COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 30.12.2003
COM(2003) 840 final

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

establishing the guidelines for the second round of the Community Initiative EQUAL concerning
transnational co-operation to promote new means of combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities in connection with the labour market

"Free movement of good ideas"

EN   EN

1. INTRODUCTION

EQUAL forms part of the European Union strategy to create more and better jobs and to make sure that no one is denied access to these jobs. As the Community Initiative of the European Social Fund, EQUAL is the learning platform that finds new ways of achieving the policy objectives of the European Employment Strategy and Social Inclusion Process. EQUAL differs from the mainstream European Social Fund programmes in that it is a laboratory to develop new ways of tackling discrimination and inequality in the labour market. EQUAL presents evidence of good practice for these innovative approaches, with an emphasis on active co-operation between Member States, thus ensuring that the most positive results are adopted and shared across Europe.

The final steps for enlargement of the European Union are currently in hand, and all ten future Member States will participate in the European Social Fund and EQUAL from 1st January 2004. EQUAL operates in two rounds, the second of which will be launched in 2004. This means that the second round of EQUAL will encompass the entire territory of the European Union and will include 27[1] Programmes.

The European Union has an integrated strategy to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Focusing on the labour market, EQUAL forms part of that strategy and supports efforts to fight discrimination on all of these grounds.

2. AIM OF THIS COMMUNICATION

The principles and architecture of EQUAL i.e. partnership with empowerment, transnationality, mainstreaming, innovation and thematic approach, have proven to be extremely effective in piloting holistic approaches to disadvantage and discrimination and therefore remain valid for the second round. This Communication illustrates some of the early results of EQUAL, pointing to promising practices which can already contribute new ways of tackling discrimination and inequality in the labour market. It also sets the scene for the second round of EQUAL, confirming the principles and architecture whilst simplifying the administrative implementation in order to enhance effectiveness.

3. PARTNERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT

At this early stage, the most visible success in EQUAL is partnership. The objective of partnership in EQUAL is to bring together actors who cooperate in a Development Partnership to develop an integrated approach to the multi dimensional problems of discrimination by pooling their efforts and resources in pursuit of innovative solutions to jointly defined problems and common goals.

This necessitates the involvement of a wide range of actors; where those involved in the implementation of activities should also take part in decision making; on the basis of a commonly agreed (and written) work programme; which includes partners from other Member States.

---

[1] Belgium and the United Kingdom have established two Community Initiative programmes.

EQUAL partnerships bring together very disparate groups, many of whom have not previously collaborated, combining skills and resources among a multiplicity of actors within society. This is confirmed by the spread of involvement of organisations, and it is particularly satisfying that one in three Development Partnerships are led by non governmental organisations.

	Legal Status of the Development Partnership managing partner		Legal Status of all partner organisations	
	No. of Development Partnership	*%*	No. of partners	*%*
Non-profit private organisation (including NGOs)	423	*33*	3,831	*28*
Public organisation	422	*33*	4,395	*32*
Private organisation	295	*23*	3,694	*27*
Semi-public organisation	72	*6*	563	*4*
Social Partners (Trade Union, Confederation)	40	*3*	880	*6*
Without legal status	22	*2*	321	*2*
Co-operative	11	*1*	133	*1*
Total	**1,285**	***100 %***	**13,817**	***100 %***

The composition of, and the cooperative work within, the Development Partnerships are important factors of success, and when combined with active participation by people exposed to discrimination or disadvantaged due to inequalities, has brought a new dynamic to partnerships. Experience from the earlier Community Initiatives showed that success depended heavily on the working relationship between partners. But such a relationship needs time to develop. Thus in EQUAL the first phase – *action 1* – specifically provides time and resource for this dialogue. It has proven to be of the outmost importance, allowing for reflection about prior experiences especially in other Member States, identification of and agreement with transnational partners, potential contributions from different groups, analysis of strengths and weaknesses, assessment of relevant linkages to on-going (local, regional, national) change processes and new possibilities for networking. On the basis of the trust and dialogue built between partners during *action 1*, objectives were clarified as well as the different roles, responsibilities and methods for enhancing participation of the different partners.

The experience gained in the first round of EQUAL has shown how important it is that Development Partnership initiators are sufficiently resourced, both in terms of funding, time and tools, to discuss and agree on a common diagnosis of the problem, and on a coherent strategy for developing and testing innovative approaches. Establishing effective partnerships means building trust with potential partners, especially transnational ones (including travelling to other Member States) and getting their commitment. It is also clear that the dynamic generated by this dialogue and the implementation of an agreed work programme should not be suspended due to prolonged administrative procedures in the passage from *action 1* to *action 2* (implementation of the work programme). Thus in the second round of EQUAL, the duration of *action 1* will be configured to support this essential dialogue and the

break in activity between *action 1* and *action 2* will be avoided by the introduction of a confirmation step for *action 2* providing for a continuous flow of activity by the Development Partnership.

3.1.   Good governance

Good governance requires the active participation of all interested stakeholders, not only to increase effectiveness of policy development and implementation, but also to enhance and improve governance of the process, thereby contributing to a better mainstreaming of the outputs of EQUAL into policy at national and European level.

The architecture of EQUAL has integrated essential features good governance as it addresses cross-cutting policy issues, and works across and beyond institutional boundaries. As an innovative programme, EQUAL questions established ways of dealing with situations and encourages new and creative ideas. Learning is based on experience of what works and what does not, through systematic evaluation and using sound evidence for assessing and implementing policy and delivery alternatives whilst also learning from peers and taking full account of national and European experience.

In EQUAL, many of the bodies that can use its outcomes and products are inside the Initiative, as was largely the case in ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT[2]. However, due to the preparatory phase, EQUAL Development Partnerships now include a wider range of partners and "potential user" bodies such as employers' organisations, training or public employment bodies or economic development agencies in their partnerships and their activities. Not only is the partnership wider, but all key stakeholders, especially the people and organisations directly or indirectly affected by discrimination and inequality, are included throughout the whole development and mainstreaming process.

Nevertheless, to ensure that innovations are implemented in a sustainable way, even after EQUAL funding ceases, it is necessary that the networks created continue to exist in some way, in order to support the integration of innovation into policies at local, regional, national and European level. Thus the scope of mainstreaming will be widened in the second round of EQUAL (see Mainstreaming).

4.   THEMATIC APPROACH

4.1.   Support to European Employment Strategy and Social Inclusion Process

In order to contribute innovative approaches to labour market policies, the first round of EQUAL operated a number of thematic fields, defined in the context of the four pillars of the employment strategy - measures and priorities of the programmes respectively. Since then, the European Employment Strategy (EES) has been revised placing emphasis on objectives, priorities and targets whilst still retaining the overarching objective for the next decade of becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.

The promotion of social cohesion is an essential element in this global strategy. In the Social Inclusion Process, applying the open method of coordination to the fight against social exclusion allows for both coherence and diversity of action at national level. Policies in pursuit of the objective of fighting social exclusion and poverty vary in nature, and in their

---

2   ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT were Community Initiatives operated between 1994 and 1999.

implications for Member States and their target groups. EQUAL also contributes to the Social Inclusion Process by searching for new ways of tackling discrimination and inequality – major factors of exclusion.

Following consultation, Member States have agreed to retain the themes of EQUAL unchanged for the second round as they continue to support the overarching objectives of full employment, quality and productivity at work, cohesion and an inclusive labour market, and therefore continue to support both the Employment Strategy and Social Inclusion Process.

Thus the second round of EQUAL continues the thematic approach established in the first round with the objective of benefiting those subject to the main forms of discrimination (based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation) and inequality. Each thematic field is fully accessible to all such groups. In accordance with Article 1 of Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999[3] the promotion of equality between women and men is integral to all thematic fields as well as being targeted through specific actions.

Themes

- Facilitating access and return to the labour market for those who have difficulty in being integrated or re integrated into a labour market which must be open to all

- Combating racism and xenophobia in relation to the labour market

- Opening up the business creation process to all by providing the tools required for setting up in business and for the identification and exploitation of new possibilities for creating employment in urban and rural areas

- Strengthening the social economy (the third sector), in particular the services of interest to the community, with a focus on improving the quality of jobs

- Promoting lifelong learning and inclusive work practices which encourage the recruitment and retention of those suffering discrimination and inequality in connection with the labour market

- Supporting the adaptability of firms and employees to structural economic change and the use of information technology and other new technologies

- Reconciling family and professional life, as well as the re integration of men and women who have left the labour market, by developing more flexible and effective forms of work organisation and support services

- Reducing gender gaps and supporting job desegregation

- Supporting the social and vocational integration of Asylum Seekers.

In accordance with Article 7 (7) of Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999, the ESF contribution to EQUAL for the period 2004 to 2006 was adjusted at the end of 2003 to take account of the rate of indexation. For the existing Member States, Community Initiative programmes were adopted in 2001, and the selection of themes and associated funding for each Member State

---

3   Council Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 of 21 June 1999 laying down general provisions on the Structural Funds O. J. No. L 161/1 of 26.6.1999.

can be found in the EQUAL web site. The additional funding arising from price indexation will be attributed, pro rata, to these themes (measures) unless Member States propose an alternative allocation, with justification.

For Acceding Countries, draft Community Initiative Programmes for EQUAL will be adopted after the 1st May 2004. However as expenses are eligible from the 1st January 2004, the content of the draft Community Initiative Programmes will be stabilised also in January 2004, thus facilitating full participation by these countries in the second round of EQUAL. The Community Initiative Programmes for Accession Countries will concentrate on a limited number of selected themes, including at least a minimum level of action aimed at Asylum Seekers, and ensure complementarity with the European Social Fund programmes, especially Objective 1. As for the existing Member States, each Community Initiative Programme will include a gender perspective in the programming, implementing, monitoring and evaluating phases of EQUAL.

4.2.   Asylum Seekers

The preparation of a common policy on Asylum, including common European arrangements for Asylum is a constituent part of the European Union's objective of gradually creating an area of freedom, security and justice open to those who, forced by circumstances, legitimately seek protection in the European Union. The integration of refugees into the society of the country in which they are established is one of the objectives of the Geneva Convention and, to this end, the European Union supports the actions by the Member States intended to promote their social and economic integration, in so far as it contributes to economic and social cohesion. In addition to the measures supported by the Structural Funds and other Community measures in the field of education and vocational training, a European Refugee Fund was established, in 2000, which supports and encourages the efforts made by Member States in receiving and bearing the consequences of receiving refugees and displaced persons. With regard to Asylum Seekers and particularly the conditions for reception and access to Asylum procedures, actions under the ERF provides for infrastructure or services for accommodation, supply of material aid, health care, social assistance or help with administrative and judicial formalities, including legal assistance.

The inclusion of the Asylum Seekers theme in EQUAL at a time when the EU was moving to a common approach towards the reception of Asylum Seekers (as defined in the common minimum reception conditions Directive[4]) has enabled a greater understanding of the variations between Member States and the way in which the national policies affect the access of Asylum Seekers to the labour market and education and training. The transnational dialogue within the partnerships has enhanced learning at the practical and operational levels because of the similar challenges faced across the EU

Throughout the first round, the backdrop for the Asylum Seekers activity has been challenging, with media coverage of Asylum Seekers becoming increasingly hostile. However, at local level the work of the partnerships has demonstrated the benefits of a range of support options for Asylum Seekers from access to language training, through to education, vocational training, voluntary work, to employment in the open market. The benefits have been clear and include reductions in inactivity, reduced 'losses' of Asylum Seekers to the black economy and greater contributions to the local economy.

---

4   Directive on Common minimum conditions for reception of Asylum Seekers, adopted by the Council January 2003, implementation no later than 6.2.2005

Several countries enable Asylum Seekers a ready access to education, training resources and the labour market, and in the longer term there will be scope to compare the results of the partnerships operating within these countries, to those operating in countries where access is more limited. This evidence should help inform policy choices that will be made by Member States within the framework of the development of the Common European Asylum System.

Another area which is producing good results is 'skills audits' for Asylum Seekers. Several Development Partnerships are developing, testing and applying new models of assistance for the vocational integration of Asylum Seekers. These new models take account of informal, and 'traditional' skills, address the issue of accreditation of formal qualifications and identify detailed training needs. The process of undertaking skills audits has proven to be empowering for Asylum Seekers and useful to prospective employers and providers of training and voluntary work.

Even at this early stage, there are a number of useful orientations emerging from the work in Development Partnerships and other agencies:

- The importance of providing support that is relevant and of value to both integration in the Member states and reintegration in the country of origin or a third country. Several Development Partnerships stress this 'option neutral' approach.

- Providing support as soon as practicable after an application for Asylum is made.

- Working with employers: Development Partnerships have established various forms of partnerships with employers, such as a co-operation agreement with a business to get Asylum Seekers into employment once they have completed their training programme. The experiences have demonstrated that these partnerships require intensive liaison and awareness raising to engage the employer, but have good potential and results.

Several EQUAL Development Partnerships have acted as catalysts for new partnerships that have improved the co-operation and flow of information between organisations and practitioners working with Asylum Seekers at local and regional levels.

EQUAL provides a good opportunity for the new Member States to work with the existing Member States with a view to identifying good practice in relation to the social and vocational integration of Asylum Seekers. Whilst for the moment the actual number of Asylum Seekers in some new Member States is relatively low, the position could well change after accession. In the new Member, States the Asylum Seekers thematic activity could usefully focus on activity which:

- helps to develop the capacity of the NGO sector, and enable it to work effectively in partnership with the relevant authorities;

- helps to develop networks to share information between the NGO sector;

- improves the social integration of Asylum Seekers.

The work programme for the Asylum Seekers European Thematic Group will be adapted to ensure that it provides adequate practical support to the new Member States.

The challenge for the second round of EQUAL will be to validate these early results and provide a platform so that the lessons learned have the potential to reach a much wider

audience. EQUAL benefits from the adoption of the Directives related to the Common Asylum Seekers Policy which allows greater focussing of activities on Asylum Seekers as defined, rather than those benefiting from other forms of protection. This also facilitates the clarification of the relationship and complementarity between EQUAL and the European Refugee Fund at a national level. As both funding sources are likely to work with the same type of organisations and fund quite similar activities for different groups of people, Member States will need to clarify whether they encourage joint funding of activities, making clear the practical steps which will be taken to ensure that this can be managed, monitored and audited at a national level.

5. INNOVATION

EQUAL tests innovative approaches to policy delivery. These may be completely new approaches, or the transfer of elements from elsewhere, which increase the effectiveness of policy delivery. The second round of EQUAL will continue experimenting with new ideas and approaches. However, it is also important that the innovations in the first round of EQUAL should inform the second round and should be built upon. In addition, the specific needs of the labour market in Member States may not have been fully addressed in the first round, and/or good practice may have been developed in another Member State with similar situations of discrimination. Therefore, in the calls for proposals in the second round, specific innovation needs addressing relevant or emerging issues of the labour market, and a redesign of interfaces between institutions or public policies and actions, may be identified by Member States. Member States should also articulate policy demand and encourage Development Partnerships to experiment more in areas of protection against unemployment, quality of employment, and direct job creation.

6. PROMISING PRACTICES FROM EQUAL

The Development Partnerships established in EQUAL cover nine thematic areas. Even though work is on-going, and validated results cannot yet be drawn, the first round of EQUAL which started in 2001 can already illustrate promising practices of new ways to tackle discrimination and inequality.

6.1.1. Disability

EQUAL is enhancing employment opportunities for people with disabilities by a combined delivery of several training and consultancy services targeted at employers and designed to enable these to hire a person with a disability without any attendant concerns or administrative inconveniences. Concrete examples that can be mentioned are the accessibility services for recruitment and selection, disability awareness training, an environmental assessment designed to assist employers to ensure that the workplace is accessible in every possible way as well as an advice service on the financial incentives that can be obtained when hiring and retaining a person with a disability. EQUAL is also trying to make the reintegration process "demand-driven" rather than "supply-directed", which means that the client, i.e. the individual with a disability should be "empowered" to become the lead actor in the process through the best possible development of his/her skills and knowledge.

6.1.2. Retain workers longer in employment

Age Management has become a burning issue at national and European level. EQUAL is experimenting with two different and complementary approaches: a "reactive approach"

addressing immediate and current barriers for older workers - motivation, training, news ways of working - and a "preventative approach" like strategic planning, long-term human resources strategies and Age Management practices. There has been a noticeable impact already. The greatest source of motivation for older workers is the fact that they are noticed and considered to be part of the solution. A bottom-up perspective is used when "coaching sessions" in the company are being organised which allow workers to give their input to solutions and to come up with their own ideas. At the same time, the tacit knowledge of older workers is expressed through these sessions which raise awareness among mature employees that they are "culture carriers" for employers. The question is not solely one of engaging older workers in training. There is also an issue of supporting them - and the choices available to them - to be able to move into new areas of work that fit in with their changing priorities and maximise their skills and experience.

6.1.3. *Setting-up of business by unemployed or inactive persons*

There is strong evidence that business finance is not getting through to vulnerable groups and areas. EQUAL partnerships generally concentrate on the human capital side of the equation in entrepreneurship, dealing with both barriers in supply of finance (private and public financiers) and demand (their possible clients). New methods are under experiment for transforming informal activity, often by ethnic minorities or travellers, into formal businesses, by providing skills, status, income and autonomy. EQUAL is working alongside rotating funds financed by other sources (European Regional Development Fund or private sources) in order to build the financial capacity of community groups and individuals that face discrimination in the labour market.

6.1.4. *The contribution of immigrants to employment and economic growth*

Several Development Partnerships stressed the fact that one of the most convincing arguments for employers to promote diversity action was the experience of fellow employers who could "testify" to the positive effects of diversity strategies on their business (e.g. with regard to conflict management and stress reduction, fluctuation and absenteeism, corporate image and diversification of services). Successful approaches include the formulation of criteria and the setting up of award systems for "Equal Opportunity Employers", the organisation of employers' round tables at local level and the development of local employer networks. Showcasing of role models and the creation of structured opportunities for employers to learn from each other have led to the wider application of successful practice related to the employment of people from disadvantaged groups. There is also positive experience of transfer of good practice and of the use of role models provided by transnational partners.

6.1.5. *Promoting adaptability in the labour market*

Another challenge being tackled by EQUAL is how to promote access to learning "in the real word" where time and life pressures and a lack of experience of learning all act as barriers, especially for non-traditional learners. A difference can be made by using information and communication technologies in innovative locations, like supermarkets, to maximise uptake alternative learning techniques which transplant the family learning model into the workplace.

6.1.6. *Building blocks for lifelong learning strategies*

Barriers to entry and progression are faced by individuals with low levels of basic skills and/or no qualifications and who are not traditional learners. EQUAL is enabling a range of partners - and new partnerships- to make a difference by working together in new ways in a

local context. A range of municipalities have come together for the first time to deliver an intermediate system of education and training services tailored to learners.

6.1.7. *Gender segregation in sectors and occupations*

Through working with children and youth, EQUAL is addressing not only role sharing and vocational choices of future generations, but also the prevailing attitudinal patterns of the current parent generation. Innovative curricula for primary and secondary schools which challenge traditional gender roles and the subtle integration of the related stereotypes into science and technology have been tested. These schemes use household processes such as cooking, baking or ironing to explain certain phenomena in chemistry and physics. The project is succeeding as female pupils tend to get a better grasp of subjects taught and to consider science as a possible career choice.

6.1.8. *Share of care and household responsibilities*

To highlight the importance of active fatherhood, a media campaign "Men are taking the lead" has been used to kick-started a debate. Discussions were launched with a bombardment of media advertisements, supported by press conferences, an Internet site, a talk show (2 x 12 programmes) and many other events. The first message communicated through the TV commercials confronted men with the excuses they tend to make up in order to avoid taking up more responsibilities at home. After a while, the strategy was fine-tuned and concentrated on motivation and inspiration than on provocation. The second wave of messages also addressed the need for women to learn to let go of their "household and care monopoly" and of their strong beliefs about how things should be done by recognising men's ways of caring for children or of managing in the household. In a joint approach with large companies, NGOs and with the country's top football team, EQUAL is organising activities to let fathers experience the fun and satisfaction they can gain when spending quality time with their kids and the difference this can make in the lives of their children and female partners.

6.1.9. *Corporate Social Responsibility*

Small enterprises do not have extensive human resource structures and consequently approaches to diversity that draw on Corporate Social Responsibility tend to be less attractive and less relevant to them. EQUAL is searching for new ways of motivating them to play an active role in the integration of disadvantaged groups. Other types of action, such as supported employment and assistance from intermediary agents, are being tested and positive results have been achieved through personal face-to-face contact with employers from small enterprises and through providing sustainable support and services (e.g. training programmes, mentoring, case management and job profiling and matching) that enable individual small and medium sized enterprises to cope with issues or problems related to their situation related to the employment of people with special needs.

6.1.10. *Re-integration to combat exclusion*

The preventive and active approach to the unemployed consolidated with the objective of minimising entry into long-term unemployment leads to the guiding principle of *Making the right offer to the right person at the right time.* EQUAL is working in prisons with the aim of assessing and validating existing skills and feeding this into the mainstream training and reintegration practices. Too often ex-prisoners are left on their own once released. With low self-esteem and often low levels of education, the chances of finding a job are poor with the consequent risk of a return to illegal practices. Discrimination on the labour market is high with many employers reluctant to hire an ex-prisoner. EQUAL is developing the assessment

of the competencies of (ex) prisoners and the standardisation of tools, training the trainers with meetings organised to exchange experiences (a guide/vademecum with practical information and recommendations will be developed), and using the existing channels of communication of the public employment services in order to raise awareness of employers. The partnership is wide including social partners, educational institutes, public employment services, Ministries of Justice as well as interest groups. Efforts are not limited to training however, as the reintegration of ex-prisoners is also essential by including institutions concerned with the reintegration of ex-prisoners in society in the partnership.

6.1.11. Social Economy to create more jobs and enhance their quality

EQUAL is testing the usability of franchising in the social economy. A small social co-operative which has operated a hotel for ten years, which is a success not only economically but also in the way it includes disadvantaged workers and imparts professional skills, has been taken as a business model. EQUAL is enabling the other disadvantaged groups in other Member States to pilot this business idea, and its development process. The approach can also be extended into new business fields. This work could have a structuring effect in that at the end of the programme there would be a European franchising structure owned by social economy actors.

7. RESPONSE TO EMERGING CHALLENGES

Whilst the thematic approach remains stable, EQUAL will nonetheless address emerging challenges in the second round.

Enlargement will impact significantly on EQUAL. Not only does it widen the geographic scope of coverage and increase the number of citizens who can benefit, enlargement also increases the number of programmes from 17 to 27. Thus the co-ordination of the programme, particularly from the perspective of transnationality and mainstreaming becomes all the more important.

7.1. Roma people

Enlargement to 25 countries will include millions more Roma thus making them the largest ethnic minority group in the European Union.

The poverty, exclusion and discrimination faced by the Roma people is a challenge, and an issue of concern, for all Member States. Existing Member States have developed policies and programmes to support and integrate the Roma people already living in the Union. But with enlargement, these challenges will confront the Union on a much larger scale.

The European Union has supported actions to assist the Roma for more than a decade. Through the pre-accession PHARE programme, Hungary and the Czech Republic already participated in EQUAL in the first round. Some positive results have already been achieved in the Development Partnerships which focus on the Roma, as the proportion of women and young persons (18-25 years) is higher than in the case of other, traditionally organised, programmes; participants come from small settlements from the countryside; the presence of participants with multiple disadvantages in the programme is good (e.g. under-educated Roma women coming from villages). A personal approach has been created to ensure a sense of ownership of the programme. During the training period attention is paid to communication training, how to find suitable jobs, social support and business studies. The Local Government of the Gipsy Minority and Roma Civil Organizations are partners in Development

Partnerships and encourage participation in the project whilst also arranging for potential employer and employee to make contact, to build together an integratived and inclusive approach of employment.

However the criteria of success – as seen by the Roma people themselves – may change in this new dynamic. Thus both Roma communities and other sections of society will have to play an active role in efforts to build a more inclusive Europe. As a source of innovation, EQUAL plays an important role in finding ways to tackle discrimination and inequality, and is thus relevant for the Roma people.

Therefore in the second round of EQUAL, support for the Roma people will be particularly sought in all thematic fields.

7.2. Victims of trafficking

Up to half a million women and children are being trafficked into Western Europe each year. The trade is international, well organised and growing. One CIA report estimates that traffickers make up to a quarter of a million dollars with one woman trafficked and retrafficked. They are often bought and sold into forced prostitution; to domestic labour as servants; or forced into sham 'marriages' where they are held as prisoners.

Even if victims manage to escape from the trafficker, or report to the authorities, women can find themselves facing further trauma. The cruel reality is that trafficked persons may be treated as illegal migrants and criminals. They face arrest, detention or expulsion. So the victims are further victimised.

The European Council has called on Member States to use the available tools to support victims of trafficking, in particular EQUAL. Action within the European Union is being developed taking a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach towards preventing and combating these phenomena. In terms of financial support, Community programmes are an important tool for strengthening policies, practices and cooperation in the EU and between EU Member States and accession countries in the fight against human trafficking. In particular the Structural Funds (ESF and ERDF) can financially support actions to provide assistance to victims, as well as undertaking prevention and facilitating the social and economic integration of victims of human trafficking. In particular, the Council invited[5] the Commission and the Member States to use the financial resources of the Community Initiative EQUAL to promote, in accordance with national law, the social and vocational integration of its beneficiaries, to make it possible for them to return safely to their countries of origin or to receive adequate protection in their host countries.

Therefore in the second round of EQUAL, support for victims of trafficking will be particularly sought in all thematic fields.

8. TRANSNATIONAL CO OPERATION

Co-operation across Member States is a fundamental aspect of EQUAL and the experience gained under the previous programmes as well as the first round of EQUAL shows that

---

5   Council Resolution on initiatives to combat trafficking in human beings, in particular women, 20th October 2003, 13056/03

considerable policy innovation can be achieved through transnational collaboration. Transnational co-operation under EQUAL is working well, and has already delivered

- a better insight into the nature and forms of discrimination, inequality, and labour market exclusion;

- improved strategies and actions in the light of experience in other Member States (at national as well as at Development Partnership level);

- benchmark strategies and actions across several Member States;

- credibility to the work carried out by Development Partnership as far as opinion leaders and decision-makers are concerned.

In EQUAL, transnational co-operation manifests itself at a number of levels.

8.1.   Between Development Partnerships

Transnational co-operation between Development Partnerships is intrinsic to the implementation of EQUAL and binds together Development Partnerships from several Member States though their common work programme. To achieve results, transnational co-operation requires sharing a common approach to tackling specific problems, developing similar and/or complementary strategies, approaches and objectives, and agreeing on priorities for joint action. Development Partnerships base their common work on their knowledge and experience. The joint activities are organised in such a way as to achieve a significant added value for the strategies and work plans of each Development Partnership.

However finding suitable partners in other Member States can be a challenge. The first round of EQUAL illustrated the absolute necessity of setting up a 'transnationality window' i.e. a commonly agreed date by which all Managing Authorities – having completed the single selection procedure - would complete the EQUAL Common Data Base (ECDB) with data on Development Partnerships, in order to give all Development Partnerships an equal chance to find transnational partners. Member States have agreed that for the second Round of EQUAL this transnationality window would open on the 1st January 2005.

It is expected that many Development Partnerships will quickly find partners once the 'window' is open and establish common work programmes thus allowing them to move forward to the first milestone. For Development Partnerships where it is more difficult to identify partners, the Commission will support them through a clearing house process in collaboration with Managing Authority concerned.

As transnational co-operation is an integral part of the activity of the Development Partnership, the work programme cannot be complete without this element. This is why, in the first round, the draft Development Partnership Agreement and the Transnational Co-operation Agreement each had to be submitted at the end of *action 1*. This imposes a discipline both on the Development Partnerships and on the Managing Authorities of the programmes, as the Transnational Co-operation Agreement must be approved by each Managing Authorities.

In order to facilitate this process, an internet based database 'EQUAL transnational co-operation internet module' (ETCIM) has been established which allows all authorities to view and notify their approval of Transnational Co-operation Agreements through the internet. In order to avoid bottle-necks, Member States have agreed to process submissions for the initial

milestone as and when they are received, and in so far as possible, a confirmation of the initial selection of the Development Partnership, including the multi annual budget available to implement the work programme (*action 2*) would normally be given within 8 weeks.

8.2. Thematic networks

The process of sharing information and exploiting the results of innovation is at the heart of EQUAL. To achieve this, networks structured around a thematic focus have been established in Member States and at European level. These networks bring Development Partnerships together, to discuss and evaluate the most promising practices and outcomes of the work, and to prepare their dissemination and integration into policies and practice. Other actors, from outside the Initiative, such as political decision-makers, researchers, associations, social partners are implicated in these activities also.

European Thematic Groups co-ordinate thematic activities, while Horizontal groups focus on learning from the processes of EQUAL.

Development Partnerships validate, disseminate and share their experience and results both within the framework of national thematic networks and at European level through the European Thematic Groups. Co-operation at national and European level supports

- thematic reviews of the strategic approaches and the results achieved;

- identification of good practice, particularly relevant to the Employment Strategy and Social Inclusion Process;

- dissemination of good practice solutions into Europe-wide discussion fora.

Through technical assistance, both Managing Authorities and the European Commission support the thematic review process. In particular this includes hosting conferences, seminars, and working groups in order to advance the assessment, benchmarking, delivery and implementation of good practices from EQUAL. Development Partnerships, as part of their commitment to transnationality and as an integral part of their work programme, participate and contribute to these networks and events (for which participation costs, travel and subsistence, are considered as eligible expenses).

Member States also co-operate in transnational dialogue. In a very visible way, they act as 'lead' Member State for the thematic and horizontal groups i.e. as member of the Steering Group which is responsible for development and implementation of the work programme and activities. They also host EQUAL events, independently or in collaboration with the European Commission, as well as maintaining direct co-operation between Member States.

9. MAINSTREAMING

Mainstreaming i.e. the integration and incorporation of new ideas and approaches into policy and practice, is challenging. To assist in this process, EQUAL provides structures and tools, but ultimately it is up to each Development Partnership, each Member State and the European Commission to provide evidence for effective, efficient and relevant alternatives in the delivery of inclusive labour market policies that are transferable across Member States and applicable on a larger scale. These activities should not be limited to dissemination of results which is only one step in the process of mainstreaming.

EQUAL contributes to effective policy making by finding out, on the ground, what works and what does not, and making sure that all key stakeholders can learn from it. The results are summarised and made public, and are used to enrich the policy peer reviews set up in the context of the European Employment Strategy, the Social Inclusion Process, evaluation activities at Union level, and the dissemination and exchange activities of the Community Programmes under Articles 13 (fight against discrimination) and 137 (in favour of social inclusion) of the Treaty.

In order to obtain the maximum impact from EQUAL, results must be analysed, benchmarked and disseminated in order to have an impact both within Member States and across the Union. As with any experiment in a laboratory, the effects of an experiment must be related to a wider (economic, political, cultural, organisational) context to be sustainable. The results of EQUAL must become part of the systematic approach to other policies and programmes, which are carried out on a local, regional, national and European level. At the time of writing, most Development Partnerships are only mid-way through their activities, consequently, many results are still emerging. Nonetheless it is already clear that mainstreaming the results of EQUAL presents a challenge, and therefore in the second round, this principle will be reinforced.

It is incumbent on Development Partnerships to participate in mainstreaming activities as part of their work programme. On top of this, given the complexities involved, there is additional funding available in EQUAL for mainstreaming activities. This additional funding can be used for:

a) Mainstreaming the innovations of EQUAL (*action 3*) – either from the first round or the second. Applications may be submitted to Managing Authorities by Development Partnerships acting either singly or in groups or by ad hoc consortia of Development Partnership partners, multipliers and experts. Activities at national or European level may include

- presenting and promoting the evidence for good practice;

- validation of the innovation;

- benchmarking innovation against existing approaches nationally and in other Member States;

- dissemination of the innovation to additional actors concerned with the discrimination tackled;

- demonstration and transfer of good practice including mentoring.

b) Managing Authorities may also fund additional mainstreaming activities (*action 3*) such as preparation of Guides, good pratices or other tools by Development Partnerships as part of the collaboration within European thematic groups.

It is important that policy makers, in particular those in charge of preparing the national actions plans for the European Employment Strategy and the Social Inclusion Process, as well as those involved in Objective 1, 2 and 3 Structural Fund Programmes, receive input from EQUAL, and participate in the mainstreaming activities. This can best be achieved in a structured way, and the Commission therefore recommends that Member States:

a) provide, at least once a year, a joint forum for the members of the Monitoring Committees of the Structural Fund programmes, particularly Objective 3, with the members of the Monitoring Committee of EQUAL;

b) consider repeating annually the successful ESF Seminars (held during Autumn 2003);

c) continue the thematic networks which have been established to mainstream results from EQUAL at local, regional, national and European level;

d) provide specific information in their National Action Plans on employment and on social inclusion on how the results of EQUAL have been mainstreamed.

For its part, the Commission's learning platform of EQUAL through the web site[6] will continue to provide access to good practice: on building and maintaining effective partnerships; on managing development of, testing and benchmarking of innovative solutions. The results of EQUAL will also be mainstreamed across all of the Structural Funds and other policies of the Commission, particularly in the domain of research, training, education, enterprise policy and justice and home affairs. For the remainder of the programme, mainstreaming will be prioritised, particularly the presentation of the innovations of EQUAL in a usable form to policy makers, and the utilisation of EQUAL to respond to policy gaps.

10. EVALUATION

10.1. Mid-term Review

Articles 40-43 of Regulation (EC) 1260/1999 set out the requirements for evaluating the Community Initiative programmes. The national mid-term evaluations were launched in 2001 (upon adoption of the Programme Decisions) by the Managing Authorities to ensure continuous feed-back for any readjustments necessary for successive calls for proposals. In parallel, the Commission charged an independent consultant with the tasks of carrying out an evaluation at EU-level, based on the results of the national evaluation reports, and on own analysis and field work. In defining their national evaluations, Member States were requested to synchronise delivery dates, to follow a common methodological approach, and to focus on common issues in order to exploit synergies between national and EU evaluations. National mid-term evaluation reports were submitted to the Commission in December 2003, building on which the European level evaluation was prepared. This evaluation focuses on the implementation of *action 1* (selection procedures, partnership development and the transnational partner search), and early elements of *action 2* (implementation phase) and *action 3* (dissemination and mainstreaming) as well as other transnational activities.

The EU-wide evaluators of EQUAL do not suggest any changes in the overall architecture for EQUAL. However, on the basis of the reports of the national evaluators, and on their own field work and analysis, a number of issues that may limit the effectiveness of EQUAL have been highlighted, and a set of recommendations to enhance effectiveness are made.

The evaluation notes that the spread of EQUAL funding across priorities is more even than in ESF mainstream programmes, with "Adaptability" and "Equal Opportunities" being proportionately more important in EQUAL although there seems to have been a low level of attraction to the latter. Nonetheless "Employability" remains the first priority for both

---

EQUAL and ESF. The priorities of EQUAL reinforce the Employment Strategy through focus on participation in the labour market; inequalities in the labour market and modernisation of Public Employment Services. However, EQUAL is less focussed on protection against unemployment; quality of employment and direct job creation measures. These aspects will be addressed in the second call.

The evaluation confirms that the partnership principle has proven to be the main vehicle of innovation and added value particularly when participants and disadvantaged groups are involved in decision making. Participative approaches within the partnerships enhance effectiveness. There is a great variety of organisations participating in EQUAL (degree of decentralisation) but it is necessary to assess the influence and impact of this variety especially as empowerment has been understood in different ways in different countries. Whilst many Development Partnerships have partners with previous involvement in ADAPT/EMPLOYMENT, there is an important participation of local and regional authorities as partners in EQUAL. The participation of social partners is variable and participation of non traditional partners (SME and small NGOs) could be higher.

The evaluation draws attention to the negative impact of different timing/processes between Member States on the implementation of "transnationality". This is being addressed in the second round through the 'transnationality window'. Transnational co-operation is still producing limited added value and not contributing enough to innovation. As transnational co-operation is a key principle of EQUAL, it needs to be strengthened, with more joint development encouraged.

The horizontal implementation of equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming are often understood in a limited or traditional way. These horizontal issues need to be taken more into consideration on the second round.

There are significant variances between the national mainstreaming strategies, the mainstreaming role of Development Partnerships as part of their work programme, and the mechanisms for allocation additional funding for mainstreaming activities under *Action 3* to Development Partnerships. The EU-wide evaluators recommend that the Commission and Member States should clarify and reinforce the guidance for making results of EQUAL relevant for policy development, and in particular ensure that Development Partnerships go beyond traditional dissemination activities and really engage in horizontal and vertical mainstreaming.

There is so far a limited impact of EQUAL on European policies and programmes, but there are perspectives for improvement. The mainstreaming activities of the European Thematic Groups should be accelerated, in particular by promoting the involvement of non-EQUAL stakeholders. Further, the structures, mechanisms and procedures established to manage the European thematic networks lack coordination, coherent procedures, stakeholder involvement and effective organisational and communication structures. The Commission and Member States should therefore rationalise the organisation of European Thematic Groups, by

- paying particular attention to the composition and size of the different groups,

- involving policy-makers and multipliers,

- promoting the participation of policy stakeholders from accession countries,

- setting up clear and common criteria and procedures for the selection of "good" practice,

- identifying and systematically developing strategic links between EQUAL and European policies and processes.

The evaluation report has identified a point of concern regarding the selection process used in EQUAL. As members of the Monitoring Committees of EQUAL may, and indeed sometimes are, also applicants in EQUAL, it is essential that the role of the Monitoring Committee is clearly set out. Whilst the criteria for evaluation and selection of Development Partnerships may be established by the Monitoring Committees, Monitoring Committee members representing organisations participating in a Development Partnership should not be implicated in the selection process in order to avoid any conflict of interest.

10.2.   On-going evaluation

The evaluation of EQUAL needs to reflect its experimental approach and therefore covers not only the classical evaluation dimensions such as relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, utility and sustainability, but also focuses on the processes, support structures and policy delivery systems.

Following this mid-term evaluation the existing Member States will continue to produce annual interim reports. The 2005 report will meet the requirements of the update of the mid-term report according to the provisions of Regulation 1260/1999.

Equal is about learning. Guidelines for monitoring and evaluating EQUAL[7] give the general framework and are applicable all along the programming period. In order to effectively extract the good practice and mainstream it, it is essential to maintain an evaluation function in all actions of EQUAL, and an observatory function to integrate experience and evidence generated elsewhere. Member States are therefore encouraged to continue their evaluation activities beyond the formal requirements of the Regulation, with a focus on identifying factors contributing to the success (or failure) of innovation, the mainstreaming of results, and sustainability.

With EQUAL, new Member States will be entering new ground in terms of governance, policy issues and policy development. An ongoing evaluation will facilitate learning processes amongst all stakeholders involved, and contribute to capacity building within the public sector. In an innovative, transnational programme like EQUAL it is important that future Member States make use of the 2004-2006 period to build and develop capacity to carry out evaluation of the programmes and to draw lessons for the 2007-2013 programming period. Therefore it is recommended that these Member States set up an on-going evaluation which focuses on management systems, programme implementation dynamics, monitoring systems, selection procedures and implementation of *Action 1*. A report on these should be foreseen by the end of 2005. The fact that current Member States have already carried out an evaluation of the first round could provide some useful lessons for future Member States to follow. New Member States are also advised to design and carry out an on-going evaluation for the whole period, focussing on the lessons learnt for capacity building, networking, gender mainstreaming, inclusion of minorities, and transnational cooperation.

---

7   "Guidelines for systems of monitoring and evaluation for the Human Resources Initiative EQUAL in the period 2000 – 2006". DG Emplyment and Social affairs, July 2000.

On the basis of the evaluation results already available, and no later than three years after the end of the programming period, the Commission will carry out the ex-post evaluation, in collaboration with the Member States and the Managing Authorities. Ex post evaluation will cover the utilisation of resources, the effectiveness and efficiency of the assistance and its impact. It will draw conclusions regarding policy on economic and social cohesion and will cover the factors contributing to the success or failure of implementation and the achievements and results, including their sustainability.

11. GUIDELINES FOR THE SECOND ROUND OF EQUAL

EQUAL will fund activities implemented by strategic partnerships called Development Partnerships. The second round retains the principles and architecture of the first round. In order to facilitate reading, these guidelines for the second round are presented in their entirety and replace the provisions of the guidelines for the first round of EQUAL as set out in C(2000)853[8].

11.1. Selection procedure

(1)   There will be a single selection procedure for funding under the second round of EQUAL. It will be based upon an application submitted jointly by a number of organisations (Development Partnership initiators). The application should identify:

- the partners to be involved in the Development Partnership at the outset; the arrangements for ensuring that all relevant stakeholders can become involved during the life of the partnership including, in particular, appropriate small organisations; and the arrangements for handling the administrative and financial responsibilities;

- an outline of the rationale for the partnership, a diagnosis of the problem to be addressed, and an outline of the objectives of the partnership;

- an assessment of the relevance of the problem addressed and of the solution to be tested, an explanation of how discrimination and inequality will be tackled, and an outline of how the results could be disseminated and transferred to policy and practice;

- the expectations from transnational co-operation;

- an outline of the activities foreseen for developing and testing the innovative approach for the entire period, including an indicative budget (estimate);

- a detailed workplan, methodology and management tools for developing and finalising the Development Partnership Agreement, including budget.

(2)   The procedures for selecting Development Partnerships fall within the competence of the Managing Authority. The Commission expects selection criteria to reflect the

---

8   Communication of the Commission to the Member States, establishing the guidelines for the Community Initiative EQUAL concerning transnational co-operation to promote new means of combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities in connection with the labour market, C (2000) 853 of 14.4.2000

general principles of EQUAL and that Managing Authorities will ensure that there is no conflict of interest in the selection procedure. Unsuccessful applicants should be given reasons for their non-selection and be informed of the appeal .

(3) Programmes are implemented by the designated Managing Authority[9] who will be responsible for the calls for proposals and selection procedures and the completion of the EQUAL Common Data Base (ECDB). Data on Development Partnerships will be entered into the ECDB before January 1, 2005, so that when the "transnationality window" is opened all Development Partnerships have an equal chance to find transnational partners and finalise their Development Partnership Agreement.

11.2. Milestones

(4) Once selected, expenses become eligible and Development Partnerships will be required to achieve 'milestones' in the operation of their work programme.

(5) The initial milestone (*action 1*) is the creation or consolidation of a sustainable, effective Development Partnership and its strategy including transnational co-operation which will have a real added value. The time period available for this will be determined by the quality and speed at which each Development Partnership achieves agreement with all partners on the draft Development Partnership Agreement (below). The draft Development Partnership Agreement should immediately be submitted to the Managing Authorities.

(6) Development Partnerships must identify at least one partner from another Member State. As a general rule, co-operation should be established between other Development Partnerships in EQUAL such co-operation may also extend to similar projects supported in a non Member State eligible for funding under the Phare, Tacis Meda or Cards programmes.

(7) The draft Development Partnership Agreement documents the consensus of the partners and presents their common strategy in a structured, concise and coherent way, and identifies the main factors for success of the Development Partnership. Therefore it should contain:

- a diagnosis and an assessment of the specific problems in relation to labour market exclusion, discrimination and inequality, to be tackled;

- a stakeholder analysis; identifying and discussing the interest and expectations of people, groups, or organisations that may influence or be influenced by the solution to be developed and tested, and a description of the roles of relevant stakeholders in the work of the Development Partnership;

- objectives and the strategy to attain them, reflecting learning from the first round of EQUAL and any other relevant action;

- a description of the assumptions, risks and flexibility requirements;

---

9   Details of the programmes, funding, Managing Authorities and other structures are available on the web site http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/

- a detailed work programme accompanied by a realistic budget, both broken down by national and transnational activities/costs;

- a clear identification of the role of each partner, including the arrangements for steering and managing the partnership and administering the financial support preferably using a commonly agreed system;

- a Transnational Co-operation Agreement specifying the common interests, the added value of the transnational activities, and the transnational workplan and budget. The contributions and roles of each transnational partner, the methods of decision making and the organisational arrangements for implementing the common work programme as well as the methodologies for monitoring and assessment of joint activities should be set out. This Transnational Co-operation Agreement must be presented on the basis of the common format described in the Guide an Transnationality[10], and must be entered into the common database 'EQUAL transnational co-operation internet module' (ETCIM). A paper version of the database entry should be annexed to the draft Development Partnership Agreement.

- the methodology and mechanism for on-going assessment of activities and achievements, including a description of verifiable indicators which demonstrate how the objectives, outputs and results will be measured and assessed ;

- the corresponding methodology and mechanisms for monitoring and assessment of joint activities in the transnational co-operation;

- the commitment of the Development Partnership including their transnational partners to collaborate on mainstreaming activities at national and European levels;

- the strategy and mechanisms for implementing a gender mainstreaming approach.

(8) The draft Development Partnership Agreement must also demonstrate that the Development Partnership fulfils the following conditions:

- Financial viability: the availability of the necessary co-financing.

- Transparency: Public access to the results obtained (products, instruments, methods, etc.).

- Capacity-building and empowerment: The Development Partnership has the capacity to mobilise and enable different actors to work together effectively around their common strategy. Particular attention will be given to the arrangements for ensuring that all relevant actors, such as: public authorities; the public employment service; NGOs; the business sector (in particular small and medium sized enterprises); and the social partners, can become involved during the life of the partnership. The Development Partnership must show that all partners have fully participated in the planning and development of the Development Partnership Agreement.

---

10 http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/
     index.cfm?file=listdoc.cfm&nav_id_menu=10038&lang_id=6

- Learning spirit: the capacity and willingness to learn from others, and to actively co-operate in networking, dissemination and mainstreaming activities at both national and European level.

(9)   The Development Partnership work programme would normally operate for a period of up to 3 years.

(10)   Managing Authorities should provide sufficient support to enable Development Partnerships to conclude their draft Development Partnership Agreement as quickly as possible. Failure to submit a draft Development Partnership Agreement will lead to de-selection, after which expenditure will no longer be eligible.

(11)   Upon receipt of the draft Development Partnership Agreement, Managing Authorities will confirm, normally within 8 weeks, the initial selection of the Development Partnership, including the multi annual budget available to implement the work programme (*action 2*).

(12)   Subsequent milestones relate to a review of the implementation of the work programme as set out in the Development Partnership Agreement. Where there is a financial consequence to the non-performance of activities, Managing Authorities may realign the budget accordingly. These reviews will be conducted regularly, at least at 12 month intervals.

11.3.   Transnational co operation

(13)   Development Partnerships will participate in transnational co-operation through

- The implementation of the Transnational Co-operation Agreement

- Participation and contribution to the national and European thematic networks, at working groups, events, seminars and conferences organised within EQUAL

- Participation costs (travel and subsistence) are considered as eligible expenses for this purpose and shall be covered by the Development Partnership budget (*action 2*).

(14)   Managing Authorities participate in transnational co-operation through

- Acting as lead Member State for thematic groups

- Participating and contributing to the national and European thematic networks, at working groups, events, seminars and conferences organised within EQUAL

(15)   Managing Authorities should use their own technical assistance budget to support them as lead Member State, and for the organisation of working groups, events, seminars and conferences organised within EQUAL.

11.4.   Mainstreaming

(16)   Member States shall establish a mainstreaming strategy, outlining objectives, mechanisms and resources, including networks which will facilitate mainstreaming at local, regional, national and European level. These mechanisms should aim at:

- identifying factors leading to inequality and discrimination and monitoring and analysing the impact or potential impact of the Development Partnerships on the policy priorities and on the different grounds of discrimination and inequality in connection with the labour market;

- identifying and assessing the factors leading to good practice and benchmark performance;

- disseminating good practice from Development Partnerships.

(17) In order to enhance mainstreaming of innovations (*action 3*), and upon receipt of a proposal from Development Partnerships acting either singly or in groups, or ad hoc consortia of Development Partnership partners, multipliers and experts, Managing Authorities may fund additional activities for assessing, presenting and promoting the evidence for good practice at national or European level including

- validation of the innovation;

- benchmarking innovation against existing approaches nationally and in other Member States;

- dissemination of the innovation to additional actors concerned with the discrimination tackled;

- demonstration and transfer of good practice including mentoring;

- and integration of experience and lessons learnt from outside EQUAL.

(18) Managing Authorities may also fund additional mainstreaming activities (*action 3*) by Development Partnerships as part of the collaboration within European thematic groups.

12.   FINANCING

12.1.   **Eligibility of activities**

(19) The normal eligibility rules of the ESF apply (cf. article 3 of the ESF Regulation4). However, in order to achieve the maximum effectiveness of activities EQUAL may fund action normally eligible under the ERDF, EAGGF Guidance or FIFG rules, (Article 21(2) of Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999).

(20) The rates of Community contribution defined in Article 29 of the Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 will apply. In view of the innovative nature of the methods used, a systematic application of the ceilings indicated in the Regulation is recommended.

(21) The rules of eligibility for co-financing by the Structural Funds are set out in Regulation (EC) No 1685/2000 as amended by Regulation (EC) No 1145/2003[11]. In accordance with Regulation 1260/1999, under EQUAL, the final beneficiaries are the Development Partnerships. Attention of Member States and Development Partnerships

---

11   Commission Regulation (EC) No 1145/2003 of 27 June 2003, O.J. L/160 of 28.6.2003

is therefore drawn to all the rules set out in Regulation 1145/2003, and particularly Rule No 1 *Expenditure actually paid out*, and Rule No 12 *Eligibility of operations depending on location*.

(22)   The Commission would expect that a sufficient amount of resource is made available in order to permit the Development Partnership to establish a qualitative national and transnational co-operation. In this context travel and subsistence costs are considered eligible expenses.

(23)   Member States shall check the activities of the Development Partnership for compatibility with the provisions of the Treaty, in particular rules for public procurement and with the state aid provisions, and if necessary notify them under Article 88 (3).

12.2.   Technical Assistance

(24)   Technical Assistance is available to support the implementation of EQUAL and may provide support before the commencement of Development Partnerships activities.

(25)   Technical assistance, up to 5% of the total ESF contribution, is available to support

- expenditure relating to the preparation, selection, appraisal and monitoring of the assistance and of operations (but excluding expenditure on the acquisition and installation of computerised systems for management, monitoring and evaluation);

- expenditure on meetings of monitoring committees and sub-committees relating to the implementation of assistance. This expenditure may also include the costs of experts and other participants in these committees, including third-country participants, where the chairperson of such committees considers their presence essential to the effective implementation of the assistance;

- expenditure relating to audits and on-the-spot checks of operations.

(26)   Other actions which can be co-financed under technical assistance, and which are not subject to a maximum contribution of 5%,

- studies, seminars, information actions, the collection, editing and dissemination of the experience and results;

- support to thematic networking, dissemination activities and the setting up of mechanisms for policy impact;

- co-operation in European networking and ensuring the sharing of all relevant information with other Member States and the Commission

- evaluation,

- the acquisition and installation of computerised systems for management, monitoring and evaluation.

(27)   Expenditure on the salaries of civil servants or other public officials in carrying out such actions is not eligible. The ESF rate of contribution in respect of the technical

assistance priority will be subject to the ceilings in Article 29 (3) of Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999.

(28)   The successful implementation of EQUAL demands a significant amount of collaboration between Member States and the Commission: collecting and processing information about Development Partnerships, setting up data bases, animating the thematic review process, organising seminars, publicising results, etc. A certain number of specific tasks which cannot take place without support at European level will be assigned to outside service providers, at the initiative and under supervision of the Commission, on the basis of calls for tender. The execution of these tasks shall be financed at a rate of 100% of the total cost. An indicative amount of a maximum of 2% of the total ESF contribution will be reserved to finance activities carried out at the initiative of the Commission.

(29)   Evaluation of the impact of EQUAL is crucial, and it will be implemented at all three levels of action:

- All Development Partnerships will be required to present verifiable evidence of their results, in order to generate a basis for benchmarking;

- All Member States will carry out an independent evaluation at national level and present an (updated) mid-term review in 2005. The evaluation of EQUAL needs to reflect its experimental approach and will therefore not only cover the classical evaluation dimension as relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, utility and sustainability, but will focus the evaluation activities also on the processes, on support structures and on policy delivery systems;

- At Union level, the Commission will set up an evaluation mechanism, to assess the implications of EQUAL for the European Employment Strategy, the Social Inclusion Process, and other Community policies and programmes, building on the contributions of the Member States in their National Action Plans.