3)		2 (draft) + 3 finalised
	Networking (WG4)		5 (draft) + 3 finalised
	Ethnic Minorities (WG5)		1
Entrepreneurship (ETG2)	-- (*)	"Good practice screening fiche"	3
Adaptability (ETG3)	--	"Good practice checklist"	0
Equal Opportunities (ETG 4)	-- (*)	"Good practice checklist"	11
Asylum Seekers (ETG 5)	Advice WG	"Good practice examples"	11 (**)
	Education WG		8 (**)
	Training WG		19 (**)

Source: EQUAL Intranet (February 2004)

(*): The fiches are not ascribed to a particular working group in CIRCA.

(**): The actions described are often both advice, education and training actions.

NB: There is a clear need for rationalising the presentation of case study examples and practices in the Intranet. The file designed for this purpose ("Examples") is only used by ETG4 and ETG1, and the latter also presents examples in the "working group" files.

In our view, the slow progress on the definition of a procedure for good practice selection is related to the already mentioned variety of objectives of ETGs. The participative approach taken to ETGs has clearly been dominant so far, and DP « European empowerment », so to speak, is a valuable objective in itself. In addition, ETGs have engaged in relevant work and production which is not geared to the production of good practice (see 6.3 below). There thus seem to be structural brakes to the identification of good practice, which are related to the format of the ETGs.

We would therefore recommend the rapid design of a strategy for the identification and mainstreaming of good practice which would in part be disconnected from the work of the ETG working groups (see below, 6.2.3. below).

6.2.3. Identification of « promising practice » through the Commission call to Member States

In September 2003, the European Commission (« EQUAL team »), launched a call for Member States to identify « promising practices » in view of the preparation of the second Commission communication on EQUAL. This call was launched due to the preliminary stage

⁸⁶ As is done by the ETG 1 expert.

of implementation of the ETGs and therefore the absence of documents on good practice as such and due to the emergency situation created by the need to provide emerging results⁸⁷.

A « promising practice fiche » was put together, with simple questions and criteria:

- Relevance to the ETG themes and sub-themes addressed;
- Nature of the problem addressed;
- Effectiveness (« what works?»);
- Problems (« what does not work?»);
- Transfer potential («Is what works transferable?»);
- Innovation (« Why is it innovative?»).

6.2.3.1. A lack of guidance

The questions are simple but very ambitious. In a sense they would be more suited for the selection of good practice as they require prior assessment (e.g. « what works?»). However, there was no request for justification of what was put forward. The notion of transferability was not explained either, nor was any justification asked for in terms of target beneficiaries or steps taken. There was no guidance on what was understood by innovation, whereas we have seen earlier that this concept is one which is not well understood in EQUAL. This resulted in quite varied understandings of what was required (see below)

There was no guidance either on the procedure for selecting DP practices. In most Member States⁸⁸, Managing Authorities relied on the in-depth knowledge of DPs by National Support Structures (sometimes acquired through field contact) to establish their list, and sometimes as well on the knowledge of National Thematic Network co-ordinators. In Italy, the NSS had sent a questionnaire to all DPs (March-July 2003), which was their source of information for selecting those with “promising practices”. In Spain, the fiche was filled by DPs already selected for NTN. In Finland and Ireland, the fiche was sent to all DPs and all the responses received were forwarded to the European Commission. In the case of small countries, all DPs were presented. The selection rates of “promising practice” thus varies from 11% of DPs (Finland) to 100% (Northern Ireland)⁸⁹. The total number of fiches is very high, with Italy contributing 19% of them in the final version of the compendium (November).

Faced with a relative lack of definition of selection criteria, some Managing Authorities defined the criteria they thought suitable. Some of them chose DPs with a good implementation rate (Italy) and/or some visible results (Denmark, Sweden). Some looked for DPs with practices which could “contribute to a policy development” (Flanders), had “mainstreaming potential” (Greece, Spain). Interestingly, the UK-GB Managing Authority, in co-ordination with the national support structure, selected DPs with a likely European impact, not just a national impact (However we ignore how they assess this). The German Managing Authority initially only submitted a list of DPs, without filling in the fiche, because «*no evaluation results were available*» so far, a reasonable complaint. In the end, they selected DPs on the basis of very preliminary data (promising strategies, organisational structures, expected outcomes).

⁸⁷ The call took place in two steps: Managing Authorities were first asked to provide promising practices for mid-October. This first exercise gave rise to a compendium of promising practice, which was distributed on 21-22 October in Brussels, on occasion of the meetings of the ETG Liaison Groups. Managing Authorities then had the opportunity to make changes to their fiches, add or remove fiches until the 5th of November.

⁸⁸ Source: email survey to Managing Authorities.

⁸⁹ No fiche was presented for Luxembourg.

The results could thus be expected to vary significantly from one Member State to the other, as the implementation rate was an important criterion in some, whilst in others, the selection was based only on DP intentions.

Table 6.2 – Number of promising practice fiches per Member State and ratio with total number of DPs⁹⁰

	Total number of fiches submitted October	Total number of DPs in Action 2	%age of DPs selected October	Definitive number of fiches submitted November	Total number of DPs in Action 2	Definitive %age of DPs selected November
Austria	16	58	28%	14	58	24%
Belgium-NL	2	19	10%	4	19	20%
Belgium-FRG	9	37	24%	9	37	24%
Czech Republic	6	10	60%	6	10	60%
Denmark	1	17	6%	2	17	12%
Finland	4	37	11%	4	37	11%
France	28	228	12%	36	228	16%
Germany	20	109	18%	25	109	23%
Greece	0	40	0%	12	40	30%
Ireland	9	21	43%	11	21	52%
Italy	25	279	9%	50	279	18%
Luxembourg	0	3	0%	0	3	0%
Netherlands	13	95	14%	12	95	13%
Portugal	15	109	14%	18	109	16%
Spain	20	159	13%	19	159	12%
Sweden	10	46	22%	13	46	28%
UK-Great Britain	10	76	13%	11	76	14%
UK-Northern Ireland	6	6	100%	6	6	100%
Total	194	1349	14%	262	1349	19%

6.2.3.2. Results of the call: the EQUAL principles are seen as a major source of promising practice but there is little concrete evidence of effectiveness, innovation and transfer

As a result of this lack of guidance, the questions were understood in quite different ways⁹¹ by the different authors (some of whom are DPs, some of whom are the Managing Authorities or NSSs). A full analysis of the results of the call is provided in Annex.

Generally speaking, answers refer to the EQUAL principles as major sources of effectiveness and innovation (partnership and empowerment, mostly). For example, 41% of the fiches respond to the question “What works?”, and 43% of the fiches to the question on innovation, by describing their partnership.

⁹⁰ On the basis of the data gathered by the EU-wide evaluation (National Mid-Term reports, direct information from Managing Authorities).

⁹¹ This analysis is based on the first call (fiches distributed on 21-22. October). Only 165 fiches could be exploited, as the 20 DPs provided by the German authority did not have any fiche attached to them, and only 4 Austrian fiches addressed all the questions asked. 1 fiche for BE-NL could not be exploited either because it only referred to the transnational partnership, and in very vague terms.

However only 15% of the fiches provide some justification to their claim of effectiveness. 27% of the fiches provide some kind of justification to their claim to innovation, either by mentioning results (very few), or by referring to the state of the art in the sector. Most simply provide a description of their objectives and/or actions.

6.2.3.3. Managing Authorities view this call as a useful starting basis, but point to the great variety in the quality of the fiches

The call gave rise to diverse appreciations on the part of Managing Authorities. Whilst some thought it *“was a good start for EU wide evaluation, benchmarking where appropriate, and validation of EQUAL innovative approaches”* (Spain) and thought it was a necessary exercise for *“visibility, exchange, capitalisation”* (Italy), others, or indeed the same, regretted that there were no common criteria and procedures yet for the selection of good practice at the European level (Greece, Italy), which gave rise to important differences in the quality of the material produced (Italy, UK-GB). There was a feeling that the call had been exclusively for the purpose of the Communication (i.e. that it was a one-off exercise), but that it nevertheless cut across work already done in the ETGs (UK-GB).

On the basis of the definition of good practice provided above, several evaluative comments can be made:

- The call focused, rightly, in our view, on “practices” (by asking what is the problem and what works) rather than on DPs;
- The call offered basic selection criteria (thematic relevance, effectiveness, transferability, innovation), which form a useful first basis.

However, several problems may be pointed out, so as to capitalise on this exercise for the future collection of good practice:

- The criteria lacked concreteness, probably, first, because it was unclear at which level the practice had to be innovative and make an impact;
- The call for evidence was implicit in the questions but was not explicitly formulated. As a result, and also due to the delay in the implementation of the programme, only very few fiches provided hard evidence (for example, on the basis of self-assessment). In many cases, the work programmes seem to have been used as a basis to fill in the fiche, which hardly constitutes a “proved impact”;
- As a result of these two lacks of specification, the number of fiches is probably too high, and the fiches vary greatly in quality and reliability.
- The presentation by Member State was perhaps not necessary. A thematic presentation could have helped getting a better overview of the progress made in dealing with various forms of discrimination in the labour market and would have facilitated a more direct link with the ETG work.

6.2.4. Towards a strategy for the identification and analysis of good practice

As hinted above, the adoption of a strategy for the identification of European and cross-national good practice seems to us to be a priority for the near future, given the importance which is given to this notion in the programme, and independently from its own merits⁹². This section is a contribution to the possible design of such a strategy (see also Annex).

- The objective would be to gather good practice likely to have an impact at the European level, i.e. to inform the European policy processes, programmes and strategies and/or to give rise to transfers from one Member State to another.
- Main possible characteristics of good practice at the European/cross-national level:
 - Good practice should be limited in number; in order to enhance potential impact, it may be a good idea to identify a few good practice examples per guideline of the new EES. Ideally there should be no consideration of Member State representation – as EQUAL has other mechanisms for the identification of good practice at the national level.
 - Good practice should consist in «ways of delivering employment policies in order to combat discrimination and inequality experienced by those seeking access to the labour market and those already within it », which were innovative at the European level – i.e. which brought new experience as compared with the stock of experience already accumulated through the past Community Initiatives and other processes such as the Peer Review process – and/or at the cross-national level (through cross-national transfer).
 - Good practice may consist in a DP or TP⁹³ measure/action or in a DP or TP mode of organisation or, even, in a NTG or ETG product.
 - Good practice should be selected for assessment on the basis of its potential to address persisting issues pointed out at the European level (e.g. in the Joint Employment reports and Joint Reports on Social Inclusion). Consequently, the « practice » should be assessed according to its capacity to bring new solutions to these persisting issues. Such an assessment is highly dependent on the issue tackled and is also highly political.

⁹² The notion of good practice, and more generally the open method of co-ordination, have given rise to a wealth of analyses and comments, not all of which are uncritical. Even sympathetic commentators, praising the development of new “learning processes” and of a “culture of evaluation” at the European level, have pointed out the limits and dangers of such approaches. For example de la Porte and Pochet (2003) point to the risk of falling in the “governance myth”, according to which learning effects between Member States would themselves lead to co-ordinated changes in national employment policies. Goetschy (2003) recognises that the use of non compulsory EU guidelines may not only prove ineffective, but even noxious, as it may undermine the classical Community method which rests on hard law and not soft co-ordination [de la Porte, C. and Pochet, P. (2003), ‘A twofold assessment of employment policy co-ordination in light of economic policy co-ordination’ and Goetschy, J. (2003), ‘The Employment Strategy and European integration’, both to be found in Foden, D., Magnuson, L. (eds.), *Five years’ experience of the Luxembourg employment strategy*. Brussels: ETUI. Quoted in Raveaud, G. (2003), ‘Benchmarking the EES: a critical view’. Paris: IDHEJ. Finally, as will be seen below, our interviews with Commission officials have highlighted that the production of good practice, in the case of a small-scaled programme like EQUAL, was not perceived as being the most adequate instrument for mainstreaming.

⁹³ One current limit is that, despite the mapping of Transnational Co-operation Agreements carried out by thematic experts for their ETG, there does not seem to be much emphasis at the moment on collecting data from TCAs (except in ETG 5) as the focus is much more on DPs.

- Good practice should present an in-depth diagnosis of the discriminations and inequalities tackled.
 - Even though the assessment is a political exercise, there should be a common basis of indicators such as the reliability of the data provided on results and impacts; effectiveness; quality of outcomes; transferability. Assessments should also pay attention to side effects (e.g. on groups not targeted by the action).
- Possible mechanisms
- Given the wealth of groups and structures existing at the national and at the European level, a basic principle should be to avoid the creation of yet another group or structure and to take stock of the work done so far. At the same time, we have suggested it would be more effective and fair to relieve the ETG Working Groups of this task.
 - The process could usefully involve the ETG Liaison groups, the Mainstreaming Group, Managing Authorities and European officials (particularly those working on the EES guidelines).
 - Independent assessment of the practices selected has to be a crucial element in the mechanisms adopted.

We provide an example of how such a strategy could be implemented in Annex. This has to be seen as a suggestion to contribute to a necessary debate.

6.3. Expected results, achievements and impact so far at the European level.

6.3.1. A great variety of expected results and achievements in the ETGs, and many possibilities for mainstreaming

As already said, EQUAL production at the European level does not limit itself, quite the contrary, to “case studies” and the identification of promising and good practice. In many ways, this seems to be a correct strategy – to promote collective production at the European level, and also to avoid focusing too much on good practice, which in spite of its great popularity with the advocates of new governance mechanisms, is a questionable tool and whose limited potential impact has been criticised (see above).

DP experience serves or will serve as a basis for developing more elaborate outcomes at the European level. Most ETGs have been concentrating so far on gathering DP experience and discussing it, and are planning to design various “products” in the course of 2004, which they will publicise mostly towards the end of 2004, in particular by engaging more systematically with European policy makers and other European level actors (e.g. European social partners). Most of the results are yet to come, although some are well advanced.

On the basis of correspondence with ETG thematic experts, Circa documents, and our survey of “non EQUAL stakeholders”, we have identified the following categories of planned results of ETG activity:

- Diagnoses of discrimination in the labour market and of the difficulties currently faced in tackling discrimination;
- Thematic reviews;
- Key messages to policy makers and other European actors;
- Awareness raising in mainstream and dedicated events;
- European communication tools;
- European benchmarks and models;
- European guidelines and vademecums;
- Inputs in European normative and legislative work.

6.3.1.1. Diagnoses of discrimination in the labour market and of the difficulties currently faced in tackling discrimination

The first Commission Communication on EQUAL highlights the need for mainstreaming activity at Member State level to be supported by an analysis of the “factors leading to discrimination”. In our view, this is a necessary activity at the European level as well, and some progress has been made by ETGs in that direction.

In particular, the discussions held in some working groups highlight the production, at DP level, of more precise diagnoses of the situations of discrimination experienced by particular groups. The “Living Document” elaborated in ETG 4, for example, refines the understanding of the problems faced by individuals in the management of their working and family lives. Interestingly, the document also provides examples of diagnostic tools used by DPs (e.g. a survey by a French DP of 800 families in French rural areas of their preferred choices of childcare) and of their results.

Diagnoses are also about the problems faced in tackling discrimination in the labour market, e.g. regarding the implementation of existing and new policy, on the type of stakeholders involved etc. In particular, in the working group on people with disabilities, within ETG 1, a questionnaire was sent to 83 DPs that National Support Structures (NSSs) and Managing Authorities (MAs) had indicated as having a focus on working with people with disabilities, which yielded 24 responses. This questionnaire had a section on “Barriers confronted by DPs in getting people with disabilities into sustainable employment”.

The working group on ethnic minorities, within ETG 1, plans to examine, on the basis of the experience of EQUAL DPs, the ways in which the two Commission directives on discrimination are being implemented and the obstacles faced. This diagnosis and the strategies of DPs to implement the Directives are to be described in a paper. However, the audience for that paper and the ways of disseminating this information have not been identified yet. Another example is provided by the working group on trade unions, again within ETG 1, which seeks to identify the obstacles to active trade union involvement in promoting diversity and fighting discrimination in the workplace, and to build on DP actions for the design of strategies to help overcome these obstacles.

Despite these interesting examples, diagnosis as such has generally given rise to little systematic elaboration at the European level, perhaps also because the diagnostic part of DP work has proved less rich than expected. In our view, the identification of quality diagnoses and diagnosis tools, and the capitalisation of their results should be an activity of ETGs in its own right. Diagnoses are of course also a key basis for the development of innovation at the European level.

6.3.1.2. Thematic reviews

Many working groups are in the process of writing up papers on specific issues, contextualising these issues and bringing to the fore DP experiences as illustrations of how the issues can be tackled. The most systematic and advanced example of such product is the *“Living document”* being jointly prepared by the three working groups of ETG 4 (Equal Opportunities). This document maps out the DP experiences gathered from the members of the group against a series of issues and problems identified in the implementation of reconciliation and desegregation (e.g., for childcare: the question of the extent to which professionalised childcare is desirable; gaps in provision; precarious employment and insecurity; staff training etc..)⁹⁴. The document also provides information on legislative and institutional developments in the Member States. In short, it provides a sort of panorama on pending problems, the current frameworks for dealing with these problems, and the concrete solutions brought by DPs. “Promising practice” is thus located within a context (this is especially true of the part on Reconciliation), which makes it much more meaningful, easy to grasp and interesting, than when it is presented on a case by case basis.

Although it is, even at this incomplete stage, a valuable document, its focus on EQUAL experience only may limit its ambition to provide a “European Model of Comprehensive Approaches to Equal Opportunities⁹⁵”. As such, it is helpful for mainstreaming, both at the European and national levels, although with the limit that no proper assessment of results has been carried out yet. However, if the document was to give rise to a publication for the general public, and especially for practitioners, which in our view it has the potential to do, it may be useful to coordinate with the Gender Equality programmes and other programmes with Equal Opportunity measures in order to draw them into the exercise.

Another extremely interesting example of thematic review is the background study written up in ETG5 (Asylum Seekers) on “Education and training ‘packages’ and ‘modules’ relevant to both integration in the host country and reintegration in the country of origin⁹⁶”. It consists of a rather comprehensive

- “literature review of existing research and studies at EU level and outside the Union on training tools (i.e. modules and packages) for asylum seekers” (the Annex includes the references and a short content description);
- “mapping of national and EU policy and legislative developments in the field of education and training and presenting in a tabular format, a summary of relevant developments per Member State and at EU level;
- and identifies relevant EQUAL AS activities which focus on the development, adaptation and/or transfer of education and training packages and modules for asylum seekers, including, for each DP/TCA, a short description on the type and nature of their relevant activities”.

This work could easily develop into a publication once more results are available from the EQUAL projects and they can thus be integrated in the review of available resources. It may even form the basis for a European resource centre on education and training initiatives for asylum seekers or be included in such a resource centre in case there is already one.

⁹⁴ The part on “transversal issues” is different in character and in purpose . It is analysed below, in “Guides, models and vademecums”.

⁹⁵ Email interview with thematic expert.

⁹⁶ Available on CIRCA. Undated.

More generally, the background documents developed in the ETGs for the Barcelona conference and enriched since then, especially thanks to the work of thematic experts, form a useful basis to design such thematic reviews in other fields as well. Their current focus on the policy context to EQUAL initiatives could usefully be complemented with a more diagnostic part on the specific discriminations and inequalities in their thematic area.

6.3.1.3. Key messages

In the last quarter of 2003, and more generally in the course of their work, ETG working groups have come up with key messages derived from the practical experience of DPs. These messages thus express the “voice” of DPs, and are, in our point of view, an important achievement of ETGs and one which should be followed up. We have tried to identify what these messages are, looking at various sources⁹⁷. The results of this exercise are presented in Annex.

As is clear from reading this list, it would be useful to identify the audience for each one of these messages. It would be especially important to distinguish the policy messages from the rest and perhaps build on these to design a policy document, which could be disseminated at the European and national level (a possible title: “Policies to fight discrimination and inequalities in the labour market. Key messages from EQUAL partnerships”). This could take place in parallel with the development of specific strategies and products by each ETG working group.

Some of these messages have been taken up in the Second Commission Communication on EQUAL, although the bulk of the lessons presented seem to have been drawn from the “promising practice” fiches gathered by the Commission for this purpose.

6.3.1.4. Awareness raising in mainstream and dedicated events

The working group on people with disabilities (ETG1) was invited to make a short presentation in the closing event of the European Year of People with Disabilities. Their communication was to reflect the messages related to employers, integration services and empowerment and the practical experience of DPs represented on the Working Group or those that had replied to the questionnaire. ETG4 also took part.

The ETG Entrepreneurship for all (ETG2) will be present in the European Employment Week, in April 2004. The working group “Creating an entrepreneurial culture” further decided to raise awareness of the employment opportunities offered by entrepreneurial activities of and for disadvantaged groups, e.g. by organising an Entrepreneurship for All Week, as a “*focal period for conveying the innovative approaches EQUAL has tested and validated, and the resulting policy conclusions and messages*”. It was suggested that this proposed week at European level would be part of the broader Entrepreneurship Week which the Enterprise DG is developing⁹⁸.

The Lifelong Learning working group (ETG3) will take part in a conference on validation of learning, organised in France with the participation of DG Education and Culture⁹⁹.

Participation in mainstream events is especially useful to contribute the specific EQUAL perspective on labour market discrimination in events so as to reinforce awareness raising on the needs of particularly marginalised groups.

⁹⁷ There is no clear dedicated file in the EQUAL extranet and messages do not necessarily appear as such.

⁹⁸ Report to Entrepreneurship for All Liaison Group. Outcomes of the workshops 8-10. October 2003.

⁹⁹ EQUAL @ Work. Lessons to be drawn from the 2003 work programme. 01.12.2003.

One example of dedicated events is provided by the working group on Age Management (ETG3), which intends to organise a conference in France, “showcasing the promising and good practice. The aim is also to discuss and refine the lessons for the development of age management policies – reactive and preventative – both at European and national level”¹⁰⁰.

6.3.1.5. European communication tools

The working group “Partnership and public procurement” (ETG 2) proposes to create a “European web portal giving access to social enterprise resource banks in participating countries (three or more). The aim is that public procurement officers, customers of social enterprises, decision-makers and society generally should understand the concept of social enterprises and of the social economy. The resource banks would include collections of stories illustrating social enterprise, promotional packs for social enterprises to use with their customers, and a European social enterprise award linking into the proposed Entrepreneurship Week. The portal aims to be self-financing from 2006 onwards”¹⁰¹.

The ETG3 Steering Group strongly relates mainstreaming with the capacity to engage the media. The aim is thus to produce media toolkits “tailored to the policy issues and lessons from EQUAL” that relate to Lifelong Learning and age management, targeting the relevant European and national media and the specialist press¹⁰².

Such tools, especially the resource bank, can be seen as a key contribution to the sustainability of EQUAL results at the European level.

6.3.1.6. European benchmarks and models

The working group “Tailoring business services to real needs” (ETG 2) plans to develop three products: an EU-wide *quality guidelines or a benchmark for business support services*, which would take account of the needs of disadvantaged groups, a *recognised benchmark for business adviser competencies* and *evaluation tools for business services*. These tools would be designed so as to ensure support to “diversity and inclusion”¹⁰³.

The working group “Partnership and public procurement” (ETG 2) has asked for resources to develop a pilot project (which would involve several DPs as well as relevant European social economy actors and Commission DGs) for the design of a model of “community-based procurement”.

The working group “Quality and Support services” (ETG 2) is looking to rationalise somewhat social auditing, by carrying out a survey of existing tools, providing recommendations on successful social audit tools and common benchmarking of performance and producing a common operational definition of indicators and a common certification and audit tool.

In addition to harnessing local innovations at the European level, at a more ambitious level perhaps than what can be achieved in transnational partnerships, such endeavours are likely to allow for the formation or consolidation of European networks on specific themes.

¹⁰⁰ EQUAL @ Work. Lessons to be drawn from the 2003 work programme. 01.12.2003.

¹⁰¹ Report to Entrepreneurship for All Liaison Group. Outcomes of the workshops 8-10. October 2003.

¹⁰² EQUAL @ Work. Lessons to be drawn from the 2003 work programme. 01.12.2003.

¹⁰³ Report to Entrepreneurship for All Liaison Group. Outcomes of the workshops 8-10. October 2003.

6.3.1.7. European guidelines and vademecums

The working group “Making start-up finance more accessible” (ETG 2) has planned to design guidelines for policy-makers and business finance professionals on how to ensure that start-up finance reaches the people who really need it, especially proposing “a set of norms what type of organisation a microfinance organisation should ideally be”. The group will also produce a vademecum on how to use the Structural Funds to establish effective schemes to support self-employment and micro-firms, and to make finance more accessible to those facing discrimination in the labour market¹⁰⁴.

The working group “Networking” (ETG 1) has planned to design a practical toolkit on the techniques and benefits of networking based on the experience of EQUAL DPs, TPs and NTGs.

6.3.1.8. Inputs in European normative and legislative work

The working group “Partnership and public procurement” (ETG 2) is planning to make proposals to the Spring Council meeting which will consider the revised Public Procurement Directives. “The aim is to allow social and environmental criteria to be taken into account in selecting bidders, not only in specifying service delivery standards. It will also attempt to have a notion of “public-social partnership” included in the green paper on public-private partnerships that the Commission proposes to publish in mid-2004¹⁰⁵.

This is a line of action which could usefully be pursued in more ETGs – to go beyond the identification of relevant policy initiatives for the targeting of messages and products, and actually contribute to the European policy process. This is highly consistent with the ETG role as voice of the DPs.

6.3.2. Impact so far

According to our interviews with officials of DG Employment and Social Affairs and with one official of DG Justice and Home Affairs (on the question of asylum seekers), EQUAL is viewed as a well-structured and creative instrument, although a very complex one.

However, whilst the fact that it is still early days is acknowledged, there are concerns that even more efforts should be made if EQUAL is to have a real impact. Although there is communication between the EQUAL team and the other directorates and units of DG Employment and Social Affairs (and Justice and Home Affairs), this communication is mainly informative and not strategic. Generally, the main concern so far appears to have been to avoid overlaps between EQUAL and other instruments and to explain European policy to EQUAL participants. The December 2003 Communication on EQUAL may have helped redress this perception.

¹⁰⁴ Report to Entrepreneurship for All Liaison Group. Outcomes of the workshops 8-10. October 2003.

¹⁰⁵ Report to Entrepreneurship for All Liaison Group. Outcomes of the workshops 8-10. October 2003.

Our review of the different policy processes and programmes related to EQUAL leads us to identifying the following obstacles to EQUAL's influence on policy:

- Work overload in the Commission;
- Strategic disjunctions: there were expectations in DG Employment services that EQUAL would concentrate on the gaps and lacks pointed out in the Joint Reports on Employment and Social Inclusion, but the perception is that this has not been sufficiently the case, in part for a structural problem which is the difference in the time frame of EQUAL and the Employment and Social Inclusion processes, and now because of the difference between the pillar structure of EQUAL and the new framework for the European Employment Strategy. There is also an awareness that it might be difficult for a programme such as EQUAL, which depends on existing project promoters and is of a limited scale, to build capacity in areas where Member States are still weak (e.g. on gender equality). However there is an expectation that EQUAL might contribute directly to the policy processes by pointing out the difficulties of implementation of policy on the ground and innovative methods to tackle these difficulties (This is precisely the approach taken in some ETGs);
- And organisational disjunctions: in order for good practice to be pointed out in the Joint Employment report and in the Joint report on inclusion, they have to be pointed out in the National Action Plans (NAPs). The Commission is thus encouraging ESF monitoring committees in the Member States to send good practice to the national services dealing with NAPs, but this strategy meets sometimes with problems of inter-department co-ordination. As a result, some EQUAL DPs are mentioned here and there as illustrations in the NAPs but this does not appear yet as systematic. The link between ESF and the NAPs is likely to be better in the accession countries, which have had to produce inclusion « memoranda » at the same time as they had to submit their structural funds bids.

Similarly, in the European Commission (DG Employment and Social Affairs), the fact that the EQUAL team is located in a different directorate (B) from that of the EES (A), Social Inclusion (E) and Anti-Discrimination (D) may not facilitate joint strategic planning, although Directors meet once a week. EQUAL has not been discussed so far in the Employment Committee, and has been addressed very little in the ESF Committee.

However, our interviews have shown a genuine willingness of Commission officials to support mainstreaming of EQUAL results, which could be capitalised through systematic meetings between ETG co-ordinators and the EQUAL team and relevant Commission units, to review all the possibilities for strategic linkages. Rather than the production of individual fiches of good practice, which are nonetheless useful for visibility, the production of aggregated and targeted results and messages appears particularly suited for policy mainstreaming. This is what ETGs aim at doing but strategic co-ordination with European policies and programmes could be improved.

6.4. Conclusions

- The preparation for the identification of good practice as such is still at an early stage in the ETGs and is very dependent on the DP composition of the working groups.
- Established European processes for the selection of good practice, such as the Peer Review for the European Employment Strategy, have defined selection criteria including policy relevance, level of concretion, demonstrated and reliable results and transfer potential. In the case of the ETGs, it is quite possible that the participative, bottom-up approach which has prevailed so far clashed with a selection procedure based on such criteria:

- First, because a thorough assessment is required to move from promising to good practice, and it is unclear that this assessment is best carried out by DPs themselves – nor, probably, is it fair to require it from them;
 - Secondly, because the credibility, reliability and effectiveness of the results of the programme as a whole demand that the number of good practice identified at the European and cross-national level be limited and targeted, which contrasts with the high number of DPs involved in the ETGs.
- On the other hand, in September 2003, the European Commission (« EQUAL team »), launched a call for Member States to identify «promising practices » in view of the preparation of the second Commission communication on EQUAL. The call, which took place in two stages, finally gave rise to the compilation of 262 “fiches”, i.e. 19% of the total number of DPs in Action 2. The fiches confirm that the EQUAL principles (particularly partnership and empowerment) are seen as the main source of effectiveness and innovation. However, as a result of a lack of guidance, the number of fiches is probably too high, and the fiches vary greatly in quality and reliability, as only a minority of the fiches gathered support their claims to effectiveness or innovation with preliminary evidence.
 - The limited results of both mechanisms set up so far for the identification of good practice at the European level lead us to suggest that there is a need for designing a clear strategy for selecting DP, TP, NTG or ETG practices and products, on the basis of the following criteria:
 - Limited in number and targeted to the guidelines of the new EES;
 - Evidence of new models for fighting labour market discrimination, bringing added value to the stock of European experience;
 - Based on a thorough diagnosis.

The preselection for assessment could take place in the ETG liaison groups but should involve the Commission officials working on the EES guidelines (and possibly others). Assessment could be carried out by independent experts. A form of Peer Review by Managing Authorities could also be envisaged.

- EQUAL production at the European level does not limit itself to “case studies” and the identification of promising practice. In many ways, this seems to be a correct strategy. In particular, ETGs have produced or are in the process of producing:
 - Diagnoses of discrimination in the labour market and of the difficulties currently faced in tackling discrimination;
 - Thematic reviews;
 - Key messages to policy makers and other European actors;
 - Awareness raising in mainstream events;
 - European communication tools, such as web pages and resource banks
 - European benchmarks, models, guidelines and vademecums,.
 - Inputs in European normative and legislative work.
- All of these expected results are key for mainstreaming at the European level: European communication tools, for example, secure some sustainability for the EQUAL outcomes; European benchmarks are useful for the harnessing of local innovation and for the formation or consolidation of European networks.
- We would particularly emphasise the need to further develop the diagnosis activity, as the identification of quality diagnoses and diagnosis tools, and the capitalisation of their results is a key basis for the development of innovation at the European level; and the inputs into normative and legislative work at the European level.

- It is still early to assess the impact of EQUAL on the European policy processes and programmes. However, it seems that more efforts should be made if EQUAL is to have a real impact. Commission officials highlight that it is not clear that the production of good practice by a small-scaled programme such as EQUAL is a sufficient tool for achieving mainstreaming. This confirms that the current dominant orientation of ETGs towards the production of aggregated and targeted results and messages may be the correct one, although strategic co-ordination with European policies and programmes could be improved.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Recommendations made by national evaluators

Leaving aside specific recommendations linked to the context of each Member State, we would like to draw the attention to common recommendations on programme management pointed out by the national evaluators in their Mid Term evaluation reports.

a) During the preparation and the launching

- Reinforce the quality and the relevance of the national and/or regional diagnosis on discrimination and inequalities : trends of evolution, targets groups affected, main factors underpinning discrimination, existing resources and actors for combating discrimination, priorities and strategies etc.
- Improve and intensify communication to potential applicants from targets groups and /or remote areas.

b) During Action 1

- In order to avoid interference with Actions 2 activities, the DPs should improve the preparation and the production of a clear workplan providing:
 - An in-depth diagnosis of the issues to be tackled,
 - A precise and clear definition of actions,
 - Formal objectives,
 - Milestones and deadlines,
 - A description of the nature and the degree of commitment and involvement of the different partners,
 - Arrangements for staff and premises,
 - Contractual arrangements and match funding.
- The National and/or Regional Support Structure should provide early support and visits to the DPs. Support should be methodological and not only administrative.

c) During Action 2

- Improve the frequency and the quality of the common activity : more transversal meetings for all DP partners.
- Encourage the National Thematic Groups (NTGs) and the Support Structures to keep the DPs informed of relevant policy developments.

d) During Action 3

- Emphasise the attention of all stakeholders (DPs, Managing Authorities, NTGs, NSSs) on the co-ordination of mainstreaming activities.

7.2. Recommendations of the EU Evaluator

For the 2nd call of EQUAL our main recommendations are:

7.2.1. In terms of appropriateness of strategies:

- Encourage Member States to carry out a more in-depth analysis of inequalities and discrimination at CIP level and DP level
- Encourage Member States to improve the analysis of spatial inequalities in the CIPs
- Encourage, within the possibilities of the ESF regulations, more initiatives in the areas of protection against unemployment, quality of employment and direct job creation.
- Promote more demand oriented actions, i.e. actions aimed at employers (notably in the Adaptability pillar).

7.2.2. In terms of management and implementation systems of EQUAL:

- Reinforce the quality and the relevance of diagnoses on discrimination and inequalities at CIP level and at DP level: trends of evolution, targets groups affected, main factors underpinning the dynamics, existing resources and actors for combating discrimination, priorities and strategies.
- Readjust or confirm the selection procedure by :
 - Either maintaining 6 months for Action 1 or reducing Action 1 to 4 months with a greater level of details required at DP proposal stage,
 - Indicating to Member States that the realised thematic spread should be in range with the initially planned spread,
 - Excluding from the selection process those stakeholders who are already involved as actors in DPs in order to prevent conflicts of interests.
- Improve the guidance given by Managing Authorities and National Support Structures to:
 - DPs to finalise their strategies, to identify clear target groups during Action 1 and to promote direct involvement of target groups and individuals,
 - Lead partners to organise briefing sessions with their partners during Action 1 to explain the administrative obligations,
 - Non-traditional partners (SMEs and small NGOs) to improve their understanding of the EQUAL “specialised language”(e.g. empowerment, mainstreaming).
- Reinforce the common understanding of the key principles, especially “empowerment”, “innovation” and “mainstreaming”.
- Reinforce the monitoring of the actions/DPs dealing with employment stability and the reduction of inequalities and discrimination.
- Encourage Member States to review the reliability and user-friendliness of their national monitoring systems.

7.2.3. In terms of national and European networking and impact:

- Clarify and reinforce guidance to DPs for Action 3 ; in particular ensure that DPs go beyond traditional dissemination activities and really engage in horizontal and vertical mainstreaming ;
- Improve and systematise the links between National Thematic Groups and European Thematic Groups;
- Improve the organisation and the role of European Thematic Groups by :
 - Paying particular attention to the composition and size of the different groups;
 - Rationalising the objectives of the working groups, focusing on giving a voice to DPs and encouraging collective production rather than the selection of good practice;
 - Clarifying the role of DPs in the ETG working groups and ensure that there is adequate representation of the broader DP community to the extent that this is relevant to the issues addressed ;
 - Promoting the participation of policy stakeholders from accession countries in the ETGs ;
 - Accelerating the mainstreaming activity of ETGs, in particular by promoting the involvement of non-EQUAL policy stakeholders ;
 - Setting up a strategy for the identification of good practice at the European and cross-national level, possibly detached from the work of the ETG working groups;
 - Implementing meetings between ETG steering groups, EQUAL team and other DGs, directorates and units of the European Commission in order to identify and systematically take up all the possible strategic links between EQUAL and European policies and processes.
- Plan the presentation of first EQUAL results in the Employment Committee and in the ESF Committee.

7.2.4. In terms of evaluation

- Define and use more harmonised quantitative and qualitative evaluation indicators.
- Encourage the use of case study methodologies and the testing of the generalisation potential of their results through surveys.

8. NEXT STEPS

From March 2004 to December 2004 our evaluation will focus on Phase 3 of the EU evaluation¹⁰⁶. Most of our assessments will deal with the outcomes of transnational co-operation, good practice, networking and mainstreaming.

We will deliver a second interim report which should be submitted to the European Commission in December 2004.

More precisely we will :

- **Conduct a first round of case studies** for the analysis of transnationality and its contribution to innovation and mainstreaming. The case study work will be organised by our co-ordination team and our National correspondents will be in charge of interviews of TCA members in their own country. The work will take place from April to July 2004 and will include:
 - Desk research,
 - Construction of a representative sample of 30 TCAs on the basis of the data provided by the ECDB¹⁰⁷ and after a check of DPs already studied by the national evaluators,
 - Production of a short initial questionnaire to be sent to the secretaries of the 30 TCAs,
 - Production of guidelines for in-depth semi-directive interviews with the person more in charge of co-ordinating transnationality in each DP and a few other less active members,
 - Organisation of focus groups with beneficiaries for the specific assessment of their participation in transnational co-operation.
- **Prepare and implement an Evaluation Seminar** on innovation and impact, open to the national evaluators and Managing Authorities (end of April 2004);
- **Participate in the European Thematic Group meetings** and analyse their production (from March to December 2004, according to date of events);
- **Analyse the second national interim reports** produced by national evaluators (from October to December 2004, depending on national report delivery);
- **Write up and deliver our Second EU interim report** (December 2004).

¹⁰⁶ See "The Revised Workplan of EU wide evaluation of Equal" presented on 19 September 2003 to the Evaluation Unit.

¹⁰⁷ The sample will be drawn on the basis of the following criteria : the theme of the TCAs , the number of DPs involved in the TCAs, the geographical distribution of the DPs involved in TCAs