

EQUAL

Employment & European Social Fund

New ways of
tackling discrimination and
inequality in the
field of employment

Employment & social affairs



European Commission

A great deal of additional information on the European Union is available on the Internet. It can be accessed through the Europa server (<http://europa.eu.int>).

Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2000

ISBN 92-828-9998-5

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Printed in Italy

PRINTED ON WHITE CHLORINE-FREE PAPER



What is EQUAL?

EQUAL is part of the European Union's strategy for more and better jobs and for ensuring that no one is denied access to them. Funded by the European Social Fund, **EQUAL** will test new ways of tackling dis-

crimination and inequality experienced by those in work and those looking for a job. It will provide the scope to try out new ideas which could change future policy and practice in employment and training.



How will it work?

EQUAL will operate by bringing together the key players in a geographical area or sector. The different worlds of public administration, non-governmental organisations, social partners and the business sector (in particular SMEs) will work in partnership, pooling their different types of expertise and experience. These *Development Partnerships* will agree a strategy within which they will try out new ways of dealing with problems of discrimination and inequality which they have already pinpointed. Central to the work of each *Development Partnership* will be its links with at least one partnership from

another country and its involvement in a network of others dealing with the same theme across Europe. The new ideas will be tested with a view to using the results to influence the design of future policy and practice. *Development Partnerships* will be selected for **EQUAL** funding following national calls for proposals.

The European Union's contribution to **EQUAL**, provided through the European Social Fund, will be EUR 2 847 million over the period 2000–06. These contributions need to be matched by national funding.

Challenges to meet

Taking part in an **EQUAL** partnership will involve a number of challenges:

- The *Development Partnership* will have to mobilise the key people to work together to tackle specific problems of discrimination and inequality.
 - The *Development Partnership* will have to operate in a specific area and, at the same time, be ready to work closely with partners from other countries and provide information on a wide basis about what it is doing.
 - The *Development Partnership* will cooperate in networking and dissemination activities at national and European level.
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EQUAL in context

In 1997, all 15 Member States agreed to work together to create a better climate for new jobs and to ensure equality of opportunity for everyone, whether employed or looking for a job. This is called the European employment strategy. To achieve these goals each Member State draws up an annual action plan, based on common guidelines.

Discrimination and inequality currently prevent many people from playing a full role, either in the jobs market, or in society in general. When Europe's leaders met in Lisbon in March 2000 their message was quite clear. The opportunity to participate in a Europe which aims to become the most dynamic and knowl-

edge-based economy in the world must be open to all.

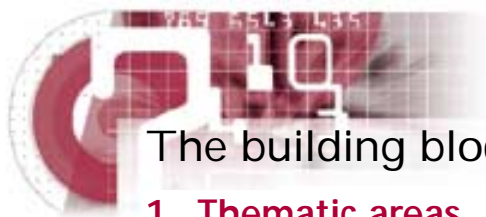
We have to find new ways of dealing with the problems of inequality and discrimination which currently stop Europe from being an inclusive society. This is where **EQUAL** has a key role to play. **EQUAL** offers a Europe-wide focus for experimenting with new ways of tackling the problems of inequality and discrimination specifically related to the world of work.

As the new Community initiative funded by the European Social Fund, **EQUAL** is not starting from scratch. It will profit from the experience of the previous Community initiatives dealing

with human resources and use it in a new context. These two initiatives, ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT (Horizon, Integra, NOW and Youthstart) have resulted in a large resource of 'hands-on' experience and expertise. Poten-

tial **EQUAL** partners wishing to draw on these resources when developing their own proposals can obtain more information on:

www.europa.eu.int/comm/equal



The building blocks of EQUAL

1. Thematic areas

The European Commission, in consultation with the European Parliament, Member States, and the social partners, has set nine themes for the first call for **EQUAL** proposals. Eight of the themes are linked directly to the European employment strategy. The ninth covers the specific needs of asylum-seekers. Overall, the aim of the thematic approach is to explore new ways of tackling the problems common to different types of discrimination and inequality, rather than focusing on a specific target group.

Each Member State will choose the themes within which it wishes to explore and test new ideas in cooperation with other Member States. In making their decision Member States will consider the national priorities on which they want to focus activity and where they think they can benefit most from working with other countries. National calls for proposals will set out the themes under which potential *Development Partnerships* can apply for **EQUAL** funding.

The nine thematic priorities in EQUAL

Employability

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

Entrepreneurship

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

Adaptability

- Promoting lifelong learning and inclusive work practices which encourage the recruitment and retention of those suffering discrimination and inequality in connection with the labour market
- Supporting the adaptability of firms and employees to structural economic change and the use of information technology and other new technologies

Equal opportunities for women and men

- Reconciling family and professional life, as well as the reintegration 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

Asylum-seekers

- Helping the integration of asylum-seekers

Depending on the official status of the asylum-seeker — an extremely complex area, with variations between Member States — assistance may be for new ways of helping access to the labour market, or to provide training for unsuccessful asylum-seekers prior to their leaving the country

2. Development Partnerships

Previous Community initiatives have taught us a lot about the benefits of working in partnership. One clear lesson is that the whole is usually greater than the sum of the parts. When you bring

together the experience and expertise of all the relevant players, much more can be achieved than when organisations work on their own.

The basic working element of **EQUAL** will be the *Development Partnership*. A *Development Partnership* will work within one thematic area and bring together interested parties with relevant experience. It should involve key players such as: local and regional authorities; public employment services; non-governmental organisations; the business sector (particularly SMEs); and the social partners. There must be at least two different types of partner involved from the outset.

Most partnerships will bring together the key players from one particular geographical area, such as a city, a defined rural area, a local authority area, or a travel-to-work-area (**geographic**

partnerships). However, given the thematic approach of **EQUAL**, a partnership might chose, for example, to focus on a particular economic sector or industry or on the causes of discrimination against particular groups (**sectoral** partnerships).

A *Development Partnership* must be more than a network of project promoters, operating in the same territory and thematic field. It should be a partnership of committed players, sharing a common purpose. Partners will need to pool their efforts to find innovative solutions to the specific problems they have identified. Their work together will be based on a formal agreement and action plan.

The *Development Partnership* — a strong, committed agreement

The basis for a *Development Partnership* shall include:

- common strategy;
- detailed work programme;
- financial plan, specifying the sources of complementary co-funding from the public and private sector;
- responsibilities and contributions of each partner, in particular arrangements for financial management;
- the commitment of the *Development Partnership* to take part in thematic networking, dissemination of good practice and to contribute to making an impact on national policy.

3. Empowerment

A partnership will be much more effective when all the partners participate fully in the decision-making and implementation. Experience has also shown that the involvement of those targeted for support can ensure that the activities are relevant and appealing.

Partners should set out to run their *Development Partnership* in

a way that enables all the partners to play a full role at every stage. Those involved on the ground in the partnership's activities should have a say in the decision-making. Consideration should also be given to ways of involving those targeted for support to ensure that their needs and aspirations are fully reflected in the activities which are planned.

4. Transnational cooperation

Transnational cooperation is not an 'added extra' in **EQUAL**. Working with other countries is crucial to the initiative's success. It helps partnerships to look beyond national boundaries for inspiration and to learn from experience in other European countries rather than reinventing the wheel. Not only can partnerships learn from different ways of doing things, but transnational cooperation can also provide a source of encouragement when trying out something for the first time.

Transnational cooperation requires time and commitment. For this reason, all *Development*

Partnerships will be given sufficient time and resources to develop clear action plans (and budgets) for their work with partners in other countries. Support will also be available for those *Development Partnerships* who want help in finding transnational partners.

All *Development Partnerships* must have at least one partner from another Member State and, in most cases, this will be another **EQUAL** funded partnership. Development partnerships may also cooperate with counterparts outside the European Union, for example, in candidate countries under the Phare programme.

5. Innovation

EQUAL will provide support for pioneering ways of tackling inequality and discrimination at work, and in access to work. The innovation may be a new approach or involve the transfer of elements from elsewhere. The way the *Development Partnership* is formed and works together may also be innovative.

EQUAL is looking for new ways of getting things done. Through the *Development Partnerships*, it can support a wide range of activities to tackle specific problems. From our experience of ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT, innovative action is likely to result in one or more of the following changes: new processes or methods; new targets; changes in systems.


6. Dissemination and mainstreaming

EQUAL is a testing ground. It aims to analyse the causes of discrimination and inequality in relation to the world of work and to propose new ways of tackling them. Through the work of the broad-based *Development Partnerships*, **EQUAL** will explore, test and validate new solutions.

If **EQUAL**'s work is to change the way things are done in the future, there must be an organised sharing of experience and results with those who stand to benefit the most from them, in particular policy-makers, the social partners and those involved in other partnerships. *Development Partnerships* will be required to be involved in this process.

At **national level**, Member States will set up arrangements to identify the factors leading to good practice and to share the results of activities undertaken by *Development Partnerships*.

A distinctive feature of **EQUAL** is the importance of cooperation between Member States and the European Commission. There will be a range of activities aimed at ensuring **EQUAL** has a maximum impact at the **European level**.



Getting started

Following publication of the **EQUAL** guidelines by the European Commission in May 2000, each Member State prepares a programme called a Community initiative programme for the way it intends to implement the initiative. Each programme, including detailed criteria for the selection of *Development Partnerships*, has to be agreed with the European Commission. The first call for proposals by Member States can be expected in the first quarter of 2001. Those interested in setting up an **EQUAL** *Development Partnership* should start exploring with other potential partners how they might work together.

►► Putting together an application

A *Development Partnership* will be selected on the basis of its application in response to a national call for proposals. The national selection criteria will include elements which are common across all Member States.

Selection will take place at two stages. The main selection will be based on an application which will have to present an outline strategy submitted jointly by at least two different types of

partner. This will show the different kinds of partners who will be involved during the life of the partnership and what role they are to play. It will also explain why the partnership is being set up, and what it intends to do. The partners will need to set out a detailed action plan for the initial period of funding (around six months), and an outline of the main types of activities planned thereafter. If the partnership is selected, this initial period of funding will provide time for them to find transnational partners, consolidate the national *Development Partnership* and firm up their detailed work programme. All of these aspects will have to be in place before selection for the second stage which is the implementation phase.

►► What support is available?


The **EQUAL** initiative will be jointly financed by the Member States and the European Commission. The contact points listed below will provide information on the support available in individual Member States.

Setting up a partnership is a complex process and support will be available during the initial

phase. The range of help available will include a database to help find transnational partners.

Once partnerships are set up and running, support will continue for the implementation of the

projects, collection, editing and dissemination of good practice, and for networking at national and European level.



For further information

EQUAL website address:

www.europa.eu.int/comm/equal

European Commission

Community initiatives (EMPL/B/4)

Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 200
B-1049 Brussels

Fax (32-2) 29-69770

empl-info@cec.eu.int

EQUAL CONTACT POINTS IN MEMBER STATES

Belgium

Guy De Smedt

Cellule FSE

Rue Royale 123
B-1210 Bruxelles

☎ (32-2) 278 42 48

📠 (32-2) 278 42 30

fse@skypro.be

Louis Vervloet

Ministerie van de Vlaamse
Gemeenschap — EWBL/Afdeling
Europa Werkgelegenheid

Markiesstraat 1
B-1000 Brussel

☎ (32-2) 553 44 34

📠 (32-2) 553 44 25

louis.vervloet@ewbl.vlaanderen.be

Denmark

Henning Eriksen

Arbejdsmarkedsstyrelsen (AMS)

Blegdamsvej, 56
Postboks 2722
DK-2100 København Ø

☎ (45) 35 28 81 00

📠 (45) 33 14 71 76

her@ams.dk

Spain

Aurora Saeta del Castillo

Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos
Sociales — UAFSE

Pío Baroja, 6
E-28009 Madrid

☎ (34) 914 09 09 41

📠 (34) 915 74 16 01

equal@mtas.es

Germany

Kurt Brüß

Bundesministerium für Arbeit
und Sozialordnung

Rochusstraße 1
D-53123 Bonn

☎ (49-228) 527 27 16

📠 (49-228) 527 12 09

ku.bruess@bma.bund.de

France

Geneviève Rialle-Salaber

Ministère du travail,
de l'emploi et de la formation
professionnelle — DGEFP

7, square Max Hymans
F-75741 Paris Cedex 15

☎ (33) 144 38 30 36

📠 (33) 144 38 34 13

genevieve.rialle-salaber
@dgefp.travail.gouv.fr

Greece

Chrysoula Papandreou

Ministry of Labour — ESF

Peiraios, 40
GR-10182 Athens

☎ (30-1) 524 30 68

📠 (30-1) 529 51 55

Dgana55@otenet.gr

Ireland

Eugene Forde

Principal Officer — Department
of Enterprise and Employment

Davitt House
65A Adelaide Road
Dublin 2
Ireland

☎ (353-1) 676 58 61

📠 (353-1) 676 90 47

fordee@entemp.irlgov.ie

<http://www.esf.ie>

Italy

Annalisa Vittore

Ministero del Lavoro e della
Previdenza sociale —
Dirigente generale UCFOPL

Vicolo d'Aste, 12
I-00159 Roma

☎ (39) 06 46 831

📠 (39) 06 47 88 72 04

<http://www.europalavoro.it>

Luxembourg

Erny Dornseiffer

Ministère du travail

26, rue Zithe
L-2939 Luxembourg

☎ (352) 478 61 12

📠 (352) 478 63 25

dornseiffer@mt.etat.lu

Netherlands

Margreet van Oostrom

Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en
Werkgelegenheid
Directie Arbeidsmarkt

Postbus 90801
2509 LV Den Haag
Nederland

☎ (31) 0800-9051

📠 (31-70) 333 40 06

mvoostrom@minszw.nl

Austria

Roland Hanak

Bundesministerium für
Wirtschaft und Arbeit

Stubenring 1
A-1010 Wien

☎ (43-1) 711 00 61 75

📠 (43-1) 711 00 60 49

roland.hanak@bmwa.gv.at

Portugal

Ana Vale

GICEA — Ministério do Trabalho
e da Solidariedade

Av. da República, 62-7.º
P-1050-197 Lisboa

☎ (351) 217 99 49 30

📠 (351) 217 93 39 20

gicea@gicea.mts.gov.pt

<http://www.gicea.mts.gov.pt>

Finland

Pertti Toivonen

Ministry of Labour

PO Box 524
FIN-00101 Helsinki

☎ (358-9) 18 56 79 83

📠 (358-9) 18 56 89 98

pertti.toivonen@mol.fi

Sweden


Equal Unit

Swedish ESF Council

Box 47141

S-100 74 Stockholm

 (46-8) 57 91 71 00

 (46-8) 57 91 71 01

esf-centrala-enheten@esf.amv.se

<http://www.esf.amv.se>

Northern Ireland

Ken Gibson


Training and Employment
Agency


Clarendon House

9–21 Adelaide Street

Belfast BT2 8DJ

United Kingdom

 (44-28) 90 25 76 68

 (44-28) 90 25 76 46

United Kingdom

Jane Evans

Department for Education and
Employment


ESF Unit


Caxton House

Tothill Street

London SW1H 9NF

United Kingdom

 (44-20) 72 73 55 33

 (44-20) 72 73 55 40

jane.evans@dfee.gov.uk

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 Fax (32-2) 538 08 41
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 URL: <http://www.jean-de.lannoy.be>

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 E-mail: mail@libeurop.be
 URL: <http://www.libeurop.be>

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 B-1000 Bruxelles/Brussel
 Tél. (32-2) 552 22 11
 Fax (32-2) 511 01 84
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J. H. Schultz Information A/S

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 DK-2620 Albertslund
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 URL: <http://www.incm.pt>

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**Akateminen Kirjakauppa/
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 FIN-00101 Helsinki/Helsingfors
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 F./fax (358-9) 121 44 35
 Sähköposti: sps@akateminen.com
 URL: <http://www.akateminen.com>

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 Fax (354) 552 55 60
 E-mail: bokabud@simnet.is

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Swets Blackwell AS

Østenjoveien 18
 Boks 6512 Etterstad
 N-0606 Oslo
 Tel. (47-22) 97 45 00
 Fax (47-22) 97 45 45
 E-mail: info@no.swetsblackwell.com

SCHWEIZ/SUISSE/SVIZZERA

Euro Info Center Schweiz

c/o OSEC
 Stampfenbachstraße 85
 PF 492
 CH-8035 Zürich
 Tel. (41-1) 365 53 15
 Fax (41-1) 365 54 11
 E-mail: eics@osec.ch
 URL: <http://www.osec.ch/eics>

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 URL: <http://www.usiscr.cz>

CYPRUS

**Cyprus Chamber of Commerce
 and Industry**

PO Box 21455
 CY-1509 Nicosia
 Tel. (357-2) 88 97 52
 Fax (357-2) 86 10 44
 E-mail: demetrap@ccci.org.cy

EESTI

Eesti Kaubandus-Tööstuskoda

(Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry)
 Toom-Kooli 17
 EE-00011 Tallinn
 Tel. (372) 646 02 44
 Fax (372) 646 02 45
 E-mail: einfo@koda.ee
 URL: <http://www.koda.ee>

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СССЕС

60-letiya Oktyabrya Av. 9
 117312 Moscow
 Tel. (7-095) 135 52 27
 Fax (7-095) 135 52 27

SLOVAKIA

Centrum VTI SR

Nám. Slobody, 19
 SK-81223 Bratislava
 Tel. (421-7) 54 41 83 64
 Fax (421-7) 54 41 83 64
 E-mail: europ@ttb1.sltk.stuba.sk
 URL: <http://www.sltk.stuba.sk>

SLOVENIJA

Gospodarski Vestnik

Dunajska cesta 5
 SLO-1000 Ljubljana
 Tel. (386) 613 09 16 40
 Fax (386) 613 09 16 45
 E-mail: europ@gvestnik.si
 URL: <http://www.gvestnik.si>

TÜRKIYE

Dünya Infotel AS

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