

EQUAL

Making Change Possible

A Practical Guide to Mainstreaming

Employment & European Social Fund



Employment & social affairs



European Commission

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Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
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Introduction

EQUAL supports the development of innovative solutions to the problems raised by Member States in their National Action Plans for Employment and Social Inclusion.

It is part of the EU's strategy to create more and better jobs and to ensure that no one is denied access to these jobs. It is also part of the EU's strategy to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

EQUAL differs from other European Social Fund (ESF) programmes which are more centred on delivery. It focuses on testing innovative materials, methods and approaches to develop new ways of tackling labour market discrimination and inequality.

EQUAL presents evidence of good practice for these innovative approaches and emphasises cooperation between Member States to ensure that the most positive results are adopted and shared across Europe.

The basic building blocks of EQUAL include:

- A strong **policy focus** on priority issues where groupings of Member States expect that transnational cooperation will help them develop ways to improve the delivery of their national labour market policies;
- Commitment of key stakeholders (e.g. public authorities, NGOs, the business sector and social partners) to share resources and to develop joint strategies and solutions to the multidimensional problems of discrimination and exclusion, by establishing **Development Partnerships (DPs)**;
- Stimulating **innovation** and reform by developing and testing new approaches
- Sharing good practice and experiences both within and among Member States, and learning through **transnational cooperation**;
- Dissemination and **mainstreaming** of this good practice to inform policy and practice;
- **Promoting Gender Mainstreaming** as a management tool to make gender equality an integral part of all policies and practices.

To maximise the impact of EQUAL, the Managing Authorities and NSS (National Support Structures) have a crucial role to play. It is they who can build the links between DPs and the policy level.

Who is the guide for?

This guide supports the work of Managing Authorities and NSS. It covers the key steps needed to facilitate the transfer of the main policy and practice innovations that have been tested under EQUAL. That is:

- Pinpointing policy priorities that are relevant to EQUAL (see part 2);
- Identifying and involving the key actors and policy-makers (see part 3);
- Identifying the innovation (see part 4);
- Assessing and validating good practice (see part 4);
- Mobilising resources for transferring the EQUAL results (see part 5);
- Establishing networks and supporting them (see part 5);
- Communicating with a wider public (see part 6);
- Translating DP results into policy tools (see part 7 and 8).

The chance of individual DPs achieving change at national or European level is limited. Their range of influence will usually be limited to the local or regional level.

This is why it is so important that Managing Authorities and NSS start thinking about messages, audiences and methods for mainstreaming as early as possible.

Although the guide has been designed to support the work of EQUAL Managing Authorities and NSS, it may have relevance for other organisations with an interest in the transfer of innovations from other programmes or initiatives into mainstream policy or practice.

For mainstreaming to succeed there must be a meeting of demand and supply.

A joint effort

The development of the guide has been led by a 'mainstreaming group' with representation from Greece, France, Ireland, Portugal, Sweden and the UK. It was compiled and written by Rebecca Franceskides.

It has been shaped by the input of the 15 old Member States. Through telephone interviews, they provided a mass of useful information. What came out clearly is that the national thematic networks were central to the mainstreaming process. They offered opportunities for better addressing problems and solutions, exchanging experience and having an impact on policies.

The mainstreaming learning seminar

Further input came from participants at the learning seminar on the mainstreaming of EQUAL results held in Dublin in April 2005. It was organised by the European Commission and hosted by Ireland's Managing Authority.

Opening the seminar, William Parnell, head of Ireland's ESF Managing Authority, emphasised that mainstreaming the EQUAL successes into policy and practice takes time and effort. 'It does not have to be a big bang nor result in huge policy shifts. Many of the EQUAL successes are happening at local level or in small steps.'

Managing Authorities have to ensure their mainstreaming plans are in place from the start and 'not bolted on at the end', advised Tommy Murray, Ireland's National Coordinator of EQUAL.

Gerhard Braeunling, from the European Commission's EQUAL Unit, said in his introductory remarks that EQUAL is about changing attitudes, processes, products and delivery systems. 'Change is triggered by demonstrating that things can be done differently – the technical term for this is innovation.'

EQUAL can draw many lessons from industry on how to manage change. 'Most industrial innovations are incremental, not radical.' They are improvements to an existing product, process or context.

Like other speakers, Mr Braeunling underlined that managing innovations means managing risk. 'Innovation is associated with the risk of failure.' For example, some 60% of all new ideas do not make it to prototype and as many prototypes never get to be manufactured. There are many reasons, for example, they may not be feasible or cost-effective.

Industry has shown that successful innovations are user

friendly and early involvement of users is crucial to success. They also take into account the human factor and are able to 'manage' the user's resistance or fear of change. 'Innovations have to create confidence in the benefits they can bring.'

Using the guide

This guide is a 'living document' to be constantly updated as further good practice emerges. Updates will be placed on the web.

It outlines approaches to influence current policies and practice through a process of networking, dissemination and mainstreaming.

There is no single model of successful mainstreaming. Each country needs to adapt the advice in the guide to best meet its national situation. It may depend on the size of country, the number of DPs and EQUAL themes that it is tackling, the sources of match funding and so on.

EQUAL cannot change everything and therefore it is important that Managing Authorities set realistic goals for their mainstreaming strategies.

The EQUAL programme is in itself innovative in the way it works. Its building blocks are an example of good practice in employment and training policies. They leave an important legacy for the future.

Readers may also wish to refer to other EQUAL Guides available:

- EQUAL Guide for Development Partnerships
- EQUAL Guide for Gender Mainstreaming
- EQUAL Guide for Transnational Cooperation 2004-2008
- EQUAL Partnership Development Toolkit – a partnership oriented planning, monitoring and evaluation guide for facilitators of EQUAL Development and Transnational Partnerships.



1. Mainstreaming and EQUAL – The Concept

Mainstreaming is one of EQUAL's basic principles. It ensures that the innovations being tried and tested throughout the EU can reach a wider audience and so maximise the learning and the investment.

But what lies behind this concept still leaves many confused.

What does it actually mean?

The EQUAL glossary gives this working definition:

Mainstreaming is 'a process which enables activities to impact on policy and practice. This process includes identifying lessons, clarifying the innovative element and approach that produced the results, their dissemination, validation and transfer. More specifically, mainstreaming also defines the phase of transfer and the way in which other actors take account of the results, approaches and key elements elaborated by one or more Development Partnerships (DPs).'

The mainstream represents the principal, dominant ideas, attitudes, practices or trends. It is where choices are considered and decisions are made that effect economic, social and political options. It is where things happen. The mainstream determines who gets what and provides a rationale for the allocation of resources and opportunities.

Mainstreaming is about influencing these dominant ideas, attitudes, practices or trends to achieve change in policy and in practice – change in the attitudes and skills of staff, change in organisations themselves and in how they deliver their 'services'.

Mainstreaming goes beyond dissemination. Although this is part of the process, the core of mainstreaming is the transfer and, eventually, the adoption of lessons learned.

Getting ideas adopted into national policy and incorporated by other organisations is extremely difficult. It is easier to disseminate findings than to ensure that findings influence policy or are adopted by others.

Dissemination means sharing information and raising awareness of the work of DPs and the results achieved, good and bad.

Mainstreaming means that these results are transferred and taken up in every day policy and standard practice. They create a wide impact and influence change.

Both dissemination and transfer start with innovation at project level. They both involve identification of good practice. But for the transfer to take place, a further, deeper assessment of the results is necessary to ensure that they are relevant, useful and can be adopted equally successfully in a different context or on a wider scale.

To enable a transfer of results (mainstreaming), it is necessary to:

- Evaluate what works;
- Spot the aspects that can be generalised;
- Assess the relevance of results and what they offer to established policies and actions;
- Validate the lessons learned;
- Clarify the conditions under which they were achieved.

In addition, dissemination and mainstreaming often use the same tools, accentuating the confusion between them. These include peer review, publications, reports, guides, events, visits and so on.

Under EQUAL, mainstreaming means:	Integrating tried and tested EQUAL innovations into the core of local, regional, national and European employment and human resource policies, delivery systems and practice.
The result:	Having an impact on these policies and practice so as to reduce all forms of labour market discrimination and inequality.
The ultimate goal:	A labour market open to all.



Why mainstream?

EQUAL is an experimental programme. It is a laboratory to develop new ways of tackling discrimination in the labour market. The investment can only be justified if there is a positive impact on current policy and practice improving the lives of groups who experience discrimination.

Experimenting with new approaches and products on the one hand (innovation) and integrating validated and successful results on the other (mainstreaming) are at the core of EQUAL.

'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 laboratory experiment, the effects 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.'

Guidelines for the second round of the Community Initiative EQUAL. COM (2003) 840 final. 30.12.2003

Through mainstreaming, EQUAL can:

- Contribute to improving public policy and practice, based on what actually works (and does not work);
- Involve key stakeholders, including the groups who experience discrimination in this process;
- Raise the awareness of decision-makers at all levels, and of the public, about potential solutions to common social and economic problems;
- Provide a way to share and transfer knowledge, expertise and experiences through networking and learning;
- Help DPs see the value of their work from the eyes of others who want to use the results to achieve similar outcomes;
- Ensure the continuity of good practice explored in Equal beyond the life of the programme.

How does it work?

Mainstreaming can impact on practice, on policy or on both.

Mainstreaming of practice occurs when an organisation adopts and reproduces examples of good practice arising from the actions of DPs. They can adopt all or part of the actions undertaken by a DP.

Mainstreaming of policy occurs when the policy lessons arising from the actions of DPs influence or impact on mainstream policy-making or policy delivery. It is the most difficult to achieve, as it necessarily involves a wide range of actors and different levels of decision-making.

It can cover, for example:

- Tangible outcomes and products from one DP or groups of DPs;
- An innovative approach or model;
- New ways of working with partners or beneficiaries;
- A new qualification;
- New practical tools, for example, monitoring methodologies or new ways of collecting data;
- New research, testimonials and experiences that demonstrate the added value of the new solutions explored by EQUAL.

It is important to transfer information about both what has worked well and what has not worked sufficiently in order to avoid the same mistakes being repeated.

The transfer of innovative results can happen in a variety of ways:

- The lessons learned can be transferred to other people or organisations working on similar issues. This mainstreaming, at a peer level, is called 'horizontal mainstreaming' and is done primarily by the DP's themselves. Usually it focuses on changing practices in local organisations or organisations within a sector at regional, national or European level. Adopting these changes is usually in each organisation's control. For example, adopting a new on-the-job training methodology for less qualified workers in small companies.



Horizontal mainstreaming:

Changes at local or regional level often focus on practice.

- The lessons learned can be transferred from one administrative level to another, influencing employment and training policy and practice at institutional, political, regulatory and administrative level. This is called ‘vertical mainstreaming’. This type of transfer is harder to achieve as it may involve many decision-making layers before any change is introduced. If successful, such mainstreaming is likely to result in a systematic and general change.

Vertical mainstreaming

Changes at political and administrative levels.

For vertical mainstreaming to occur, a number of stages are necessary:

On the demand side

Policymakers and other potential users have an interest in the findings because they fit into current policy priorities and so they want the information.

On the supply side

DPs develop innovative practice – a new idea, a new concept, a new method – and want to disseminate and share it.



Start with the users

If there is a mismatch between what is demanded by policy-makers and other potential users of EQUAL innovations and what is supplied by DPs, mainstreaming efforts may not succeed.

This is why it is crucial that policy-makers and potential users of innovation are brought in from the start. They can then make a clear policy link with the work of EQUAL, be involved throughout the life of the programme, and build up relations with the Managing Authorities, NSS and the DPs and so become more receptive to taking on board the new practices.



Mainstreaming is a social learning process. It needs a short, medium and long-term strategy. It is not something you do once and then let it be.

Shared responsibility

The Managing Authorities and the NSS on the one hand, and the DPs and their networks on the other hand, share the responsibility of mainstreaming. Each has a role to play in promoting the validation and transfer of innovations. Each can help the other to achieve it.

Managing Authorities and NSS can facilitate mainstreaming in a number of ways:

- They can empower DPs to take on and develop their own dissemination and mainstreaming strategy by providing political support to ‘open doors’ and technical resources (on how to develop a mainstreaming plan, how to monitor and evaluate it, how to tell the story of their project to others, how to validate products, how to monitor mainstreaming, and so on).
- They can regularly inform and involve in EQUAL policy-makers and 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 Structural Fund Programmes.
- They can facilitate the dialogue between DPs and policy-makers as well as other potential users of their innovations.

In many cases, public administrations are taking a leading role in DPs. As such they have a double function. They are directly involved in the development of the innovation and have the power to transfer and adopt the lessons learned from the project into every day policies and practices.

Paradoxically, such DPs may be far better placed to mainstream EQUAL innovations than the Managing Authority.

But Managing Authorities still have a role in such cases, supporting and encouraging these DP members to opt for change.



Be smart

Remember, the transfer and incorporation of innovative results into policy and practice is not an automatic process. It takes time. It is difficult to implement, difficult to measure and not easily understood by all who need to implement it.

Managing Authorities and the NSS must not set themselves up for failure. It is important to set realistic targets – that is targets which are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound (the SMART formula).

The mainstreaming process – a summary

Innovation	DPs develop and test new ways to tackle inequality, discrimination and exclusion at work, and in access to work.
Validation	DPs and their networks, peers and stakeholders validate the innovative results: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what works under what conditions and what does not, and why; • what is the relevance, advantage and transfer potential of the innovative solution.
Dissemination	DPs and their networks, as well as key stakeholders, document and validate their results, distil the lessons learned and communicate them to the relevant target audience through briefings, publications events and tailored to their needs. The DPs are the key actors here.
Transfer	DPs identify the lessons that can be transferred to a different or wider context, and make them available to third parties influencing policy and practice. This can happen in two ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other promoters active in the same or similar field adopt them in their policies or practice (horizontal mainstreaming); • Policy-makers and administrative bodies adopt them in their everyday policies or standard practices (vertical mainstreaming). <p>The key actors in this phase are individuals and organisations who are involved in the design and implementation of policy areas that are relevant to EQUAL. Examples are national, regional and local political and administrative bodies, the social partners, opinion shapers, NGOs, churches, project sponsors, scientists and academics.</p>



The do's and don'ts of mainstreaming

The Do's

- Start early and plan your mainstreaming strategy well;
- Agree on a shared vision of what you want to achieve;
- Keep working at mainstreaming;
- Keep looking for opportunities;
- Make opportunities by connecting policy with DP practice. Find political agendas that are relevant and match them with EQUAL results;
- Make policy choices and focus on them;
- Continuously review political priorities and your policy choices;
- Involve stakeholders in the whole process;
- Bring on board people who have access to policy- and decision-makers as champions of EQUAL;
- Create a national mainstreaming group with high-level politicians and decision-makers to help you in this task;
- Get the right people interested at the right time;
- Select DPs with mainstreaming in mind. Does it fit into the policy priorities of the day? Is the project sufficiently innovative? Does it have a potential to be incorporated into other sectors if successful? And so on;
- Require that all DPs draw up and present a mainstreaming plan with their initial application and agree to share their resulting innovations;
- Document your projects thoroughly so you know what works under which conditions;
- Formulate results in terms of cost effectiveness;
- Involve experts to help transform experiences into policy messages;
- Match your messages to the group you are targeting;
- Pick the themes of your national networks according to your national priorities;
- Persuade DPs to join forces and participate actively in the networks;
- Create a forum to allow open discussion on the issues and ideas coming out of the EQUAL;
- Involve the media.

The Don'ts

- Don't think that having good results at hand is sufficient. If it is not on the political agenda, if policy-makers are not looking for solutions in that area, you may get nowhere;
- Don't see EQUAL as a closed network. It must be a visible and 'open show' accessible to all who are interested in its work;
- Don't get wrapped up in the structures and administrative procedures;
- Don't raise people's expectations if you cannot deliver. Be realistic about what you can achieve as a Managing Authority and what DPs can achieve;
- Don't think you can do mainstreaming on your own. You need to involve wide networks at all levels and bring in experts as necessary;
- Don't organise big events and seminars to mainstream EQUAL innovations. They are good for dissemination but not for mainstreaming;
- Don't let projects get on with their work without monitoring it. You should feel like a partner in each project, spotting what can be mainstreamed and when;
- Don't overload those you want to influence. They are not ready to listen to you everyday;
- Don't remain at the level of dissemination.



2. Identifying policy needs



Mainstreaming in a policy context involves similar laws of supply and demand as in the economic sector. For a DP to transfer its innovation into mainstream policy or mainstream delivery system, it must supply a solution to a current policy demand.

To identify the policy demands, Managing Authorities, NSS and DPs will need to keep a watchful eye on:

- Policy developments;
- The political agenda in their country;
- New laws and policies that may be under discussion where EQUAL results can contribute.

Managing Authorities will also need to actively involve policy-makers and practitioners before finalising mainstreaming plans (see part 8). As potential stakeholders, they can:

- Say whether they find what EQUAL wants to mainstream useful;
- Identify the policy gaps that EQUAL may be able to fill and so achieve a closer link between their needs and the planned outputs of EQUAL.

In addition, through this relationship, Managing Authorities will enable key stakeholders to better understand and appreciate the context in which DPs are developing innovations.

Officials who are in charge of preparing the National Action Plans for the European Employment Strategy and the Social Inclusion Process, as well as those involved in Structural Fund Programmes can be a first point of contact to unveil key policy priorities relevant to EQUAL.

Many Member States have formalised their discussions with key policy-makers through the creation of national or even regional mainstreaming committees. Senior officers and decision-makers sit on these committees. As they know the policy-making process well, they are in a good position to introduce relevant and evidenced innovations coming out of EQUAL into the policy domain.

This is how some Member States have done it:

Ireland has set up a national mainstreaming group with senior officials from Government Departments and state agencies and social partner representatives. In addition, representatives of the National Thematic Networks (NTNs) sit on this Committee. The country's Equality Authority (Department of Justice, Equality and law reform) and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment jointly chair it. The group helps the Managing Authority keep tabs on relevant policy developments so it can intervene at an early stage with policy proposals coming out of EQUAL. The existence of the group has also helped build up personal relations between the Managing Authority and policy-makers.

The Managing Authority chairs Spain's national mainstreaming group. It has the following members: the director of the Managing Authority; a representative of the Equal Unit within the Ministry of Labour; representatives of the social partners; each regional authority; key NGOs; and NSS members involved in mainstreaming. The group receives information requests from policy-makers within the Monitoring Committee and establishes thematic priorities that match these policy requests.

Italy has set up a national mainstreaming committee and regional ones. The regional authorities chair the regional committees which focus on regional policy priorities. They usually include the social partners as members. These committees ensure the link to the policy issues of the day.

In (Dutch speaking) Belgium, the Managing Authority sought out the opinion of policy-makers and the social partners before they finalised the call for proposals. Policy priorities were discussed with relevant ministries and meetings were held with the social partners to see the policy focus they wanted. Only when the consultation process was finished was the call for proposals finalised and project selection made.

In (French speaking) Belgium, the link is made with relevant ministries through a special Committee that oversees the work of the Managing Authority. This Committee brings together the six ministries that are interested in the work of EQUAL. In addition, it has set up a mainstreaming committee with a wider membership. Representatives of regional authorities, public services, employers and trade unions join the members from the six ministries. Its job is to analyse project findings and make recommendations for policy and practice.

In Lithuania, the Managing Authority undertook a structured assessment of the issues and innovations that needed to be addressed at the outset of the programme. Using an external facilitator, they undertook a problem analysis highlighting cause and effect between problems and issues. As a result, they developed a set of ‘problem trees’ for each EQUAL theme in order to identify specific issues that could be addressed with innovative solutions. Through a systematic analysis of complex issues, it was possible to map the potential areas for innovations by the DPs.

Getting the timing right

Managing Authorities, the NSS and DPs must take mainstreaming into account from the very beginning and implement it on an ongoing basis to take advantage of relevant mainstreaming opportunities as and when they occur.

Change is more likely to be successful when implemented over time. Managing Authorities and NSS cannot wait until DPs complete their work before informing policy-makers. Opportunities to influence may be lost, their innovation may be less relevant than when first planned and policy-makers may be less inclined to trust their outcomes if introduced to them at a late stage.

Further, policy development is not linear. Managing Authorities need to understand the funding and decision-making cycles of their target mainstreaming audience. It is unlikely that these will coincide directly with the delivery programme of a DP. Sometimes DPs can be ahead of policy-makers and sometimes they may be lagging behind. Only if the demand and supply match, can mainstreaming work effectively.

Creating and responding to demand

In most cases, the Managing Authority and the NSS seek out what is demanded by policy-makers. This is sometimes referred to as the ‘pull dimension’ of transferring innovation.

They fix the policy priorities following a survey of policy demands and keep evaluating this information to adapt their advice to DPs.

But part of their work also involves creating the demand for EQUAL innovations. As one commentator put it ‘the suppliers of innovation are there but the buyers are invisible. There is nobody saying we want it.’

Policy-makers and other practitioners do not always give clear guidance on what they need. Managing Authorities and DPs face the challenge of opening ‘new ways of thinking’. But they also run the risk that such innovations may not be sufficiently operational as they are developed without clear specifications on what and for whom they are innovating.

Under its Action 3, Sweden is funding a special policy spotting project. It amounts to a small secretariat that looks at employment and training policies, analyses the policy demands and matches them with EQUAL findings. When it spots a policy opportunity, it can then turn to DPs to ask them to feed into it. It is looking at government policy but also at that of employers and trade unions. The Managing Authority started the project because it felt that ‘there was no pulling. We are pushing but nobody is pulling.’

It may also happen that policy- and decision-makers and other key actors may see their policy priorities reflected in EQUAL and follow progress in these areas with the idea of using the results. This mobilisation towards the eventual adoption of innovative practices and policy change is referred as the ‘pull’ dimension of mainstreaming.

In some cases, policy-makers initiate their own mainstreaming actions within EQUAL. This happened in France, for example, with the French Agriculture Ministry. The country is undergoing major agricultural reform and the Ministry looked to EQUAL for an input – 17% of EQUAL first round projects in France involved farming and rural development. As a result, the Ministry initiated its own EQUAL project under Action 3 involving three of its departments (Agricultural development, Education and Communication), the sector’s main training funding bodies and many of the existing EQUAL rural projects.

A rural networking organisation manages the partnership.

The policy world gives a clear definition of the innovation that is needed with this top-down approach. It guides DPs on where they should focus their energies although it might also limit the capacity of DPs to develop new ideas.



Keeping a balance

The European mid-term evaluation report of EQUAL found that public administrations were often taking a leading role in monitoring and DP selection. *'This is linked to the need for co-funding but also to the role of regional and local authorities in the area of employment and/or social inclusion policies.'*

But it pleaded for keeping a balance. *'The better knowledge of the problems and actors at regional level may be a strong argument in favour of the involvement of local and regional stakeholders. But, at the same time, the possibility of conflicts of interest is increased, as institutions participating in selection committees may also be involved in regional DPs.'*

Exercise: identifying priorities

After a policy needs survey, you can use this brainstorming technique to pinpoint the policy areas you would like to concentrate your mainstreaming effort on.

With your teams try this exercise.

- Each person identifies key policy areas that EQUAL can contribute solutions to and notes each one on a card.
- Pin all the cards on a board.
- Cluster similar themes and eliminate double descriptions.
- Each person explains his or her choices. No discussion takes place.
- Each person has six votes to allocate to the list of policy priorities with the highest number of votes going to the issue they think is the most crucial to concentrate on.
- Identify the policy priority that received the highest number of votes. You may come back to the other problems in a second and in consecutive turns until you have analysed all the issues. Take your time.
- Start with the top policy priority. Ask 'Why' is this problem the most pertinent to focus on.
- People can give their answer on a card or explain it aloud. All the answers are noted on the board.
- Start with one of the answers and ask again 'Why'. Do this with all the answers for this problem.
- Repeat the whole process until you have asked five consecutive 'Whys'. You may find many of the problems have a common cause and the answers will converge.



3. Identifying and involving the target audience

Once a Managing Authority has decided its policy priorities, the next task is to identify the target audience and how they will be involved in EQUAL.

The chances of successfully influencing policy and practice are much greater if policy-makers are actively involved with EQUAL from the start, understand the working of the programme and become familiar with the DPs developing the innovation.

Their views can shape projects at an early stage and ensure that DPs are supplying solutions in areas where there is a clear policy demand.

The UK defines 'policy-makers' as individuals or organisations that can turn the practice of DPs into policy.

You will need to understand:

- Who makes the decisions? (e.g. individuals, committees)
- When are decisions made? When is demand most acute (e.g. spending reviews, policy consultations)
- How are decisions made? (e.g. based on 'hard evidence' only, through consultation)
- What type of information is needed to influence these decisions?

Political will is crucial to mainstreaming. In the absence of a political leader, reluctant administrations can argue that their job is to execute policy and not make it. So often you could be talking to the wrong people when you want to mainstream EQUAL innovations. You are asking the system to change itself. It usually needs an external push from the top.

Personal contacts count

Success in mainstreaming also depends on being able to interest and inspire individuals. For example, one could find a 'champion' for an innovation within a target government department or organisation who is ready to back and promote the new approach.


Successful mainstreaming involves a lot of contacts, meetings, interviews. In short, 'a lot of talking' to explain the innovations being developed and to get decision-makers to listen. Involve them from the start and keep them informed throughout.

The target audience for innovative solutions can include:

- Policy- and decision-makers from relevant political and administrative sectors who can introduce change. This includes those responsible for the implementation of national and regional employment and training policies including the Structural Funds as well as those developing the National Action Plans for the European Employment Strategy and the Social Inclusion Process;
- End-users who may use the innovations such as beneficiary interest groups including employers, professional associations, practitioners and project managers;
- Organisations interested in seeing change such as non-governmental organisations;
- Organisations that can influence the policy and decision-makers or the end-users such as the Chambers of Commerce, local and regional development agencies, qualification and accreditation bodies, Equality Commissions, advisory bodies and research institutes;
- Committees and Boards designing policy in your country;
- The media and opinion leaders.


Engaging the target audience

The target audience can be involved in a passive way, for example, through mailing lists to receive mainstreaming outputs from DPs and national networks as they become available. But this may not involve them sufficiently and there is no guarantee that they will find the outcomes timely or relevant.


 *It is important to understand the needs of your target audience as well as their constraints and competing demands. Explore how you think the mainstreaming process can help them and what you can offer. For example:*

- *Help with acquiring new knowledge;*
- *Help to gain a deeper understanding of a policy area or practice;*
- *Support to implement new solutions;*
- *Data to support a policy position;*
- *Resources for what they want to do.*

A more active strategy will ensure their more effective participation in the programme and a greater sense of ownership of the results. For example, they could be invited to participate in the Monitoring Committees and the national networks, help to shape agendas, observe progress and influence the EQUAL timetable to meet their own needs.

 *By involving decision-makers throughout, you will enhance the effectiveness of the EQUAL outcomes and promote a wider understanding of, and trust in, the DP model.*

Managing authorities can organise regularly focused meetings with a selected number of DPs working in a specific area and relevant policy-makers for a guided discussion. This can help DPs to better meet their demands and can give policy-makers a chance to draw on the lessons coming from EQUAL.

 *In the Netherlands, the Managing Authority organises executive lunches and dinners. At these meals, it invites senior politicians, business people and trade unions to discuss a specific topic while enjoying a good meal. The number of guests is never more than 10. A few DPs are also invited to present their work. The National Thematic Networks collaborate in the preparation of the DP presentations. A discussion follows. The aim is to inform but also to secure top level support and a commitment to consider the policy or practice implications of the EQUAL innovations.*


Staying in tune

An active strategy to involve policy-makers can be resource-intensive and difficult to maintain in the face of shifting priorities. What is a political priority when DPs are selected may lose its number one spot a year later making it difficult to attract the same political attention. This can happen, for

example, if there is a change of government half-way through the programme. The risk can be partially avoided by taking account of short-term but also medium- and long-term policy needs and continuously reviewing political priorities and policy choices.


Further, it might not be easy to get the right people involved. Once again, much may depend on political priorities. If a theme is one of the 'hot' labour market issues of the day, then it is much easier to interest policy-makers.

One piece of advice is to start from the top and work your way down until you find a listening ear. It involves sending information but also telephoning and face-to-face contacts. People you are targeting have to see what they can gain from being involved.

 *Sometimes you can achieve more in a quick face-to-face meeting over the phone than sending three reports in a week.*

Involving the target group through DPs

DPs should be involving organisations and individuals who have a central role to play within the policy field in which they operate in their partnerships. Partnerships that comprise organisations that are developing the new practice and those which will incorporate it are an important innovation in themselves. They strengthen the DPs role and responsibility in both horizontal and vertical mainstreaming.

 *Encourage DPs to include in their partnership partners who can provide easier access to policy-makers.*

Many partnerships in the first round of EQUAL had such a combination of members. But experience has also shown that in many cases the partners who can influence policy do not always do enough to realise the mainstreaming potential of the projects they are involved with and need more encouragement.

The European EQUAL mid-term evaluation report found that many partners were public authorities. But it warned: 'Direct participation may be both viewed as an asset for the programme, especially with regard to mainstreaming purposes, and as a risk, as existing policy agendas may take precedence over innovation or may limit innovation to the design of tools within the frame of existing policies.'

Social partners are insufficiently present in the DPs although they often participate in the selection committees and thematic networks.



1 In Austria, the Managing Authority focused its mainstreaming efforts on the make up of the DPs. Each DP, from the start, had to involve strategic partners who were potential users of the innovations being developed.

As a minimum, they had to include in their partnership at least one regional authority or municipality; representatives from relevant public bodies such as the public employment service or the federal offices for social affairs and disabilities; the social partners; and key NGOs.

It warned DPs not to opt for the easiest partnership but one that will be most beneficial when it comes to spreading and transferring their project results.

Once the DPs were set up, the Managing Authority worked with the partnerships to maximise the possibility that partners who are potential users of the innovation, do actually consider, adopt and adapt it into their policy and practice.

The Managing Authority also promotes contacts between the different regions as it believes that if one regional authority adopts a new policy or practice, it will be easier to convince others to follow suit.

1 In Sweden, for the second round, the Managing Authority paid more attention to the link between the DPs that are selected and mainstreaming.

The DP had to show through its composition and agenda how it will lead to innovation and ensure that participating members and other relevant organisations can integrate the results into their policies and practice.

Impact and dissemination costs were an obligatory budget item. The 'products' created or developed had to be innovative and renew:

- The development of labour market and working life policy, ideas and measures;
- Structures, institutions and values in society that affect peoples' participation in working life;
- Formal and informal processes, working methods and networks relating to working life;
- The strategies, productivity and growth of companies, authorities and organisations;
- The working life situation of individuals and specific groups.

The Managing Authority facilitates this process by arranging fora and opportunities for organisations, at all levels, to follow from the start the activities of EQUAL and to define their policy needs so that they can assimilate and incorporate the new ideas that emerge.

The members of the Monitoring Committee represent a first point of contact at the national level for this.

Another primary target is Sweden's political organisations.

Exercise identifying the target audience¹

You can use this brainstorming technique to identify the organisations you need to reach, and the relevant individuals within these organisations that you will need to influence and gain their support if you are to facilitate the transfer of EQUAL successes into policy and practice.

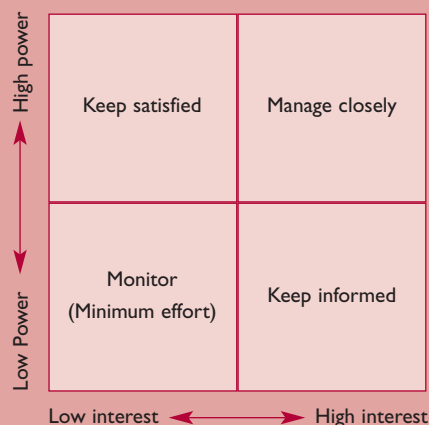
→ Brainstorm on all the organisations/people in your country that may be interested in the work of EQUAL and can influence its success (or even failure).

→ Once you have your list, for each organisation/individual work out their power, influence and interest. This will help you to see who you need to focus on first.

→ Mindtools (for more information see www.mindtools.com) suggests the following grid to classify your target audience:

→ You should target your greatest efforts at the people you classify as high power and high interest. But remember people who you may identify as low power but high interest may prove to be useful allies.

→ The next step is to decide how you can involve the different groups into EQUAL according to their level of importance for your mainstreaming efforts.



¹ Further guidance on identifying the target audience can be found in the EQUAL Partnership Development Toolkit – a partnership oriented planning, monitoring and evaluation guide for facilitators of EQUAL Development and Transnational Partnerships.



4. Identifying good practice or policy innovation – The message

Once the needs and stakeholders of the ‘policy market’ (see part 2) have been identified and the target audience (see part 3) has been involved, Managing Authorities need to be ready to identify the good practice or policy innovations that can meet these needs.

The levels of good practice

The development of good practice is not limited to the DPs. It is not an isolated entity that can be just copied and then reproduced. It is developed through a network of activity that is mutually supportive.

Researchers have argued that there are different levels of good practice. Creating or finding good practice is about plotting, mapping and reflecting on who were the key players, the structures and the situation that made that practice work. It involves the DPs but also the local and national framework.

Managing Authorities can contribute to creating an environment that allows good practice to evolve and so generates other good practice. They can take the role of ‘honorary’ partner in each DP, showing continuous interest in their work, supporting their self-evaluation, spotting what has a mainstreaming potential and helping them to transfer the results.

It is a mutual learning relationship where all parties develop, change and learn.

Good practice at DP level

- Crossing individual thresholds and opening up new possibilities in the lives of individual project beneficiaries be it in employment, training or other activity.
- Good interaction and dialogue between staff and project beneficiaries.
- Good connection to local and, indirectly, to national strategy.
- Demand driven approach taking into account labour market demand and the needs of customers and stakeholders.
- Building learning networks involving the public and other relevant services.

Good practice for local and national networks

- Involvement of relevant actors at different levels of decision-making.
- Strategic dialogue with actors to identify local, regional, sectoral and national needs.
- Fostering a learning infrastructure between members.
- Advising DPs to stay policy relevant and ensure flexible adaptation to changing conditions.
- Enable a dialogue between DPs and potential users of the innovation.

Good practice for administrations responsible for EQUAL

- Communicating strategic needs.
- Fostering strategic dialogue with the public and private sector.
- Fostering a learning infrastructure involving the public sector but also the social partners.
- Fostering project quality and skills.
- Prompt redirection according to changes in the labour markets.

The makeup of good practice

The UK EQUAL Support Unit defines good practice as ‘approaches that are working well and can be replicated elsewhere’.

The Peer Review Programme for the European Employment Strategy states that:

- Good practice should be relevant to current and emerging policy priorities;
- Good practice should bring concrete responses to problems targeted by current and emerging policy;



- Good practice is declared ‘good’ on the basis of demonstrated and reliable results;
- Good practice is assessed as ‘good’, if potential users judge that they could take it up so there is an assessment of the transfer potential by those who want to adopt it.


In its 2002 paper for an EQUAL conference in Barcelona on Networking for Inclusion, the commission suggests that the following requirements, ideally, should be met to qualify as good practice:

- Innovative – it provides new, creative solutions to common problems of social exclusion, discrimination and inequality in the labour market;
- Effective – it makes a difference, and has a positive, tangible impact on the life of socially disadvantaged individuals, groups or communities;
- Efficient – it delivers value for money;
- Sustainable – it produces lasting benefits for participants and the community at large;
- Reproduced – it has the potential to be reproduced in similar contexts, serving as a model for generating initiatives and policies elsewhere;
- Transferable – it has the potential for transfer in different contexts and/or for different problems;
- Policy relevant – it addresses real issues and responds to the needs of policy-makers.

Defining innovation

An innovation need not be new in the sense that it has never been tried before. But it must be new in at least one aspect. For example, it is new to the trainers concerned, to the target group of disadvantaged people, to the policy area, to the sector and so on.

The European EQUAL Mid-term evaluation report warned of a possible ‘*inherent tension in the programme between the importance given to innovation and the requirement of policy relevance and mainstreaming*’.

 Innovation has a value if it makes a difference to the solving of specific discrimination problems. It has to make a difference for the target group.

Managing Authorities will have to figure out the right balance. An innovative project may have more problems raising co-finance because of its ‘risky’ character. The public sector does not always reward innovation by putting money into it as it may feel the cost of experimenting is too high.

Innovation can occur in a variety of ways. It may be:

- Process-oriented – focusing on the development of new methods, tools and approaches or the improvement/adaptation of existing ones;
- Goal-oriented – focusing on formulating new objectives, uses, target groups and qualifications or opening up new areas of employment;
- Context-oriented – focusing on political and institutional structures, developing labour market systems or other structures through adapting innovation from another context.

Innovation in EQUAL

Under EQUAL, innovation is more likely to improve existing delivery systems rather than fill policy gaps. It is difficult to set up innovative practices in the short timeframe of EQUAL and even more difficult to assess them as such.

DPs need to understand what amounts to innovation. They will have to analyse, test and generalise their project results in such a way that they can be adopted by other potential users and in different contexts. The following tasks are suggested to each DP:

- Analyse the initial situation. DPs can use the geographical or sectoral analyses carried out under Action I for identifying inequality and discrimination to help them in this work.
- Describe the innovative quality of their approach compared to the initial situation. They need to explain how their innovations contribute to reducing inequality compared to other employment policy tools previously used in the same situation. They can use the categories of goal-oriented, process-oriented and context-oriented innovation described above.
- Determine the success of the approach chosen by constantly documenting and evaluating the delivery, results and impact. Where possible, they can compare their approach with the results of the other existing approaches to see if it is more effective or more efficient than those previously used. It is important to document problems as well as success factors. In short, DPs must be able to describe what worked well and under what conditions and provide the evidence to support their claims.

Practical tools to support, analyse and facilitate the evaluation of innovative actions are presented in the EQUAL Partnership Development Toolkit – a partnership oriented planning, monitoring and evaluation guide for facilitators of EQUAL Development and Transnational Partnerships



Facilitating good practice

Good practice outcomes include innovative approaches or models to solve a problem or to respond to a need as well as practical tools such as training materials and checklists.

Managing Authorities may need to select from amongst the good practices that they have identified those that are most effective or most relevant to specific policy priorities to concentrate their efforts.

They will have to identify the DPs which are likely to come up with innovations that they can transfer. This is not the case for all DPs. Sometimes the people involved are what make the project work. In others, it is the context or the target group. Any change in the equation in such cases will not guarantee effective results.

In addition, they will have to consider what is useful to mainstream at local level only, what has national relevance and so on.

Managing Authorities can support DPs to better evaluate their work and turn their findings into concrete and tangible tools that can be useful to third parties. DPs spend much of their time developing their project and addressing their target group's problems and needs. They may need some encouragement to identify, assess and package their good practice into stand alone tools that other organisations can use.

They can do this by asking DPs to identify, during Action 2, the products and processes that have a potential for being transferred with support under Action 3. These become the departure point for the planning of the project itself. Portugal has used this technique successfully. It has resulted in DPs focusing more of their efforts in Action 2 on experimental activities that are crucial to produce the products they want to mainstream and has avoided a dispersal of money, time and energy in activities that are unnecessary or unrelated to the final product.



The Managing Authority for (Dutch-speaking) Belgium has selected nine products developed with co-financing from the ESF and EQUAL as its 'ambassadors' of good practice for 2005. The aim was to give a 'helping hand' to ensure that interesting products reached the right policy-makers and decision-makers.



An intensive selection procedure took place with a prominent jury drawn mainly from the public sector. The twelve selection criteria included the product's innovative character, how far it empowered the target group and met its needs, if it took women and men equally into account, its added value, if it was user-friendly and accessible and if it could be easily transferred and adapted to other situations. The Managing Authority organised a forum where the nine 'ambassadors' presented their work to an invited senior level audience drawn from the government, the public sector but also employers and trade unions.

The employment minister presented the organisations which developed each 'ambassador' product with a prize of €2 500 to help them with their mainstreaming efforts. As part of the deal, they have to remain open to information requests by potential users of these products or by other interested organisations. In addition it secured the agreement of a newspaper in Flanders to run a feature on each 'ambassador' over a nine week period. The organisations will be able to use this quality label for one year.

Identifying good practice

At the beginning of the programme, The European Commission made proposals for identifying good practice relevant to EQUAL. It suggested a checklist that Managing Authorities could use it to identify good practice developed by DPs. It revolves around three questions:

- What has been achieved and how?
- How do the EQUAL building blocks of partnership, empowerment, transnationality and gender equality contribute to the outcomes?
- Can the results be applied outside the DP?

The Commission's proposals for a good practice checklist²

What has been achieved and how?

- What did the DP expect to achieve?
- What are the results and which innovations did it achieve?
- What obstacles did the DP meet and how did it overcome them?
- Are the results sustainable?
- In what way do the actions build on what existed before in the area or sector (new action in the territory or sector, new project content, new methodologies, new delivery mechanisms or mainstreaming strategies)?
- How does this help to solve specific problems of discrimination faced by the target group?
- Have the results been achieved in a cost-effective manner?

How do the EQUAL building blocks of partnership, empowerment, transnationality and gender equality contribute to the outcomes?

- Partnership – are the most relevant actors within the territory or sector involved (public authorities, social partners, training providers, NGOs, third sector, ...) and do they have clearly defined tasks? How does the DP coordinate its partnership to ensure effective implementation and avoid a duplication of efforts and resources?
- Empowerment – have all partners been involved at every stage of the project (design, implementation, follow-up, evaluation) and how? What measures has the DP taken to directly involve beneficiaries (or their representatives) in the decision-making process?
- Transnationality – How has transnational cooperation contributed to the DP's results? Did the DPs in the transnational partnership agree from the beginning on a detailed programme (joint actions, expected results, possible products, etc.) and an operational mode? Are their methods of cooperation (organisation, decision-making, communication between transnational partners, task sharing ...) adequate? Have they assigned sufficient and adequate resources (financial, human, technical) for the transnational cooperation? Do they have an adequate monitoring and evaluation system for the transnational actions? Do the transnational actions add value to all participants?
- Gender equality – has the project taken account of women and men throughout? How does it address the needs of women and of men? How do the results affect women and men? How does the DP not only avoid reproducing discrimination on the grounds of gender, but actively contribute to the general objective of equality between women and men?

Can the results be applied outside the DP?

- Can the DP apply its products or practices in other regions, sectors, target groups and countries? What conditions are required to reproduce the action elsewhere (training, skills, resources, institutional framework ...)?
- Can it survive after EQUAL funding ends? How?
- Did the DP put in place, from the beginning, a detailed strategy (calendar, dissemination and communications plan, target groups etc.) for mainstreaming good practice? How did it identify relevant policy and decision-makers (regional and local level) and contact them to communicate the results? To what extent have DP partners committed themselves to mainstreaming the successful results in their own organisations?

2 Based on the Networking for Inclusion Barcelona Conference paper, May 2002.



Three models are suggested to identify good practice:

- Top-down – the Managing Authority, NSS or the target audience (for example a local authority or government department) identify what they consider an innovative activity by comparing it with existing practice;
- Bottom-up – the DP itself identifies (often with the help of their evaluators and direct beneficiaries) and markets what it considers to be good practice to the target audience;
- Peer-review – the DP is evaluated by peers (one or more of the other DPs, external evaluators, NSS) and policy-makers to identify good practice which is then marketed jointly to the target audience.

In 2004, as part of the mainstreaming activities at EU level, the European Commission applied a framework for **validating good practice at EU level**³ which consisted of four building blocks to organise effective capitalisation and transfer of good practice developed and tested under EQUAL:

■ **Identification of (promising) good practice by Member States**

Member States, as part of their national mainstreaming endeavours, identify good practice, in the following way:

- Continuously screening the results of Development Partnerships; Transnational Partnerships, and National Thematic Networks.
- Focusing on three types of good practice: an entire activity which can be replicated; the principles underlying a practice, a policy or delivery mechanism.
- Applying the following evaluation criteria:
 - Demonstrated advantage over existing practice in tackling discrimination and inequality in the field of employment;
 - Evidence proving the case (quantified where possible, and with identification of ‘credible champions’ to present the innovative solution);
 - Potential to be transferred to, and applied by, other actors, in other regions and in other contexts that can be applied on a larger scale;
 - Demonstration of how the innovation can/will be embedded into the mainstream policy delivery systems in a sustainable way.

■ **Validation of the policy relevance and evidence at EU level**

The overall validation process at EU level involves two complementary feedback loops:

- Firstly, the ‘evidence of good practice loop’ where the evidence of **comparative advantage** of the promising good practice case is verified, by applying the following common criteria:
 - Analysis of the evidence of the advantages of the good practice identified in tackling discrimination and inequality in the field of employment (this may involve having ‘credible champions’ to present the innovative solution);
 - Views of stakeholders/users have been involved in the evaluation of the good practice at Member State level;
 - Transparency of the results, and access to the relevant information proving the case (if the proof is difficult to find, the logic of the concept may be sufficient to be persuasive);
 - Potential to be transferred to, and applied by, other actors, in other regions and in other contexts that can be applied on a larger scale;
 - Demonstration of how the innovation can be embedded into the mainstream policy delivery systems in a sustainable way.
- Secondly, the ‘policy relevance loop’ where the relevance of the underlying issue, the proposed solution and the policy arguments presented are checked with policy-makers and key stakeholders, by applying the following common criteria:
 - Link to the policy agenda at EU level or in a larger number of Member States, to be assessed against the political agenda of EU policy-makers and key stakeholders at European level, and emerging policy opportunities;
 - Specific relevance of the good practice to the thematic focus, or to the policy argument it has to support;
 - Adding value to the policy debate, notably by providing convincing evidence for policy arguments, quantified where possible;
 - Addressing policy gaps, new policy objectives, or issues cutting across established responsibilities and policy domains.

3 For details, see Annex 3.

Validating results

EQUAL encourages DPs to describe but also validate their practices and resources. This is particularly important to decide if a product can make the shift from promising to good practice.

Most Member States have opted mainly for peer review as a way of validating good practice. The national thematic networks often provide such a platform. They develop common validation criteria and often involve external experts to carry out the analysis. This helps DPs improve their products and strategies before transferring them to a wider target group or different context. Whatever the validation process used, it is important to involve the end users throughout.

In Spain, for example, the NSS used specially designed questionnaires to gather information on DPs' innovative practices and results. This information was analysed by the national thematic networks, helped by experts, and was benchmarked.

In Belgium (French-speaking), the NSS worked with DPs to ensure there was uniformity in the good practices collected. They helped all DPs to improve their evaluation skills. They produced a guide on how to evaluate their project and imposed a framework for doing this work. They also published a catalogue of products. An external consultant is currently validating the products using the criteria suggested by the Commission.

Italy asked DPs to complete an online monitoring questionnaire. In addition, the NSS visited the projects. A Technical Working Group on Good Practice was set up to analyse the information collected and come up with a common methodology for the identification and validation of DP innovations. The Managing Authority chairs this group which includes selected representatives of the Regions. The NSS is responsible for overall management. On completion of this analysis, it will publish a directory of good practices.

The validation of EQUAL products

Portugal is the only Member State to have set up a formal validation process for EQUAL products⁴. This brings on board, alongside the authors and designers, independent experts and peers to give their opinion on whether a product is of high quality and, almost as important, has the potential to be transferred to a different or wider context (see www.equal.pt).

Its success depends on:

- The attitude of the authors submitting their products and how far they are open to such a discussion and outside 'input';
- The ability of peers and experts to provide a constructive and well-explained appraisal.

The NTN's run this validation process. All the networks use the same criteria for assessing product quality and dissemination potential. It is compulsory for DPs to validate all products they have finalised. They can also opt to validate their products while they are still developing them. This gives them early inter-peer feedback and expert critical analysis. It allows them to make timely improvements before they complete their product.

Each validation session lasts some two hours. The product's designers/authors make a presentation. The thematic networks select the independent experts (usually two) and peers who follow with their inputs. Potential users of the product such as employers and trade unions are often invited.

A description of how the validation process works follows. Annex I gives an example of the analysis grid that is used in Portugal to measure quality.

4 The term 'product' covers single resources such as videos, guides, specific practices, methodologies, strategies, work tools and resources but also 'families' of different but complementary products such as a training programme and a separate but complementary training on the trainers' course.



How Portugal's validation process of EQUAL products works

Prior to the validation session

- The authors and designers of the product or outcome complete a special form prior to the validation session which includes:
 - Information giving the product background and its description (the problems it addresses, what makes it different from others, the methodology used and so on).
 - Description of how the DP developed it including difficulties, how it tackled them and the reaction of end users.
 - Description of the DP's transfer strategy including what type of organisations may be interested in this product, the kind of skills they will need to develop to use it as well as their strategy to make the products accessible.
- The thematic network identifies and schedules the products that will be validated.
- The thematic network identifies the peers and outside experts who will take part in the validation session.
- The thematic network circulates to all who are involved in the session the product(s) to be validated and the information prepared by the authors.

The validation session

Agreement on the procedure.

- The authors have some 30 minutes to present the product. Trainers and end beneficiaries can be invited to give their opinion on the product's usefulness.
- Three separate subgroups – the peers, the experts and the authors – examine the product using a special grid (see Annex 1). The idea is to put themselves in the shoes of potential users of the product. They complete the grid and award points. This takes some 30 minutes. In the plenary session, each sub-group presents its analysis and scores. It can ask the authors for further clarification. Peers and specialists reach a consensus on the score, the strong and weak points and recommended actions. If there is no consensus, then this is noted. This takes between 30-45 minutes.

They do not take into account the authors' grid (with the awarded score and comments) when calculating the final score but it is included in the validation dossier for information.

After the validation process

- The authors finalise the product taking account of the recommendations and prepare the validation dossier to accompany their Action 3 application including the score grids.



5. Mobilising EQUAL resources to integrate the lessons learned into the mainstream

EQUAL provides a number of resources to build and transfer the good practice developed by DPs and maximise its impact on policy. One of the most important has been the National Thematic Networks (NTNs) that have led the field in identifying good practice and building bridges with policy-makers across the board to ensure that EQUAL innovations match policy needs.

The National Thematic Networks – a key mainstreaming tool

The National Thematic Networks (NTNs) are at the centre of most Member States' mainstreaming strategies.

Established sometimes under different names (such as Thematic Networking Groups and so on), they have become the main learning and peer-review forum amongst DPs.

NTNs enable effective dialogue between those delivering the activity and those developing the policy.

Generally speaking, the thematic networks have two key roles:

- Creating links between DPs working on similar themes and other interested practitioners, identifying, validating and building on good practices (horizontal mainstreaming);
- Identifying policy needs and making the links with policy-makers and potential users of EQUAL innovations (vertical mainstreaming).

Under their role of making links between DPs and building on good practice, thematic networks:

- Identify and involve key policy-makers in the shaping of priorities;
- Have an input in the selection process of DPs;
- Enable a sharing of knowledge and exchange of experiences;
- Avoid excessive duplication;
- Are a forum to enable learning from other DPs;
- Allow DPs to analyse together problems of discrimina-

tion and develop assessment and benchmarking tools for good practice;

- Allow DPs to jointly disseminate their results on specific themes;
- Allow DPs to make new strategic alliances and partnerships;
- Make recommendations to individual DPs.

It is not easy for individual DPs to attract the attention of politicians and influence policies. The thematic networks give DPs a chance to combine forces and become a stronger lobby group for change.

Under their role of making an impact on policy, thematic networks:

- Pinpoint emerging policy needs and changes in the labour market;
- Establish a clear link between policy development and DPs from the start;
- Maintain and develop the strategic focus to ensure EQUAL continues to target priority areas;
- Allow DPs to develop a common mainstreaming strategy pooling resources and ideas;
- Involve non-programme players (e.g. potential users, public bodies);
- Provide access to specialist/resource persons;
- Establish a clear link between national and European mainstreaming activities through the European thematic groups and participation in other events;
- Allow DPs access to policy-makers in a broad range of government departments and agencies;
- Allow DPs to combine forces based on their common experiences and draft joint policy briefs and policy proposals that achieve the critical mass in order to have an impact;
- Feed into the design and implementation of employment, training and social policies.



I The UK set up its thematic networks right at the start of the programme.

The NSS worked with each network to agree on a mainstreaming strategy involving the Managing Authority and the Monitoring Committee. It is a consultative process involving all key stakeholders. The networks regularly monitor and review their strategy and update it if necessary.

The Managing Authority assesses all applications for Action 3 funding against these network strategies and only funds activities covered by them. It consults the networks on its funding decisions.

The networks help DPs to identify within these strategies:

- Outcomes they would like to mainstream;
- The target audiences for mainstreaming these DP outcomes at various levels – local, regional, national, transnational;
- Methodologies to reach the target audiences;
- A proposed time-table.

Selecting network themes

Managing Authorities and NSS have used a variety of strategies to select the themes of their national networks. They consulted:

- DPs for their views on the priority themes they would like to see;
- Relevant ministries and departments to check their policy priorities with them;
- Employers and trade unions for what they considered to be the key priorities for them when it comes to labour market discrimination.

Currently, countries have used a mixture of the following models to decide the theme and structure of their networks:

- Opted for all or part of the nine EQUAL themes;
- Focused on specific issues such as sexual orientation and diversity development (for example, Sweden);
- Focused on target groups (for example, two of the UK (Northern Ireland) networks concentrate on people with disabilities and the long-term unemployed. In Portugal one network is looking at the vocational integration of migrants, refugees and ethnic minorities);
- Focused on EQUAL transversal principles such as empowerment and working in partnership (for example, Portugal, Sweden and the UK) and gender mainstreaming (Austria and Germany);

- Focused on particular sectors such as rural development (France – although this was on the initiative of the Ministry – and Portugal).

In all cases, the decided themes reflect national policy priorities and project concerns.

I In Germany, for example, DPs were heavily involved in deciding the themes of the national networks. The NSS had asked them to identify the themes they considered to be the most pertinent and what they could contribute with their work. The Managing Authority with the NSS made the final decision. Fourteen networks were eventually set up.

Selecting the network members

Managing Authorities have also taken a different road as to who should sit on these networks in addition to the DPs who are strongly encouraged to do so (in Greece, Finland and Sweden it is compulsory for DPs to be part of these networks).

H Get the network membership right. A good mixture of people is important but so is the size of the network. If it is too big it runs the risk of turning into a talking shop.

They have opened up membership to:

- Policymakers, the public service and the social partners (for example, Belgium, Greece, Finland, France, the UK);
- Relevant private sector organisations to provide different viewpoints and profiles (for example, Finland, Greece, Portugal);
- ESF projects (for example, Finland, France);
- Representatives of the country's equality commission (for example, the UK);
- Local and regional authority representatives (for example, France, Greece, Italy and the UK);
- Organisations that are interested in taking on board the products developed by DPs (for example, Portugal and the Netherlands).

I In Greece, DPs are obliged to participate in at least one of the thematic networks. The Managing Authority assigns the theme for each DP and they can also volunteer to participate in additional networks. DPs validate, disseminate and diffuse their project results through these networks. Each network produces a common synthesis report based on their collective experiences and common policy briefs.



Making the link with the policy world is crucial to ensure the transfer of innovations outside to organisations directly linked with EQUAL.

I To sell the benefits of becoming a network member, the UK NSS produced in 2004 a handbook to accompany its recruitment drive. In it, policy-makers and DPs which were already members explained what they had gained. (<http://www.equal.ecotec.co.uk/resources/gpg/>)

→ Policy-makers said the benefits included:

- Accessing innovation through the new approaches DPs are testing;
- Developing ‘better’ policy by working alongside practitioners and assessing what works and what doesn’t before policy is confirmed;
- Accessing ‘expert’ practitioners from DPs;
- Developing ‘better’ practices by following all the steps of a project from its creation to its completion;
- Learning from Europe through the exchange of expertise and information;
- Meeting their own national targets, as EQUAL activities tackle current national policy priorities, and saving money in doing so.

→ For DPs, the benefits included:

- Joint work with other DPs especially when targeting the same policy audience;
- Accessing funding from policy-makers;
- Gaining a policy steer on their work, keeping up to date with policy developments and future trends and avoiding duplicating effort;
- Acquiring opportunities to promote their work;
- Access to expertise and practical ‘hints and tips’ improving their projects;
- The opportunity to benchmark activities against other DPs both nationally and transnationally;
- Access to a broad network.

If senior policy-makers, experts and other key people are unavailable to be full time network members, the Managing Authority can invite them to participate at strategic moments as discussions progress. Experts, researchers, representatives of the social partners and of public bodies responsible for social, employment and training policies can be invited in this way to give their input.

I The Netherlands has structured its networks with only a limited input from DPs. It prefers to target organisations that are the end users of the good practice being developed under EQUAL.

The chair is a recognised expert in the thematic field of the network chosen by the Managing Authority. This is a paid job. They have the freedom to run their network as they wish. It is their experience and enthusiasm that will drive and shape it. The members (chosen by the chair in collaboration with the Managing Authority) are other experts in the field, policy-makers including representatives from the relevant ministries, the social partners, NGOs and representatives of a handful of DPs (although DPs do not have to be members). A policy officer from the relevant Ministry supports the networks and the NSS offers additional technical support. They meet on average every two months.

The five networks also meet together. Their policy officers meet every two months and the chairpersons at least every six months. Every year, each thematic network holds at least one larger practical workshop focusing on exchanging information on good practice. It invites all DPs working within the specific theme for discussions. It organises the meetings in one of two ways:

- A short presentation by a DP followed by a longer round of questions by peers and policy-makers;
- A presentation of a tool or methodology which is tried and tested by the workshop members.

Each network detects, describes and delivers good and bad practice to the EQUAL monitoring Committee and, ultimately, to the responsible minister.

To carry out their work, they have access to the database for EQUAL projects, a screening questionnaire which DPs have completed on-line, back up information from the monitoring visits carried out by NSS staff and data on the DP products that are being developed. They can also decide to visit DPs and participate in DP events. The NSS also provides any other additional support or extra information a network may need.

For the second EQUAL round, all the networks had an input in project selection. In short, these networks form an interface with relevant policy-makers and other organisations within their field.

Building relationships

Network members need to get to know each other, interact and build personal relationships, essential to generate trust, learning and value. For many, it will be the first time that they will have to work in such close collaboration with other organisations that they may even consider as competitors.

They need to meet regularly, especially at the beginning. They can do this through formal but also informal meetings and visits amongst members.

Consulting and listening to each other must become a habit, so that they can identify their common needs and discover ways of reflecting, approaching and resolving problems collectively.

It is also important that networks do not close in on themselves once they have built this trust. They must remain open to 'outsiders' who can offer different perspectives on the issues under debate.

The Managing Authority and NSS can organise regular meetings (three or four times a year) with all the network coordinators to ensure they also communicate across themes.

Buying expert time

In many countries, networks have taken on paid experts for each network to develop with the members the thematic focus, maintain the standard of the discussions, design the common mainstreaming strategy, monitor the quality of the content and draw up relevant reports on the outcomes of the network (for example France, Greece, Portugal, Sweden and the UK). In Greece, this expert also has a key role to play in identifying good practice and innovation.

Voluntary input on its own is not always successful in delivering the results. Network members have many demands on their time. Even with the best will, their voluntary input may be insufficient to identify the learning points and package them in a way that can be disseminated more widely.

When paid experts are involved in networks, Managing Authorities have to make clear that their job is to build a common work programme based on the work of the DPs with the aim of having an impact on policy and practice. It is not an individual research arena for the expert to promote his or her individual scientific interests.

Providing support

Network members can also be supported by:

- The NSS that can have the role of animating each network including drafting and implementing the network's

mainstreaming strategy in collaboration with members (as Germany and France have done);

- Appointing as chair high-level politicians (Sweden) or key figures from government departments/agencies to give the policy lead (UK);
- A DP selected through an open call for tender to lead the network (Finland);
- A DP selected to be responsible for mobilising the group and providing logistic support (Portugal).

In Finland, DPs, chosen by an open call for tender, lead the national thematic networks. When applying for this position, they have to outline their proposed work programme, how they will implement it and their dissemination and mainstreaming strategy.

A steering group comprising policy-makers, experts, social partners and relevant NGOs accompanies the networks. The group monitors their work and contributes to the dissemination and mainstreaming of good practices and products developed by DPs.

The Managing Authority supports these networks by training steering group members on mainstreaming activities and processes and giving them know-how and tools to identify, disseminate and mainstream good practices developed by projects. It is also planning to publish a number of guide books on these issues.

In Sweden, influential people such as Members of the Swedish Parliament, former government ministers and key employer and trade union representatives chair the national thematic networks. Their common points are that they have direct access to decision-makers and are well respected in political circles. One result is that Sweden's Minister of labour has agreed to meet the chairs of the eight networks, two or three times a year, to hear about the work of EQUAL and how it can impact on employment policy and practice.

Working the networks

The network structure has to be flexible giving members the freedom to decide how they want it to work.

But it is also important that for each network the Managing Authority and the NSS:

- Establish a clear mandate and terms of reference;
- Define the outcomes they want to see from each network;



- Brief the Chair and the members on their exact role;
- Indicate the expected time demands that will be made on the Chair and the members and secure their agreement;
- Specify the resources that each network will have (financial, support from the NSS, the possibility to pay experts and even members and so on).

At the end of the day, a network's efficiency will depend largely on how involved its members are and if they find the discussions useful and relevant for them.

Generally, it is advisable to set up a smaller core group at the centre to manage the networks, especially if they are large.

Networks can also set up working groups focusing on specific topics within their themes bringing together a smaller number of members in a more intensive work programme.

A typical network can:

- Involve relevant members from the EQUAL Monitoring Committee in their work and build up a strong link with them;
- Identify mainstream policy users such as other government departments, key organisations and even individual opinion leaders who may have an interest in the network's results. These can range from organisations which may just want to be kept informed to those who want to become more involved in the work and are interested in incorporating some of the innovations;
- Decide how to involve such interested organisations in the network and at what level. For example, some may be invited to be full members while others are invited to special meetings, regular briefings or specific events;
- Carry out a survey to identify policy gaps;
- Agree on the policy priorities and problem areas they want to focus on;
- Exchange information (this can include visiting individual DPs) and get to know each other building up trust;
- Develop methods for identifying, analysing and validating 'good practice';
- Develop monitoring and evaluation tools to ensure quality;
- Discuss findings and explore solutions for problems that come up;
- Produce common tools (publications, guides, audiovisual material as well as 'living documents' which are developed as network members and comment on each other's contributions);
- Develop common activities such as meetings, seminars, hearings, peer reviews, visits, exchanges;

- Make practical recommendations based on their common experiences in their thematic area;
- Participate in local, national and regional campaigns;
- Use the media to get their message across to a wider public;
- Feed into the work of the European thematic groups.

Networks can apply for Action 3 funds to transfer their findings to a wider audience. They can involve policy-makers in such mainstreaming partnerships as well as other users of their innovations.

In Spain, the national thematic networks were designed with the idea of matching demand (from those in charge of policy) with the supply of good practices (from the DPs).

They have a three level structure:

- *A chair appointed by the Monitoring Committee, usually drawn from the Managing Authority or regional government;*
- *A core group of policy-makers drawn from the Monitoring Committee representing regional and local authorities and the social partners;*
- *An extended group of selected DPs.*

As a first step, the core group decides its policy priorities and draws up a mainstreaming plan. Then, they look at the work of DPs. They select, for their extended group, the DPs that are the most relevant to the policy priorities they have identified.

An ongoing dialogue takes place between the core group and the selected DPs. The policy-makers inform DPs of their information needs. DPs present what they are doing. Policy-makers listen, analyse, discuss and where possible incorporate the innovations.

Regional and sectoral networks

Some of the largest Member States have set up regional or sectoral networks in addition to national thematic networks.

In Italy, for example, the regional authorities are involved in regional networks and promise to introduce tested innovations into their regional-level programmes.

In Spain, five regional networks have been set up. It is the regional governments which decide to go ahead with such networks and involve policy-makers and DPs within their area. They also set the themes of these networks according to their policy needs and priorities. The aim is to explore how they can incorporate the findings of EQUAL projects into their regional policy.



Germany has also sought to establish partnerships between the regional authorities and the DPs active in each region.

National and regional mainstreaming groups

Some countries have set up specific mainstreaming groups to work alongside the NTN⁵.

Ireland's national mainstreaming group:

- Identifies best practice and lessons learned within EQUAL DPs and networks;
- Supports their integration into local, regional, national and European employment and human resource development policies and practices;
- Supports a capacity within relevant organisations to incorporate such good practice;
- Examines Action 3 and other mainstreaming proposals, make suggestions if they feel this is necessary and can even co-finance some of these activities;
- Builds up personal relations between the Managing Authority and policy-makers.

Spain's national mainstreaming group:

- Coordinates the activities of the national thematic groups;
- Approves requests for funding by DPs under Action 3.

Italy's mainstreaming group:

- Identifies DP results that can be reproduced and transferred from one region to another.

Action 3: funding mainstreaming innovations

Action 3 in EQUAL provides a financing facility for mainstreaming activities of DPs. Under it, Managing Authorities can fund activities at national and European level which include:

- Assessing, presenting and promoting the evidence of good practice;
- Validating the innovation;
- Benchmarking innovation against existing approaches nationally and in other Member States;
- Disseminating the innovation to other organisations dealing with the discrimination being tackled;
- Demonstrating and transferring good practice including mentoring.

In most Member States, many of the applications for Action 3 come from the thematic networks. Most countries encourage joint applications from groups of DPs.

These new mainstreaming partnerships:

- Can bring on board new partners to reflect the different skills and expertise required for the mainstreaming process;
- Can involve the mainstreaming target audience as partners.



Portugal has used Action 3 as a way of bringing together organisations which authored/produced the innovations and new partners who will ultimately incorporate and or spread these innovations.

Once DPs validate their products and practices created during Action 2 (they need to present a product validation dossier – see part 4), they must consider how they can collaborate with organisations interested in incorporating them.

New DPs are formed which must include organisations interested in the proposed good practice transfer and dissemination. They include:

- *Those who have designed and are directly responsible for the products to be transferred (at least one partner that was active in the DP during Action 2 must continue to be involved in Action 3);*
- *Those who will be adopting them;*
- *And, institutions that can do large scale dissemination of the innovations (such as the media) and those involved in the design of policy and in modifying systems (such as public institutions and the social partners).*

The new DPs must explain:

- *How they plan to adapt their products to the contexts to which they are to be transferred;*
- *How they plan to maximise the transfer of knowledge, for example, through training trainers, coaching, organising practice periods in the author organisations (instead of more passive diffusion methods, such as seminars, which have not proved sufficiently effective in the past).*

Over the course of Action 3, which lasts for a year, DPs receive funding for monitoring and self-evaluation on the basis of a model provided by the Managing Authority. This encourages critical reflection on the results achieved during the four stages of the dissemination process:

- *Convergence between the authors and those who are interested in the new solutions;*

⁵ See page 13 of this guide for the composition of these groups.



- Acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary for utilising the product;
- Incorporation or reconstruction of the product in the context and culture of the target organisation;
- Assessment of the process and the results, which includes the gains in terms of skills acquired by the target organisation and the extent to which users are satisfied.



In Greece, DPs are invited to submit two mainstreaming action plans:

- A common plan for each national thematic network which members prepare together. It describes planned activities and the roles and obligations of each one and highlights the common elements amongst DPs. At the centre is the joint action;
- An individual plan for Action 3 submitted by the coordinator of each DP explaining the mainstreaming strategy of their particular EQUAL project. This plan has to focus on different activities to the common work programme.

When first asked to design these common plans, many DPs were sceptical. They were not used to presenting their work to peer organisations, something they had to do if they were to develop joint actions.

The Managing Authority played a key role in supporting DPs through this initial phase. They organised numerous preparatory meetings to help them define common activities and fix their work programme, brought in an expert for each network to work with them and propose specific thematic priorities and actions according to policy developments in Greece, and provided support tools such as a guide.

The result is that DPs have now developed close working relationships and are deeply involved in the networks. In addition, by joining forces, they have been more effective in influencing policy than as individual DPs.

- National thematic networks or other network activities;
- Drafting policy proposals addressed to decision-makers;
- Adaptation and evaluation of products and practices with the active involvement of the organisations that will incorporate them;
- Activities to accompany the publication of products such as study visits and events to demonstrate the good practice;
- Activities relating to product transfer and incorporation such as guidance and advice, coaching of people who want to use the innovations, training in skills that are critical to the success of incorporating new products, training trainers and training technicians and other players from the organisation appropriating the new products/practices;
- Activities supporting mainstreaming or wide-scale diffusion of innovative solutions targeting for example the public employment services, the social partners, government ministries.

All Action 3 proposals should include an evaluation of how successful they have been in mainstreaming the lessons learned to combat labour market discrimination.

Certain Member States such as Germany and Finland allocate Action 3 funding for each DP at the same time as Action 2. In such cases, DPs must present their mainstreaming plan from the start.

Finding match funding for Action 3 is a problem in most Member States. By involving other government departments in EQUAL, there is a higher chance that they may release extra funds from their budgets for Action 3 work as they will see a direct benefit. Usually co-financing comes in the form of secondment of staff and not cash.



To find match funding, DPs can bring in new partners with an expertise in marketing and dissemination, who will provide in-kind or cash match funding or they can recruit additional staff to deal with the dissemination and mainstreaming side of the work, and use their time as match funding.

Examples of the type of activities currently funded under Action 3 are:

- Networks that comprise a wider policy-making audience than those of the national thematic networks;
- Research and evaluation studies;
- Communication and publicity material including short films, radio and television spots and broadcasts;
- Publications;
- Public relations and contacts with the media;
- Events;




6. Communicating the message

To disseminate and transfer the results of EQUAL, Managing Authorities, NSS and DPs need to organise activities or take measures to reach out to EQUAL ‘outsiders’ and use their policy needs and language as a starting point.

They can do this through:

- Lobbying activities including face-to-face contacts, briefing meetings and participating in relevant policy-making committees;
- Reporting and disseminating, through published documents, briefings, targeted articles, press releases, evaluation reports, guides and toolkits based on a common experience, audio-visual materials and web-based tools, media campaigns including the preparation of radio and television slots;
- Organising large- and small-scale conferences and workshops, events, discussion/focus groups;
- Demonstrating through pilot activity observed directly by the target audience.

 *DPs must learn to speak the language of policy-makers. They cannot simply present their practice. They have to transform this information into clearly understood messages. Managing Authorities and NSS can help DPs translate their project results into policy messages and tools. They can also strengthen DPs ability for self-evaluation so that they can better understand what they are achieving and how. If they have a clearer understanding, they will be able to explain it more effectively to others.*

Learning to influence

Managing Authorities may be familiar with what it feels to be lobbied by others. To promote the EQUAL lessons, they will have to change roles and enter the lobbying game themselves so as to win the support of those who can influence policy and administrative practice.

Lobbying in the EQUAL context means:

Influencing from the ‘inside’

- Hold face-to-face meetings with politicians and key officials who are interested in the issues covered by EQUAL and especially those dealing with the National Action plans for Employment and Social Inclusion;
- Build links with staff working for politicians and these key officials;
- Meet with other officials who can influence policy and administrative practice;
- Provide analysis and information briefings to departmental and parliamentary committees;
- Speak at relevant committees;
- Negotiate with politicians and officials who can influence policy and administrative practice.


Influencing from the ‘outside’

- Involve policy-makers in the design and implementation of EQUAL;
- Inform and build relationships with the media;
- Assist journalists with stories;
- Make links between DPs and policy-makers;
- Build broad and diverse networks with relevant groups;
- Meet with people that can influence policy and practice;
- Provide analysis and information briefings to relevant outside bodies;
- Become a source of reliable information on discrimination in the labour market.



A lot of lobbying is listening, looking for indications from politicians and policy-makers and finding opportunities to provide relevant information. Follow-up is also important. For example, if commitments are made in a meeting, repeat your understanding of them. If staff members are present, write to them and keep them informed as they can become important allies.

The starting point for your lobbying work is your mainstreaming plan (see part 8). There, you should have covered the main strategic questions to help you see where you are, where you want to go and how.

 Keep your message focused and avoid a 'shopping list' of issues.

With EQUAL covering such a wide range of problems, you could focus your energy for vertical mainstreaming on a few major issues that you have identified as central in your country.

Policy-makers are interested in applying socially, politically and economically acceptable solutions to problems. Your role is to pinpoint such possible solutions within the EQUAL context.


A reminder – key questions for developing your lobbying strategy

<p>Objectives <i>What do you want to achieve?</i></p>	What are your short-term and long-term goals? What policy changes would you like to see?
<p>Target group <i>Who can help you achieve your goals?</i></p>	Who are the people and institutions you need to move? Who else do you need to attract to your side to influence those in authority (media, social partners, NGOs)?
<p>Message <i>What do they need to hear?</i></p>	How do you tailor your message to your target group? What interest do they have in introducing this change?
<p>Messenger <i>Who do they need to hear it from?</i></p>	The same message can have a different impact depending on who communicates it. Who are the most credible messengers for your different target groups? Often a mixture is needed – DPs with practical experience, people with recognised authority and others who may have a special pull with the people you are targeting.
<p>Delivery <i>How will you get them to hear it?</i></p>	What actions will you take to make your point? This can range from face-to-face meetings, targeted briefing notes, articles in the press and so on.
<p>Resources <i>What have you got?</i></p>	Which alliances and networks are already in place to help you get your message across and influence policy?
<p>Gaps <i>What do you need to develop?</i></p>	Which alliances and networks do you need to build? What additional information and research do you need?
<p>First effort <i>How do you start?</i></p>	What would be an effective way to launch your strategy?
<p>Evaluation <i>How can you tell if it is working?</i></p>	Keep checking to ensure you are on course and make mid-term corrections.



Getting your message across


If you want your message to be heard, make sure it is a packaged with your audience in mind.

 *Make your messages relevant to your target audience and easy to 'digest'.*

For example:

- A Member of Parliament may only need a short briefing note pinpointing the main political lessons to be drawn from the work of particular DPs. A detailed research paper or programme description may go to waste.
- Employers interested in introducing an innovation in their work practices to improve access to groups who experience discrimination may need a short description but also details about the method used, what to look out for, what they must put in place to improve their chances of success and eventually the possible cost.

A major problem is that DPs often find it difficult to transform their experiences into policy messages. They do not speak the same language as politicians or even as the media. Bringing in specialists to help them do this can be an important support. Organising short courses on communication and marketing for groups of DPs working on the same theme can help redefine their dissemination targets, communication tools and message content.

 *Think carefully how to present your ideas. Be realistic and match the message with the needs and demands of your target audience. Remember you can use a mix of methods to put your message across always keeping your target audience in mind.*

Reaching the media

To reach the media, you will have to consider how you package your information. Your story is in competition with dozens of others happening on the same day that might have a more clearly political urgency.


Prepare and provide 'just-in-time' information on the policy implications of EQUAL giving concrete examples of good practice.

Publicise EQUAL widely. Use the media and especially radio and television. Once politicians and policy-makers know it better, you can approach them more easily with specific requests. If you decide to produce a regular newsletter, ensure your mailing list covers all of your target groups.

 *The French NSS is transforming information about projects into tailor-made articles for the press and other bodies. This information will be available on the EQUAL website and on CD-Rom.*

They have opted for a 'just-in-time' dissemination approach. This means providing information on request packaged in a way that can appeal to a wider public by containing practical examples and interviews focusing on the human appeal. This will enable the NSS to quickly respond to information requests from, for instance, a journalist who asks for examples of good practice to illustrate a story, or a government department wanting to see what has been happening in a given area or sector.

A 2004 national government campaign in France on the European Social Fund already featured EQUAL projects. The campaign produced an audio CD and sent it to all French local radio stations. It proved a hit. It contained a series of one to two minute radio reports on ESF and EQUAL projects and the impact they can have to combat labour market discrimination.

 *In Greece, the national thematic networks have produced short films presenting EQUAL good practices. They are broadcast before major mainstreaming events.*

 *In (Dutch-speaking) Belgium, press lunches are organised on EQUAL during the months when there is a news slowdown such as August and journalists are looking for stories. At these lunches, DPs are also invited for the media to interview and gain practical insight into the work of EQUAL.*

Depending on the target audience's needs, the information you provide may need to consist of 'hard', quantitative data (obtained by benchmarking, for example). Or it may be more qualitative and descriptive.



Some tips for your media campaign

<p>Be clear about what you are trying to achieve through the media and who you are targeting</p>	<p>Clarify your aim and target group. For example, a general promotion of EQUAL to raise public awareness, strategic information for policy-makers, etc. How you use the media will differ for each target audience.</p>
<p>Design your message</p>	<p>Have a message that appeals to your target audience and not just to you and communicate this message concisely.</p>
<p>Make your story newsworthy</p>	<p>Link your story to big issues that are already in the news, make it news, give personal stories to make it more human.</p>
<p>Use a variety of tools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up media lists for the different issues you want to cover (national, sectoral, regional, etc). • Keep the media informed of upcoming events. • Publish press releases which write the story the way you want it and include all the facts. • Provide easily accessible case stories and background information that will help illustrate your story. • Act as a resource and information finder.

You can also use your EQUAL website to spread information. For example:

- The UK EQUAL website has an on-line diary of DP events and other mainstreaming and dissemination activities;
- Portugal's EQUAL Management office maintains a directory – the EQUAL Product Directory – accessible to the public, containing details of all products which have been validated and so ready for a wider dissemination;
- Greece's Managing Authority has created an electronic Forum on their EQUAL website to facilitate a dialogue between network members and key persons outside the EQUAL 'family'.

Special events

Member States have organised a wide range of events to mainstream EQUAL innovations. These provide a direct contact between those who can influence policy, potential users of EQUAL innovations and DPs. They have increasingly tried to explore new ways of holding such events.

These are just some of the examples:

- Germany holds an annual mainstreaming conference bringing together its thematic networks. The idea is to create a platform where DPs and policy-makers can dis-

cuss results and the potential impact on national and regional policy and practice. The Managing Authority asks the networks to submit a proposal if they are interested in running a workshop on their thematic area at this conference. In 2004, ten of the 14 networks answered positively. In the end, the Managing Authority selected six to present their findings in greater detail. It also organised an exhibition on the work of the networks. It presented the discussions in position papers to feed into the National Action Plans on Employment and Social Inclusion;

- Portugal organises open days, giving key actors the possibility to visit DPs;
- Belgium (French-speaking) gave DPs the chance to communicate directly with policy-makers in a specially targeted event. It offered every DP a free stand to exhibit its project. It also offered them the possibility to do a 20-minute presentation to invited guests explaining their work. The Managing Authority invited as guests all ESF projects, regional and local authorities, politicians and the social partners;
- Greece organises small-scale events, such as workshops and fora in the country's smaller cities to mainstream results at local level.



When organising events:

- Decide on the aims of the event – passing on information, self-reflection, bridging links;
- Think innovatively about how you can maximise the opportunity to bring change within and between organisations that are participating;
- Remember that meetings, and especially transnational ones, are tiring events;
- Keep sessions short and focused;
- Make sure that as much information as possible is prepared and circulated in advance to maximise time for discussion rather than long presentations;
- Make sure all participants have a say;
- Involve your participants as much as possible in the sessions and in finding possible solutions;
- Use flip charts and other visual aids to record key discussion points and results;
- Make sure the chair makes regular summaries, ensures everyone understands the key points and is clear on the decisions that have been reached;
- Confirm the follow-up actions.



Ireland's Mainstreaming engagement event

This event took place in March 2004. It was organised in 'cabaret' style with round tables where policy-makers and DPs could mix in a friendlier environment. The event focussed on four key policy areas identified through the work of the thematic networks.

All DPs were invited to a preparatory meeting where they worked in policy groups – the DPs were asked to select the policy area from the four to be discussed at the event that they felt they best fitted into. They had to identify the successes they had achieved so far in addressing their selected policy area and how they had measured these successes.

Each policy group, nominated three or four representatives to make a joint presentation on their behalf at the event. To do this, they co-developed a paper reflecting the views and achievements of all the projects in their respective groups. Before finalising it, they circulated the paper to all group members for their comments.

In addition, all DPs had to complete a 'Mainstreaming Capture Form' which was designed to give projects space to describe what they saw as the mainstreaming value of their work. They outlined briefly their policy priorities, the issues they were addressing, their project achievements, the lessons for policy and practice, how to secure the mainstreaming of these lessons and their available resources to support mainstreaming transfer.

The NSS published this information in an easy to access booklet which they distributed at the event and made available on their website (www.equal-ci.ie). At the event, the nominated DPs presented their common papers. Two parallel feedback sessions then took place – first for the policy-makers and then for the DPs. Over 135 people attended.



Agora 2005, a new way of communicating

The Ministry for Employment, Labour and Social Cohesion in France (with the French NSS offering the practical back up) and the European Commission embarked on a special event on the theme of age management. Named Agora 2005, the organisers drew their inspiration from classical Greece where major issues were discussed in a central market place. The aim was to present concrete experiences from EQUAL to respond to the challenges of an ageing population and the low level of employment of older workers. Agora addressed business concerns but also those of individuals, the development of territorial approaches and the orientation of national and European policies. In 16 fora, entrepreneurs and territorial actors presented their stories, those responsible for national and European policies presented their focus, and project leaders their approach. They included testimonies from the business world and from older people and employment and training bodies. Experts gave practical demonstrations and offered individual advice on the latest tools and methods at 32 stands. An arena hosted the plenary sessions in the form of talk shows where European personalities were interviewed. The event was interactive, organised 'à la carte', to meet participants' needs.



7. Preparing to promote mainstreaming and foster good practice

Mainstreaming is a process which needs to be embedded from the beginning in each country's national EQUAL strategy and in all DPs. It is a slow process and does not happen overnight.

Introducing a new idea or product may mean changing a policy or a practice that might be well-established. Achieving this is not easy as there is a natural reluctance to change. You will need perseverance to overcome obstacles and to convince others that making the change will bring benefits.

This is further complicated because government departments are not geared to receiving innovations and dealing with change. There is often no unit dedicated to the task of looking out for new solutions to the employment and labour issues of the day. As such, change can be seen as a threat rather than an opportunity. It could imply a higher time investment on the part of officials – which they feel they do not have to give – and could even mean higher costs, at least in the short-term – also a scarce resource.

Create a vision

The UK EQUAL Unit recommends agreeing on a common vision for mainstreaming work.

For vertical mainstreaming, it set the following vision statement:

- DPs will produce evidence-based solutions to questions emerging from the policy-making community;
- The policy-making community will be aware of the opportunities offered through working with DPs;
- Demand for their ideas and findings will be high.

Managing Authorities and NSS can use the exercise provided in Annex 2 to help them develop their mainstreaming vision.

Reflecting on change

'We must become the change we want to see' Mahatma Gandhi

Managing Authorities and NSS mostly gear their mainstreaming efforts to the external world.

But they may need to prepare their own organisations for change.

Typically in most organisations there is a strong resistance to change. Understanding the change process can bring benefits to your own organisation and will also give you a better insight into how you can become a change promoter in other organisations.

- How does your organisation perceive change?
- How can you improve the change process?
- Why must there be change?
- Can people be taught or led to enjoy change?

Managing change is like moving from one state to another. It can involve:

- A problem state – a current state to be left behind;
- Setting of goals – a future state to be realised;
- Careful planning – a structured, organised process to get from one to the other.

There are many complex reasons why organisations and individuals resist change:

- The purpose is not clear;
- Lack of involvement in the planning;
- The habit patterns of the group involved are ignored;
- Poor communication regarding change;
- Fear of failure;
- Excessive work pressure;
- High cost;
- Inadequate reward for making the change;
- Current situation seems satisfactory;
- Lack of trust in the change initiator.

In any organisation there are individuals who:

- Agree with new ideas but never move to implement them;
- Believe each change is fine for others but not for them;
- Hope new ideas will die before his or her department must act on them;



- Argue he or she needs more time to study the change;
- Want everything cost justified before making change;
- Is prepared to accept new ideas as long as they 'add' to what is already there.

Change can also be seen as a how, what and why problem:

- Change as a how problem. How do we get people to be more open, to assume more responsibility, to be more creative? How do we get this organisation to be more innovative?
- Change as a what problem. What are we trying to accomplish? What changes are necessary? What indicators will signal success?
- Change as a why problem. Why do we have to change the way we do things? Why do we do what we do? Why do we do it the way we do it?

Essentially, change involves working with stakeholders to:

- Create a vision of what you want to achieve;
- Take stock of the current situation;
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of the current system in the light of the vision – what worked, what you would do differently next time and why;
- Target priority items for improvement;
- Establish a plan for addressing these priority items and for measuring success;
- Identify barriers and resources;
- Assess progress regularly and revise actions as needed;
- Take stock of the new state, use feedback to revisit the vision and begin the cycle again.

Below you will find four basic change management strategies. You will need to use a mixture of these strategies depending on a number of factors, such as the degree of resistance, the time-frame, the target population and so on.

Change management strategies

Rational	→	People are rational and will follow their self-interest – once it is shown to them. Change is based on communicating the information and offering incentives.
Re-educational	→	People are social beings and will adhere to cultural norms and values. Change is based on redefining and reinterpreting existing norms and values and developing commitments to new ones.
Coercive	→	People are basically compliant and will generally do what they are told or can be made to do. Change is based on the exercise of authority and the imposition of sanctions.
Adaptive	→	People oppose loss and disruption but they adapt readily to new circumstances. Change is based on building a new organisation and gradually transferring people from the old to the new one.



8. Translating DP results into policy tools – The mainstreaming plan

Designing a national mainstreaming plan is not just an administrative requirement. This is where Managing Authorities will set out the steps to be taken to mainstream the EQUAL outcomes.

The plan has to be designed and agreed from the start and be constantly reviewed throughout the life of EQUAL. What is a political priority today may not be so in a year's time.

The plan must be demand-led in both content and method based on a thorough understanding of the needs of the identified audience.

For every action you take, ask yourself the question: 'How can this action impact and influence policy?'

The EQUAL Managing Authority has the final responsibility of determining the mainstreaming strategy and evaluating the results achieved under EQUAL linking them to employment and social inclusion policies.

To develop a plan, you will have to:

- Put the Mainstreaming strategy as a task to be done at the very beginning of the Programme (see part 1);
- Identify the policy needs in your country where EQUAL can provide solutions (see part 2);
- Identify and involve as early as possible the target audience, the receivers of your message, finding out what pressures they are operating under, what they may need from you and what you can offer (see part 3);
- Identify the good practice or policy innovations coming out of EQUAL, 'the message' (see part 4);
- Support DPs to develop their mainstreaming strategies from the start (see part 5);
- Develop and design strategies and tools that will make the key message better understood by the target group (see parts 6 and 7);
- Bring together the 'producers' of the innovation and those who will ultimately incorporate and/or spread it (see parts 5 and 6);
- Make the link with European mainstreaming activities for evaluation, dissemination and implementation of innovative EQUAL developments in policy and practice.

Part 7 gives some tools to help reflect on the changes Managing Authorities may want to achieve with their mainstreaming plan.

A key part of your mainstreaming strategy is to feed successful approaches into national policy including the Structural Funds and the National Action Plans for Employment and Social Inclusion. Those in charge of designing and implementing these policies in your country need to be regularly informed of EQUAL outcomes. At least once a year, Managing Authorities could organise national joint forums bringing together members of the Monitoring Committees of the Structural Fund programmes, particularly objective 3, with members of the EQUAL Monitoring Committee.

A well-targeted and clear strategy has a better chance of success and can avoid wasting resources. So invest the time.

Getting the timing right

Remember, good timing is crucial for effective mainstreaming. Mainstreaming has to be there from the very beginning and implemented on an ongoing basis to take advantage of relevant mainstreaming opportunities as and when they occur.

With an effective plan in place, Managing Authorities can maximise current or future policy relevance as you will know, for example:

- When important products will be ready. You can then link mainstreaming actions to the dates when these products will be available;
- When policy-makers will find it most useful to know about DPs' products and results;
- Which landmark occasions you can use to disseminate essential information.

Seize opportunities as they arise. Start information flows from the start. Do not wait until DPs have completed their work to make links with policy-makers. It should be an ongoing process.

Seek to make available your results in advance of debates or the delivery of strategic reports. Arrange for relevant DPs to have a presence at key conferences, exhibitions and events.

Keep in mind that DPs will need encouraging to start thinking about mainstreaming from the start of their project. Their focus, especially at the beginning, will be on implementing the project and not on how to mainstream any eventual results.

France and Spain offer two examples of incorporating mainstreaming in all stages of EQUAL.



 **France**

<p>Action 1 The launch</p>	<p>Mainstreaming meant informing, communicating and mobilising stakeholders. They did this through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The website; • Press releases and leaflets; • Audiovisual material; • Information workshops; • Meetings with DPs on mainstreaming. <p>Mobilising government services at national and regional level, potential co-financers, relevant networks, the social partners and other key bodies which could have an interest in the EQUAL outcomes.</p>
<p>Action 2 Project implementation</p>	<p>Mainstreaming meant identifying good practice, capitalising on this good practice and being the memory bank of the programme. They did this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating the national networks; • Participating in the European thematic groups; • Putting the spotlight on EQUAL projects through a number of publications, press briefings, articles and other information material and integrating EQUAL projects in the national, government-led European Social Fund (ESF) campaign. <p>To foster mainstreaming, from the start, the French Monitoring Committee chose to give priority to two themes, which dovetailed policy priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age Management; • Reconciliation through time management.
<p>Action 3 Dissemination</p>	<p>Publicising the results, encouraging strategic partnerships with key organisations outside EQUAL and awareness-raising of policy- and decision-makers and the press.</p> <p>They are doing this through publications based on the work of the thematic networks, targeted events, audiovisual material, witness reports, organising exchanges between DPs and the social partners as well as key public sector representatives, and presentations of good practice that has been developed to relevant organisations like company heads, managers of non-governmental organisations and so on.</p>



Spain

<p>Action 1 The launch</p>	<p>Mainstreaming meant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selecting projects that had the best mainstreaming potential both in terms of DP composition and how far their innovations were responding to a policy need; • Increasing the mainstreaming capacity of each project through the adjustment and improvement of their work plan; • Requiring each DP to establish a detailed mainstreaming plan from the start; • Requesting that this plan identifies and involves policy-makers and other potential ‘end-users’ of their innovation; • Requesting that DP partners who are ‘end-users’, including public bodies commit themselves in writing to try to incorporate the project results that are relevant to their policy or sector and have been successfully tried out. This amounts to a promise to listen and consider seriously; • Requesting that all DPs nominate a person to be responsible for implementing mainstreaming actions.
<p>Action 2 & 3 Project implementation & dissemination</p>	<p>Mainstreaming means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Managing Authority monitoring if each DP has done what they promised to do in their mainstreaming plan; • The NSS offering DPs support to help them with mainstreaming; • Ensuring relevant innovations, lessons and good practices are disseminated and mainstreamed through the national thematic networks; • Funding action 3 projects to disseminate and mainstream the most relevant good practices for policy development.

The mainstreaming ingredients

- | | |
|---|----------------------|
| Identify the right people on the policy side; | Make the connection; |
| Identify the right DPs; | Stir the pot. |
| Find the right opportunity; | |

National mainstreaming plans must consider the following:

<p>What policy priorities are you targeting?</p>	<p>→ Identify where policy gaps exist and decide on your priorities. Describe how you will keep up to date with policy developments.</p>
<p>What actions will occur?</p>	<p>→ Describe the different stages of your mainstreaming process, your outputs and products. They can include reports, publications and briefings, guides and toolkits, face-to-face contacts, informal events, electronic communication, audio-visual materials and large scale public events.</p>
<p>Who will you target?</p>	<p>→ Identify your target audience(s) and what they may benefit. Remember, your thematic networks can play an important role here.</p>
<p>How will you target and involve them?</p>	<p>→ Specify how you are going to reach and involve each of the target groups that you have identified?</p>
<p>Who will do what?</p>	<p>→ Assign clear tasks and roles for all key actors involved in implementing your mainstreaming plan.</p>
<p>By when?</p>	<p>→ Describe the timing and frequency.</p>
<p>Communicate</p>	<p>→ Describe who should know what. Frame your message with each audience in mind so as to make it relevant.</p>
<p>Monitor and evaluate</p>	<p>→ Your strategy cannot be static. Explain how you will monitor and evaluate your mainstreaming activities to see their impact.</p>

Monitoring and evaluating a national mainstreaming plan

The mainstreaming plan and timetable for implementing it need constant review if they are to remain politically relevant.

An essential ingredient is creating an ongoing monitoring process to show what works and what does not enabling you to introduce changes as necessary. The target mainstreaming audience can tell if targets are met and an impact is made.

The general advice is not to try and achieve everything – mainstreaming on too many levels and having too many target groups. The danger is that you spread yourself too thinly. At the same time, make the most of all opportunities that arise.

The European Commission published in July 2000 guidelines for monitoring and evaluating EQUAL. These give the general framework and are applicable for the total programming period.

As a minimum they cover:

- What mechanisms were developed to enable identification of good practice at national level? How was benchmarking of performance been made?
- How effective are the mechanisms established for the identification of the factors leading to inequality and discrimination? How has the identification and assessment of the factors led to good practice?
- What type of information was made available and through what means? Has the dissemination of good practices been done systematically?
- Have the thematic networks enabled the participation of all relevant partners involved in the DPs? Have they involved non-EQUAL partners? To what extent have policy needs at local, regional and national levels been taken into account?
- What mechanisms have been put in place to mainstream the lessons from EQUAL into the ESF programmes at national and sub-national levels? How effective are these?
- To what extent have the lessons and good practice from EQUAL been taken on board in the design and implementation of National Action Plans for Employment and Social Inclusion?

The focus under EQUAL is to identify the factors that are contributing to the success (or failure) of innovation, the mainstreaming of results and sustainability. An ongoing evaluation will facilitate learning amongst all stakeholders and contribute to capacity building including within the public sector.

Monitoring gives an answer to what happened – the progress, the success and warnings of problems and under performance.

Evaluation tells us if the programme has made any difference, and which, by assessing the relevance of the activities and results, their efficiency, effectiveness and impact.

Even if there is no independent evaluator involved, EQUAL encourages ongoing self-monitoring and evaluation.

Key questions for monitoring and evaluating dissemination and mainstreaming activities include:

- Have the dissemination and mainstreaming activities been effective in reaching and influencing the main policy actors?
- Have they led or will they lead to improvements in policy design?



Annex 1: Portugal's analysis grid for quality of EQUAL products

Project Identification or Thematic Network

Identification of Product(s)

Following the presentation/demonstration/handling of products, check their quality standard against the criteria listed below; give a score from 1 to 4 (1 for a low or unsatisfactory standard, and 4 for very high or very good standard).

Weight	Quality criteria	1	2	3	4	Evidence/justification (Identify the elements of proof or evidence that substantiate the presence of each criteria)
1st Level Criteria	Innovation (extent of the presence of new and distinctive features in the products; what distinguishes these products from others with similar characteristics and purposes; added value in relation to conventional solutions)					
	Empowerment (to what extent were the beneficiaries and target users involved in the product's design, and how much will its use enhance the target group's integration and participation in their organisational and social contexts)					
	Suitability (in terms of the culture, and social and vocational experience of the beneficiaries and target users, and to what extent the product addresses their learning needs)					
	Usefulness (benefits and value perceived by the beneficiaries and target users, demonstrable in terms of skills recognition, social value and/or personal autonomy; quantitative indicators must be referred to, namely competitive advantages or other gains in the case of enterprises)					
	Accessibility (beneficiaries' and end users' proximity to and familiarity with the means of distribution/utilisation and with product supports, especially in terms of the literacy and technologies required)					
	Transferability (ease and speed of transfer and incorporation of the products)					



Weight	Quality criteria					Evidence/justification (Identify the elements of proof or evidence that substantiate the presence of each criteria)
		1	2	3	4	
2nd Level Criteria	Equality (to what extent gender equality is actively and positively promoted by the products)					
	Governance (to what extent do the products enhance cohesion, address greater responsibility sharing on the part of the target group, and raise organisations' social awareness)					
	Universality (to what extent are the products capable of being applied/used in different contexts and with diverse target groups; this requirement may also be gauged by the products' potential for generalisation)					
	Scalability (to what extent can the products be organised in small updatable units, ensuring modularity of contents and of the resources incorporated in the products, which facilitates updating and renewal)					
	Autonomy (ease and extent of independence of the user in terms of exploiting and using the contents and materials integrating the products)					

Score: _____

Products' Strong Points	Products' Weaknesses

Suggested Improvements and Recommendations (content quality, degree of innovation, pedagogical value and usefulness in the context of life and/or work)

Conclusions regarding validation, transfer and incorporation of the products

Analysed from the perspective of:

- Authors/designers
 Peers
 External experts

Place, date and signature/identification of the person in charge of the validation session:



Annex 2: Exercise – Developing a mainstreaming vision

The following technique can be used as one of the tools to develop a mainstreaming vision, translate it into realistic steps and identify constraints and limits.

<p>Step 1</p> <p>Answer the following questions with an attitude of ‘Anything is possible’. It is not necessary to determine whether your goal is realistic or look for constraints.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you want to do (your goal)? • Why do you want to do it? • What are the benefits? • How will you know that you have achieved the benefits? • When can you expect to get them? • Where do you want this idea to get you in the future?
<p>Step 2</p> <p>Answer the following questions with an attitude ‘as if the scenario outlined in step 1 was realisable’, again without looking for constraints.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the overall time frame for reaching your goal? • Who will be involved (Assign responsibility and secure commitment from people who will carry out the plan)? • How will you implement the idea? • What will be the first step? • What will be the second step? • What will be the third step? • What will be the ongoing feedback that will move you towards or away from the goal? • How will you know that you have achieved the goal?
<p>Step 3</p> <p>Answer the following question with an attitude ‘What, if problems occur?’.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will this new idea affect and who will make or break the effectiveness of the idea? • What are the needs of the most affected group? • Why might someone object to this plan or idea? • What positive gains are there in the present way(s) of doing things? • How can you keep these gains when you implement the new idea? • When and where would you not want to implement the new idea? • What is currently needed or missing from the plan?
<p>Step 4</p> <p>Completing the Circle.</p> <p>You can ask these three questions several times, until you are satisfied with the results. Usually, by doing several rounds, the original goal gets broken down into realisable steps.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can you identify a possible solution to take care of what is needed or missing in the plan? • How could you implement it? • What else is currently needed or missing from the plan?



Annex 3: Validating good practice to inform policy⁶

I. General Objectives

EQUAL is a learning platform to find new ways of achieving the policy objectives of the European Employment Strategy and Social Inclusion Process (and anti-discrimination). EQUAL's input into these processes is to present evidence of good practice for these innovative approaches, with an emphasis on active cooperation between Member States, thus ensuring that the most positive results are adopted and shared across Europe.

The overall objective of EQUAL is to identify new ways of tackling discrimination and inequality in the field of employment for those in work and those looking for a job, and to transfer the good practice developed and tested into policy⁷ and practice. In the context of EQUAL, innovation could feed into any stage of the policy cycle or policy process, namely: needs assessment; policy definition and policy formulation; implementation of policy (activities, management, involvement of users, resources, tackling obstacles); monitoring and evaluation.

2. Experience outside EQUAL

The Commission's experts conducted a comparative assessment of good practice presentations in a number of policy fields. The survey showed that:

- Success depends on well-timed fora attracting the target audience because they address issues which are on their political agenda, and for which new solutions and the reasons for their success can be demonstrated.
- Presentation is key to success: well-established key points, backed up by (up-to-date) case studies and evaluative evidence, need to be combined with personal reports by, and contacts to, those who have tested or validated the new approaches. Communication and presentation has to create confidence amongst decision-makers on the advantages of applying or integrating new approaches.

The analysis also highlighted that successful transfer of good practice requires more than databases and case stories post-

ed on websites. Indeed, the simple transfer concept of a linear chain, in which ideas will inform experimentation, and successful results will inform policy-making if presented adequately to the public, did not seem to work effectively.

3. Framework for validating good practice at EU level

In light of this experience, it is proposed to use the following four building blocks to organise effective capitalisation and transfer of good practice developed and tested under EQUAL:

■ Identification of (promising) good practice by Member States

Member States, as part of their national mainstreaming endeavours, identify good practice, in the following way:

- Continuously screening the results of
 - Development Partnerships;
 - Transnational Partnerships, and
 - National Thematic Networks (networks of DPs, or ad-hoc networks);
- Focusing on three types of good practice:
 - An entire activity which can be replicated;
 - The principles underlying a practice which can be supported by evidence of what works (and what does not) and an explanation of why and how it works;
 - A policy or delivery mechanism which can be supported by evidence of what works, and can be illustrated by presenting cases that demonstrate its advantages. In the case of new policy areas, the cases provided may help to raise an issue up the policy agenda;
- Applying the following evaluation criteria:
 - Demonstrated advantage over existing practice in tackling discrimination and inequality in the field of

⁶ The following text is a shortened version of a paper by the Commission submitted to the EQUAL Managing Authorities on 17/02/2004, entitled 'Identifying, validating, disseminating and transferring good practice at EU level to inform policy' [HoM 04/019].

⁷ In the context of EQUAL policy normally includes: statements of worthy policy objectives, specific target setting against which progress can be measured (including benchmarking at national or transnational levels), resource allocations, regulations and legislation, programme design, project design/selection criteria for financial support schemes, etc.

employment;

- Evidence proving the case (quantified where possible, and with identification of ‘credible champions’ to present the innovative solution);
- Potential to be transferred to, and applied by, other actors, in other regions, in other contexts, and that it can be applied on a larger scale;
- Demonstration of how the innovation can/will be embedded into the mainstream policy delivery systems in a sustainable way.

■ **Presentation of evidence of (promising) good practice**

Member States:

- continuously feed the (promising) good practice identified into the common collection of promising good practice under EQUAL,
- should make available data and information needed to validate the cases submitted, and
- update the information if new results are generated, or if needed for validation at EU level.

■ **Synthesising (promising) good practice into policy arguments**

Two target audiences have articulated interest in the results of EQUAL: practitioners and activists on the ground; policy-makers and multipliers (policy delivery intermediaries, policy advisors, implementing bodies). In order to have an appeal to policy-makers and multipliers at European level, the results of relevant good practice validation need to be presented in policy messages that are clear, well-articulated and linked to the policy agenda. The EQUAL Mainstreaming Conference in Warsaw provided an opportunity to make these key policy messages, backed by validated evidence of good practice, visible at EU level.

■ **Validation of the policy relevance and evidence at EU level**

The overall validation process therefore involves two complementary feedback loops:

- Firstly, the ‘**evidence of good practice loop**’ where the evidence of comparative advantage of the promising good practice case is verified, by applying the following common criteria:
 - Analysis of the evidence of the advantages of the good practice identified in tackling discrimination and inequality in the field of employment (this may involve having ‘credible champions’ to present the innovative solution);

- Views of stakeholders/users have been involved in the evaluation of the good practice at Member State level;
- Transparency of the results, and access to the relevant information proving the case (if the proof is difficult to find, the logic of the concept may be sufficient to be persuasive);
- Potential to be transferred to, and applied by, other actors, in other regions, in other contexts, and that it can be applied on a larger scale;
- Demonstration of how the innovation can be embedded into the mainstream policy delivery systems in a sustainable way.

- Secondly, the ‘**policy relevance loop**’ where the relevance of the underlying issue, the proposed solution and the policy arguments presented are checked with policy-makers and key stakeholders, by applying the following common criteria:

- Link to the policy agenda at EU level or in a larger number of Member States, to be assessed against the political agenda of EU policy-makers and key stakeholders at European level, and emerging policy opportunities;
- Specific relevance of the good practice to the thematic focus, or to the policy argument it has to support;
- Adding value to the policy debate, notably by providing convincing evidence for policy arguments, quantified where possible;
- Addressing policy gaps, new policy objectives, or issues cutting across established responsibilities and policy domains.

Validation double loop



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