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

FINAL REPORT VOLUME 2 IMPLEMENTATION OF EQUAL IN THE NEW MEMBER STATES

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In co-operation with ICAS Institute and Economix Research & Consulting

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

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Abbreviations

| | |
|-------|---|
| AS | Asylum seeker |
| CIP | Community Initiative Programme |
| CSR | Corporate Social Responsibility |
| DP | Development Partnership |
| DPA | Development Partnership Agreement |
| ECDB | EQUAL Common Database |
| ECTIM | EQUAL Transnational Cooperation Internet Module |
| EES | European Employment Strategy |
| ESF | European Social Fund |
| ETG | European Thematic Group |
| GL | Guideline |
| HG | Horizontal Group |
| HRD | Human Resources Development |
| JAP | Joint Assessment Paper |
| JIM | Joint Inclusion Memorandum |
| LM | Labour Market |
| LLL | Life Long Learning |
| MA | Managing Authority |
| MC | Monitoring Committee |
| MS | Member States |
| NAP | National Action Plan |
| NMS | « New » Member States |
| NSS | National Support Structure |
| NTN | National Thematic Network |
| OMS | « Old » Member States |
| PCM | Project Cycle Management |
| PES | Public Employment Service |
| R1 | Round 1 |
| R2 | Round 2 |
| TA | Technical Assistance |
| TCA | Transnational Co-operation Agreement |
| TLP | Twinning Light Project |
| TN | Transnational |
| TNP | Transnational Co-operation Partnership |
| TOR | Terms of reference |

Abbreviations for Member States

| | | | |
|-------|------------------------------------|----|-----------------|
| AT | Austria | CY | Cyprus |
| BEfrg | French and German speaking Belgium | CZ | Czech Republic |
| BEnl | Flemish Belgium | EE | Estonia |
| DK | Denmark | HU | Hungary |
| DE | Germany | LV | Latvia |
| ES | Spain | LT | Lithuania |
| FI | Finland | MT | Malta |
| FR | France | PL | Poland |
| GR | Greece | SK | Slovak Republic |
| IE | Ireland | SI | Slovenia |
| IT | Italy | | |
| LU | Luxembourg | | |
| NL | Netherlands | | |
| PT | Portugal | | |
| SE | Sweden | | |
| UKgb | United Kingdom (Great Britain) | | |
| UKni | Northern Ireland | | |

Thematic priorities

| | | |
|--|--|----|
| Employability | Facilitating access and return to the labour market for those who have difficulty in being integrated or re-integrated into a labour market which must be open to all | 1A |
| | Combating racism and xenophobia in relation to the labour market | 1B |
| Entrepreneurship | Opening up the business creation process to all by providing the tools required for setting up in business and for the identification and exploitation of new possibilities for creating employment in urban and rural areas | 2C |
| | Strengthening the social economy (the third sector), in particular the services of interest to the community, with a focus to improving the quality of jobs | 2D |
| Adaptability | Promoting lifelong learning and inclusive work practices which encourage the recruitment and retention of those suffering discrimination and inequality in connection with the labour market | 3E |
| | Supporting the adaptability of firms and employees to structural economic change and the use of information technology and other new technologies | 3F |
| Equal Opportunities for women and men | Reconciling family and professional life, as well as the re-integration of men and women who have left the labour market, by developing more flexible and effective forms of work organisation and support services | 4G |
| | Reducing gender gaps and supporting job desegregation | 4H |
| Asylum Seekers | Member States must plan at least a minimum level of action aimed at asylum seekers, in line with the dimensions of the problem in the Member State. | 5I |

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11. APPROPRIATENESS OF STRATEGIES IN THE NMS

The Terms of Reference for extension to the EU-wide evaluation requested an assessment of the appropriateness of strategies in EQUAL in the New Member States on the basis of the following criteria:

- The clarity of the priorities identified in the CIPs;
- The consistency and complementarity of the policies identified with those of ESF as a whole and with national employment policy. A focus on existing gaps was expected;
- The responsiveness to the diversity of local contexts;
- The consistency between DP objectives and CIP priorities.

Our main sources have been the 9 national evaluation reports available for 2005 in the NMS as well as our interviews with the Managing Authorities and national evaluators. We have complemented these with an analysis of ECDB data¹.

11.1. RELEVANCE AND CONSISTENCY OF CIP PRIORITIES

As a foreword, it has to be said that the process of CIP elaboration has not been assessed by evaluators, although some have provided a description. Where information is available (in the CIPs themselves and/or in the reports), the elaboration of the CIP seems to have given rise to a more or less wide consultation exercise.

11.1.1. Thematic priority focus

Except for CZ where all thematic priorities were taken up, all other NMS selected only a few of them:

- 4 NMS (CY, EE, LT, LV) focused on 3 thematic priorities, which were often the same (theme 1A – facilitating access and return to the labour market, 4G – reconciling family and professional life or 4H – reducing gender gaps, and 5I – asylum seekers),
- 3 NMS (HU, MT, SI) focused on 4 thematic priorities but with different choices from one NMS to another,
- 2 NMS (PL, SK) chose 5 themes out of the 9 proposed.

Two themes, 1A (facilitating access to the labour market) and 5I (asylum seekers), were systematically addressed by all CIPs. Theme 4G (Reconciling family and professional life) was chosen in 7 NMS. The other topics were treated in only 2 NMS (themes 1B – combating racism and xenophobia, 2C – opening up business creation to all), 3 NMS (themes 2D – social economy, 3E – lifelong learning, 3F – adaptability) or 5 NMS (theme 4H – reducing gender gaps).

In most cases, the decision to focus on few priorities is justified by the fact that small countries have small budgets for EQUAL and a short programming period. Indeed, this was the recommendation of the EC for small countries. In practice, this recommendation was taken into account in almost all NMS, regardless of the size of their programme.

¹ For more details on the methodology of the EU-wide evaluation and on the scope and methodologies of national evaluation reports in the NMS, please see Chapter 1 (Volume 1).

Table 11.1 – Distribution of CIP priorities in the NMS

| Weight of the indicative budget in the CIP | Employability | | Entrepreneurship | | Adaptability | | Equal Opportunities | | Asylum seekers |
|--|---------------|-----|------------------|-----|--------------|-----|---------------------|-----|----------------|
| | 1A | 1B | 2C | 2D | 3E | 3F | 4G | 4H | |
| CY | 41.5% | | | | | | 41.5% | | 7% |
| CZ | 18% | 5% | 13% | 15% | 16% | 10% | 5% | 5% | 5% |
| EE | 50% | | | | | | 40% | | 2% |
| HU | 42% | | | | 39% | | | 8% | 3% |
| LT | 69% | | | | | | 20% | | 3% |
| LV | 53% | | | | | | 34% | | 5% |
| MT | 25% | | 25% | | | | 25% | | 15% |
| PL | 34% | | | 28% | | 21% | 9% | | 2% |
| SI | 60% | | | | 15% | | | 15% | 2% |
| SK | 20% | 13% | | 23% | | 21% | | 12% | 3% |

Source : CIPs

Where evaluators analysed the relevance of the national CIP objectives with regard to the main labour market and social problems (CZ, EE, HU, LT, LV, MT), they validated the CIP choices in terms of priorities. They usually did not call into question choices that had been made. However some focused criticism was made and is addressed further below.

- In CZ, the evaluators carried out an update analysis of the socio-economic context and concluded that the CIP was still relevant as the main priorities had not changed.
- In LV, the evaluators carried out an extensive update socio-economic and policy analysis and concluded, on the whole, that the topics selected were relevant for solving the problems outlined in the diagnosis and in the SWOT Analysis². The CIP document provided interesting criteria for the selection of priorities in EQUAL, which are worth mentioning here. The criteria concerned: target groups of policies (policies addressing the larger potential target group should prevail), policy focus (policies addressing causes, rather than effects, of discrimination should prevail), time dimension (policies causing long-term effects should prevail), spill-over effects (policies causing spill-over effects should prevail), potential for policy innovation (policy areas that are new for LV employment policy should prevail), potential development of partnerships (policy areas where there are potential DPs within the country able to co-operate transnationally should prevail).
- According to the HU evaluators, the EQUAL programme fully complies with the objectives and concept of EQUAL Community initiative. Furthermore, priorities and selected issues fully correspond to the conclusions of the situation assessment. The presentation of the economic situation and major labour markets trends is assessed as comprehensive, detailed and precise enough.

On the basis of our own CIP analysis, it seems that some NMS, particularly those focusing on few priorities (EE, HU, LT, LV, MT), looked for complementarities with the Single Programming Document (SPD). For example, entrepreneurship and adaptability were not chosen in EE because they would have overlapped directly with the SPD. Theme 1A (facilitating access to the labour market), on the other hand, corresponds to priority 1.3 (inclusive labour market) of the SPD but the approach is different, with EQUAL focusing more on testing innovative methods rather than on the immediate employability of the target groups. The evaluators pointed out that the EQUAL strategy ‘fits well’ with the national action plan for employment.

- In SI, according to the CIP, the strategic goals elaborated in the SI National Development Plan of 2001 represented the skeleton for the choices made for the use of the European structural policy actions. In that case, EQUAL was designed not to cover new policy fields but to concentrate on the policy fields addressed in the Joint Assessment Paper (JAP), the Joint Inclusion Memorandum (JIM)

² SWOT analyses seek to determine the internal/external Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, e.g. for a given policy or set of policies.

and the National Development Plan. The CIP is primarily based on the JAP and to a lesser extent on the JIM, and most importantly on the analysis of where the country stands with respect to the EES.

- In PL, the CIP has been elaborated on the basis of an analysis of the labour market but also of the sectoral programmes HRD. According to the evaluators, the principle adopted was to look for complementarity between the two programmes (HRD and Regional development programmes).
- In MT, the evaluators referred to the analysis made by the ex-ante evaluators and compared thematic priorities with the SWOT analysis. As a result, the evaluators agree with the conclusions of the ex-ante evaluations which confirmed 'a high degree of consistency' within themes 2C (opening up business creation to all) and 4G (reconciling family and professional life), even if from the ex-ante evaluators' point of view some topics would need more resources than were allocated. The ex-ante evaluators concluded that the EQUAL CIP strategy properly complemented other programmes, in particular the SPD for Malta 2004-2006. Furthermore, the evaluators stated in their first report that the EQUAL CIP seemed to have been used to fill in policy gaps rather than to support current policy approaches, arguing that there is no national and ESF labour market interventions directed towards unemployed people starting up a business, gender equality and asylum seekers.

Nevertheless, even though thematic priorities were broadly validated, national evaluators also made some critical analyses regarding the priorities chosen. According to some national evaluation reports, theme 5I (asylum seekers) would not have been selected as a main priority, if it had not been compulsory. Indeed, other priorities seemed more strategic to some NMS.

- The HU evaluators pointed out that the share of the budget was low for theme 4H³ (8%) considering the fact that, apart from theme 5I, this area is where least experience is available. Experimentation and methodological innovation thus require higher resources, if they are to lead to appropriate policy and targeted measures. They also regretted that theme 2C had been left out, since, in their view, the promotion of entrepreneurship, subsidies for establishing viable enterprises and the improvement in the capacity and sustainability of micro and small enterprises are effective responses to employment problems. Theme 3F (adaptability) would have been useful as well, especially in regions affected by job losses.
- The LV evaluators draw the attention to the fact that many jobseekers were leaving LV in order to take up jobs in other countries. Therefore, it might have been useful to select the 'Entrepreneurship' theme, so as to focus on job creation. In addition, they stressed that, whilst employability measures may achieve short-term results for the improvement of opportunities for disadvantaged groups, policies should also look forward to transforming the structure of the labour market so that it becomes more accessible to these target groups.
- On the contrary, the CZ evaluators argue that the high weight given to business creation is not justified as the most pressing problems concern integration in the regular labour market, a priority which should have attracted more funding. They recommended that the MA should exert efforts on the next programming period to receive more applications from all CZ regions. In that perspective, the MA should find out the reasons of low participation of some regions and take necessary measures.
- According to the SI evaluators, it might be advisable to include Theme 2D – Social Economy in the subsequent Programme periods in accordance with recommendations from the study 'Social and Economic Inclusion of Vulnerable Categories in Slovenia – Possible Measures for Increasing the Employability of the Most Vulnerable Categories of Hard-to-Employ and Inactive Persons'. Most important in the view of the evaluators is that the unemployed are not sufficiently defined: it is not clear whether only registered unemployed are targeted or whether a broader definition of the unemployed (e.g. in the ILO sense) is adopted. DPs targeting unemployed persons are required to involve the Public Employment Service. Hence the evaluators draw the attention to the need for precise controls in order to avoid multiple public financing of activities and to direct activities to non-registered unemployed as well).

³ Reducing gender gaps.

In those evaluation reports where **clarity of priorities and operational priorities** have been assessed, most evaluators converged on the fact that this was adequate. However, according to the LT evaluators, the analysis of threats and opportunities were not operational enough to be translated into relevant strategies.

11.1.2. A target group approach to labour market inequalities

Labour market inequalities are addressed in most of the NMS CIPs by target group rather than by theme (LT, HU, MT, EE, CZ, SI) : Socially marginalised individuals, Ethnic minorities (mainly Roma⁴), Refugees-immigrants (Russian), Disabled, Unemployed people, Long term Unemployed, Young people, Women, Low skilled, Older workers, 'Excluded people' (drug addicts, homeless, offenders). Employment quality is mainly an issue in relation to gender equality and in the context of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

This led a majority of NMS to seek to focus EQUAL on those target groups which are not or not sufficiently addressed by existing policies. Thus, in LV, the Managing Authority was contacted during the elaboration process of ESF by the Ministry of Justice as they were disappointed that only ex offenders were being targeted and not prisoners, while only few policies are addressed to them. As a result, people in jail became a complementary target for EQUAL.

An analysis of the target groups proposed in the 10 CIPs shows that the most nominated group is the one of women (all CIPs), followed by disabled people and excluded people like drug addicts, homeless, offenders and ex offenders (9 out of 10), young people and ethnic minorities (8), long term unemployed and older workers (7). Some specific groups are identified: employees threatened by redundancies (PL), lone parents (CY, MT, PL).

In most cases, the main factors of inequality pointed out are the lack of education and skill deficits. This focus on **individual deficits and problems** provides a justification for the emphasis put on employability in EQUAL.

Nevertheless, **structural factors** are introduced in some CIPs: the MT CIP emphasises the consequences of economic poverty, itself derived from structural inequalities in the access to the labour market. The EE CIP highlights that vulnerability factors differ between women (being a single parent or carer, living alone in old age or relying on a single income, becoming a victim of domestic violence – the figures provided are high, and of course prostitution) and men (high drop-out rates from school, alcohol and drug abuse, health-damaging behaviours).

Institutional deficits as well as **mentalities** are also pointed out in some cases. The analytical framework adopted in the **SI** CIP is particularly interesting in this respect. Three sets of factors leading to inequalities and discrimination: (a) individual factors such as specific problems like diminished work abilities, low skill levels, long periods of absence from the labour market; (b) systemic and demand-sided factors like stigma and prejudices; and (c) institutional factors in the area of schooling, education and life-long education. School drop-out rates represent a serious problem and institutional solutions (e.g. accreditation systems and reducing the gap between knowledge and skills that can be obtained from an ordinary school system and those demanded on the labour market) are discussed.

- In EE, the overview of current policies shows a lack of resources, especially in the employment service, as well as a lack of staff training (e.g. for dealing with specific groups), which makes practical availability and access to services difficult. In addition, the CIP highlights that the obstacles to labour market participation are not currently being addressed, in particular due to a lack of collaborative work between employment offices and municipalities – there seems to be the idea that EQUAL is an adequate instrument for innovating there.

⁴ The Roma community is targeted in most NMS.

- In MT, the lack of conformity of ethnic minorities with the dominant culture is pointed out as a factor of social exclusion.
- In LT, the CIP provides a description of the main problems for accessing the labour market and other inequalities. The evaluators highlight that this analysis is correct and in-depth but that it does not sufficiently address the causes, and therefore remain at an individual level instead of exploring institutional factors and prejudices. For example, they highlight that the analysis of the labour market in the CIP does not give enough importance to the poor human resources strategies and policies at employer level: employers do not train enough their staff, and they do not know either how to retain their staff when they train them. In some sectors, working conditions are really poor, and this explains the high turn over especially of young people. Very little has been done, on the other hand, in LT, for the recognition of skills derived from experience as opposed to educational degrees. Another problem is the lack of analysis of jobsearch activity in LT: for example, according to the experts, many unemployed people consider it shameful to go to the employment agency and they prefer to manage by themselves, which means that if one wants to reach them and support them, one has to look for them in other places. The evaluators' analysis, largely based on their conversations with experts, shows that the initial diagnosis could have been more concrete, so that it would have been easier to identify which DP actions should be promoted.
- According to the HU evaluators, disadvantaged groups and their problems are generally exposed adequately and the effects of the measures aimed at disadvantaged groups are being dealt with. However, some disadvantaged groups were unduly left out, in their opinion. Thus the evaluators regretted the lack of attention to ex-prisoners, those holding a degree (within the young people's age group) and those living in disadvantaged areas. The HU evaluators also estimated that there was a lack of data on the Roma population, and that asylum seekers were addressed in a too general fashion. Finally, as with LT evaluators, they pointed out a lack of exploration of correlations, for example between patterns of discrimination and employer attitudes.

11.1.3. Content of thematic priorities

This section should be read in connection with the table in Annex 11.1.

The measures mentioned in **theme 1A** (Facilitating access and return to the labour market), which is covered by all NMS, mainly refer to access to the labour market. Indeed most NMS consider access to the labour market as the main problem, which, as we have seen, affects more particularly some target groups. As argued in the SI CIP, this is therefore an area in which new ideas and new partnerships are necessary. Some NMS dedicated an important part of the budget to this theme, in particular LT (69%) and SI (60%).

Theme 1B (combating racism and xenophobia) is only covered by 2 NMS, CZ and SK. The definition of measures and target groups is quite similar in both cases.

In Pillar 2, **theme 2C** (opening up business creation to all) is a priority for only 2 NMS, CZ and MT, and **theme 2D** (social economy) is only covered by 3 NMS, CZ, PL and SK. The measures mentioned are very similar in each case. The objective of theme 2D is very clear, developing the social economy sector which seems to be very rare in the 3 NMS engaged in this topic. Specific target groups are identified whilst theme 2C is much wider in terms of target groups.

In Pillar 3, only 3 NMS are engaged in each theme: **theme 3E** (lifelong learning) was taken up by HU, CZ and SI and **theme 3F** (adaptability) by PL, CZ, SK. In theme 3E, the focus is on SMEs to promote a LLL culture both in SI and CZ while in HU efforts are more concentrated on individual target groups (older workers, individuals with low IT skills). In theme 3F, SMEs and their employees are, again, the target group in CZ and SK while measures in PL are more targeted on SME employees threatened with losing their job.

In Pillar 4, the 10 NMS are involved in the 2 themes of the pillar, even if not all NMS are positioned on each of the 2 themes. In the case of LV, there is no distinction made between the 2 themes, even though the focus tends to be more proper of theme 4G (reconciling family and professional life): the objectives are to improve and strengthen gender mainstreaming, conciliation policies, develop flexible forms of work and improve the scope of care services. The new Member States chose **theme 4G** (7 of them) more than **theme 4H** (reducing gender gaps - 5 of them).

Theme 5I, as said, was a compulsory priority. Asylum seekers are the main target group except in the case of LV and SI where victims of trafficking are also targeted. In both cases, victims of trafficking are a transversal target group as well. However it is unclear how they can be supported across all themes.

11.2. CONSISTENCY BETWEEN DP AND CIP PRIORITIES

In 7 out of 10 CIPs, the distribution of selected DPs is quite similar to the distribution of the planned budget. This is of course linked to selection processes, but it is also true that the reduced number of well differentiated priorities may have helped DPs to position themselves.

In 3 cases, some differences can be noted between the planned activities and the result :

- in CZ, the number of DPs on theme 2C (business creation) is under the planned budget while the number of DPs on theme 2D (social economy) is above. There is also a difference for the theme 3E (lifelong learning - which is under the planned budget) and for the theme 3F (adaptability - above).
- in EE, theme 1A (facilitating access to the labour market) is less important than the CIP foresees while theme 4G (reconciling family and professional life) is more developed.
- in MT, 2 DPs were selected on theme 1A while the planned budget was more for one. But the MA had to face a certain success with 4 proposals on this priority.

Table 11.2 – Share of DPs by theme (in %)

| CIP | Number of DP | 1A | 1B | 2C | 2D | 3E | 3F | 4G | 4H | 5I |
|-----|--------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| CY | 7 | 43% | | | | | | 43% | | 14% |
| CZ | 59 | 20% | 5% | 17% | 15% | 15% | 7% | 7% | 7% | 7% |
| EE | 13 | 38% | | | | | | 54% | | 8% |
| HU | 39 | 41% | | | | 41% | | | 13% | 5% |
| LT | 29 | 72% | | | | | | 24% | | 4% |
| LV | 10 | 50% | | | | | | 30% | 10% | 10% |
| MT | 5 | 40% | | 20% | | | | 20% | | 20% |
| PL | 107 | 35% | | | 25% | | 23% | 12% | | 4% |
| SI | 26 | 62% | | | | 19% | | | 15% | 4% |
| SK | 101 | 23% | 14% | 25% | | | 22% | | 14% | 3% |

Source : ECDB April 2006, interviews, Evaluation reports

EQUAL funds nearly 400 DPs in NMS (exactly 396) representing 19% of all DPs in R2. Overall, the employability pillar concentrates the highest share of DPs (158 DPs i.e. 40%). The entrepreneurship pillar (72 DPs i.e. 18%), and the adaptability and equal opportunities pillars

(17% each) have a similar weight. 19 DPs were selected for the Asylum seekers priority (5% of the total DPs).

The following 4 themes have a higher weight than the total NMS share of R2 DPs (19%):

- theme 1A: 21%
- theme 2C : 23%
- theme 4G : 32%
- theme 5I : 29%

Table 11.3 – Number of DPs by Theme

| CIP | Number of DPs | 1A | 1B | 2C | 2D | 3E | 3F | 4G | 4H | 5I |
|-------|---------------|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| CY | 7 | 3 | | | | | | 3 | | 1 |
| CZ | 59 | 12 | 3 | 10 | 9 | 9 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| EE | 13 | 5 | | | | | | 7 | | 1 |
| HU | 39 | 16 | | | | 16 | | | 5 | 2 |
| LT | 29 | 21 | | | | | | 7 | | 1 |
| LV | 10 | 5 | | | | | | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| MT | 5 | 2 | | 1 | | | | 1 | | 1 |
| PL | 107 | 38 | | | 27 | | 25 | 13 | | 4 |
| SI | 26 | 16 | | | | 5 | | | 4 | 1 |
| SK | 101 | 23 | 14 | 25 | | | 22 | | 14 | 3 |
| Total | 396 | 141 | 17 | 36 | 36 | 30 | 29 | 39 | 28 | 19 |

Source : ECDB, interviews, Evaluation reports

Overall, national evaluators found a **high level of consistency** between CIP and DP priorities. However, this assessment is sometimes rather general, and only the HU evaluators analysed the way in which DPs had taken up the priorities of the national CIP.

- In MT, the evaluators stressed that DPs addressed the priorities set in the CIP, even though the evaluators did not have access to the DPs work programmes (which were not available at the time). Their argument was in fact one of pure logic: for three of the 5 DPs, the objective of the DP becomes the objective of the thematic priority as there is only one DP in themes 2C (business creation), 4G (reconciling family and professional life) and 5I (asylum seekers).
- The SI evaluators analysed the application and monitoring reports of selected DPs by theme. This analysis contains a very short section on the relevance of the proposed actions (generally it is stated that planned actions and target groups are relevant).
- The LV evaluators pointed out that the projects submitted were all aimed at solving the specific problems defined in the CIP, ‘at the same time offering different and various innovative approaches so that the most efficient ones could be integrated in national policies, thus amending current gaps’.

- Only the HU evaluators carried out an in-depth analysis by theme and concluded that DP workplans are clearly fitting within CIP priorities. However as can be seen from the developments below, not all planned CIP activities could be addressed.
 - In theme 1A (facilitating access to the labour market), DP workplans clearly reflect the priorities defined in the CIP document according to the evaluators; the objective to reduce the disadvantage of the given target group on the labour market is clearly formulated and projects will use instruments and methods and will carry out activities that appear as a priority in the CIP document. However, the evaluators noted that no activity is aimed at preventing human trafficking.
 - In theme 4H, although the activities planned correspond to CIP priorities, some activities planned in the CIP were not addressed: for example, activities promoting women’s participation in research and development and in non-traditional professions or areas.
 - Lastly, in theme 5I, the evaluators again stated that the planned activities would promote the integration of AS, but three aspects dealt with in the CIP were missing: the creation of services assisting with the integration of relatives, the capacity of civil and governmental organisations to deal with AS, research studies in the area of legal regulation related to special training for AS.

11.3. THE PLACE OF LOCAL NEEDS IN THE CIPs AND AT DP LEVEL

The following table, based on the latest figures available in the ECDB, clearly shows the **prevalence of sectoral DPs** (63% of the total) over geographical DPs (37%), although this is not the case in all NMS:

- There is an equal breakdown between sectoral and geographical DPs in 3 NMS (EE, LV, PL)
- There is a majority of geographical DPs in SI which is not surprising given the importance of self governance at the local level.

The sectoral breakdown shows a clear predominance of DPs positioned on ‘specific discriminations and equality problems’ rather than in specific sectors.

Some particular situations can be noted, for instance SK accounts for 50% of rural DPs in the NMS and the only sectoral DP located in the agricultural sector also comes from SK.

Table 11.4 – Distribution of sectoral and geographical DPs by CIP

| | CY | CZ | EE | HU | LT | LV | MT | PL | SI | SK | Total |
|------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Geographic – rural area | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | | | | 9 | 3 | 22 | 42 |
| Geographic – urban area | | 8 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | | 13 | 7 | 4 | 39 |
| Geographic - Others | | 6 | 2 | 2 | 8 | 4 | | 32 | 10 | 1 | 65 |
| Geographic Total | 1 | 16 | 7 | 7 | 9 | 5 | | 54 | 20 | 27 | 146 |
| Geographic - % | 14% | 27% | 54% | 18% | 31% | 50% | | 50% | 77% | 27% | 37% |
| Sectoral – agriculture | | | | | | | | | | 1 | 1 |
| Sectoral – industrial | | 2 | | | | | | 6 | | 1 | 9 |
| Sectoral – services | 6 | 15 | 6 | 4 | 1 | | | 6 | 2 | 52 | 92 |
| Sectoral- specific discriminations | | 26 | | 28 | 19 | 5 | 5 | 41 | 4 | 20 | 148 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| and equality problems | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sectoral – Total | 6 | 43 | 6 | 32 | 20 | 5 | 5 | 53 | 6 | 74 | 250 |
| Sectoral - % | 86% | 73% | 46% | 82% | 69% | 50% | 100% | 50% | 23% | 73% | 63% |
| TOTAL DPs | 7 | 59 | 13 | 39 | 29 | 10 | 5 | 107 | 26 | 101 | 396 |

Source : ECDB – March 2006

This distribution of DPs echoes the fact that geographical disparities are not analysed in-depth in the CIPs, even though regional imbalances are pointed out. It is thus logical that DPs define their actions less by reference to their local environment than to their sectoral context.

Comparing NMS with all MS, it can be noted that geographical DPs are much more numerous in OMS than in NMS. One explanation comes from the limited budget of most of the NMS programmes, which restricts the possibilities for selecting DPs specifically focusing on a given area, but another explanation can be the lack of capacity for project development precisely in these remote or disadvantaged areas (as argued for example by the MT evaluators).

The following table also shows that, amongst geographical DPs, the weight of urban DPs is much less in the NMS than on average in the whole of the European Union.

Table 11.5 – Comparison of NMS with all MS in the distribution of sectoral and geographical DPs

| | All MS (25 MS) | | 10 NMS | |
|--|----------------|----------------|--------|----------------|
| | Number | % of the total | Number | % of the total |
| Geographic – rural area | 251 | 12% | 42 | 11% |
| Geographic – urban area | 441 | 21% | 39 | 10% |
| Geographic - Others | 512 | 24% | 65 | 16% |
| Geographic Total | 1204 | | 146 | |
| Geographic - % | | 57% | | 37% |
| Sectoral – agriculture | 17 | 1% | 1 | 0.1% |
| Sectoral – industrial | 39 | 2% | 9 | 2.3% |
| Sectoral – services | 223 | 11% | 92 | 23.2% |
| Sectoral- specific discriminations and equality problems | 606 | 29% | 148 | 37.4% |
| Sectoral – Total | 885 | | 250 | |
| Sectoral - % | | 43% | | 63% |
| TOTAL DPs | 2089 | 100% | 396 | 100% |

Source : ECDB – March 2006

Only few evaluators analysed the relevance of DP workplans with regard to local, regional or sectoral socio-economic contexts. This is probably linked to the fact that CIPs tended to focus much more on target groups than on an analysis of discriminations or inequalities by sector or of a territorial nature.

- In LV, the evaluators pointed out that the majority of DPs planned their actions for the whole territory, or sometimes for 3 or 4 regions. Only one DP was focusing on Riga only – but the project targeted national legislation on regional development so that other parts of the country would benefit as well (if the DP reached its goals). No sectoral analysis is provided.

- In LT, the evaluators highlight that the main configuration is that with lead partners located in Vilnius and with partners located regionally. This is also the case in CZ.
- Conversely, in HU, 40% of the DPs are based in Budapest while 60% are in the countryside (North-East, or Southern region). Thus, although the ‘experienced’ DPs are in Budapest, it is interesting to note the high proportion of DPs outside the capital. In SK as well, DPs are spread over the country, but in this case this was an aim pursued by the Programme actors. As some DPs located in Bratislava or other regional centres are implementing projects targeting the whole country, the ‘real’ regional spread of funding is difficult to measure according to our interviewees.

Concerning the more specific issue of the involvement of local authorities, there may have been a problem of project management capacity which impeded small local authorities to take the lead. This for example was pointed out by the LV evaluators, who remarked that local authorities did take part as partners, but that none of the 5 applications submitted by local authorities had been selected. In the same vein, the Managing Authority in SK, which wanted to use EQUAL to ‘strengthen the local level’, regretted that very few applications had been submitted by local authorities, even though they are involved as partners.

11.4. THE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS

11.4.1. Partnership size

According to the ECDB, the average number of partners involved in NMS DPs is around 6, which is slightly lower than the average number for all MS (7.5). In **EE**, **HU** and **SK** the average is much lower than in the other NMS. There are some minor divergences between ECDB data and the data provided in the national evaluation reports (e.g. for MT, where the evaluators have computed an average number of partners of 6 rather than 7).

Within that broad picture, it is important to stress the large differences from one DP to another in one and the same Member State: for example, in MT, the largest DP has 14 partners while the smallest only has 3. In LT, the DPs vary between 4 and 20 partners.

Table 11.6 – Average number of partners, by CIP and by theme

| | Average number of partners | Average number of partners by theme |
|-------|----------------------------|---|
| CY | 8.7 | Theme 1A : 8.8 – Theme 4G : 9.7 – Theme 5I : 7 |
| CZ | 8.6 | N A |
| EE | 4.5 | Theme 1A: 5 – Theme 4G: 4 – Theme 5I : 3 |
| HU | 4.7 | Theme 1A : 5 - theme 3E : 5 - theme 4H : 3 – Theme 5I : 6 |
| LT | 8.1 | Theme: 1A: 6.5; theme 4G: 4.5; theme 5I: 7 |
| LV | 7.9 | Theme 1A: 7.5 - Theme 4G: 6 - Theme 4H: 18 - Theme 5I: 4 |
| MT | 7 | N/A |
| PL | 6.7 | Theme 1A : 6,5 – theme 4G: 5,5- theme 5I : 6 |
| SI | 9.3 | Theme 1A : 12 – Theme 3E : 7.5 – Theme 4H : 5 – Theme 5I : 6 |
| SK | 2.7 | Theme 1A: 1, Theme 1B: 1, Theme 2C: 4, Theme d: 4, Theme 4H: 3.5, Theme 5I: 4 |
| TOTAL | 6 | N/A |

Source : ECDB – March 2006

11.4.2 Lead partner organisations

According to the ECDB (see table below), public authorities represent 35% of lead partners for the DPs included in the database (80% of the DPs really involved). However this is mainly due to three Member States (EE, MT and SK) and there are problems with the data in EE and SK⁵. Organisations providing support and guidance to disadvantaged groups (mainly NGOs) represent 18% of the lead partners, but it is quite possible (as checked in the case of LV) that ‘social services’ (11%) in fact designate NGOs as well. 10% are enterprises, while only 5 % are coming from employer organisations and trade unions (together). It is interesting to note that the weight of ‘enterprises’ is exactly the same for NMS and for all 25 MS together, but the share of public authorities is much higher in the NMS (35% against 27%). On the other hand, training and education organisations are less often lead partners in the NMS than on average in the 25 MS (11% against 23%). Social partners’ involvement as lead partners is as low in the NMS as in the OMS (about 5%).

The MT evaluators accounts for the dominant presence of public authorities amongst lead partners by arguing that there are very few organisations/institutions available to carry out activities involving target groups such as women, asylum seekers, the homeless or people with disabilities. This capacity argument is likely to apply in other NMS as well.

Table 11.7 – Types of organisation managing the DPs

| in % | CY | CZ | EE | HU | LT | LV | MT | PL | SI | SK | All NMS |
|--|----|----|----|------|----|----|----|----|----|-----|---------|
| Public authority (national, regional, local) | | 5 | 60 | 17.5 | 20 | 22 | 75 | 10 | 13 | 79 | 35 |
| Education / training organisation | | 19 | | 17.5 | 10 | 11 | | 19 | 13 | 0.5 | 11 |
| Enterprise | 33 | 17 | | 2.5 | 10 | | | 7 | 36 | 6 | 10 |
| Organisation providing support and guidance for disadvantaged groups | | 32 | | 20 | 40 | | | 36 | 19 | | 18 |
| Employment services | | 4 | | 7.5 | | | | | | 3.5 | 2 |
| University / Research organisation | | 2 | 20 | | 15 | | | 16 | 13 | 3.5 | 6 |
| Social services | 33 | 4 | | 25 | 5 | 67 | 25 | 3 | | 7 | 11 |
| Social economy enterprise | | 4 | | 5 | | | | | | | 1 |
| Employers' organisation | 17 | 2 | 20 | 2.5 | | | | 2 | | | 1.5 |
| Trade Union | 17 | 2 | | 2.5 | | | | 5 | 6 | | 3 |
| Chamber of commerce | | 9 | | | | | | | | 0.5 | 1.5 |
| Financial institution | | | | | | | | 2 | | | - |
| Structure created to manage the DP | | | | | | | | | | | |
| NUMBER OF DPs | 6 | 53 | 5 | 40 | 20 | 9 | 4 | 58 | 16 | 98 | 309 |

Source : ECDB. April 2006.

The table shows the distribution by NMS but some data is missing or erroneous for 8 MS, in particular for CY (1 missing DP), CZ (6 missing DPs out of 59), EE (8 missing DPs out of 13), LV (1 missing DP out of 10), for LT (9 missing DPs out of 29), MT (1 missing DP out of 5), PL (49 missing DPs out of 107), SI (10 missing DPs out of 26), HU (40 DPs instead of 39). Thus

⁵ In EE data is provided for only 5 DPs out of 13. For SK, the ECDB data on the legal status of organisations managing DPs is that 60% have a NGO status.

ECDB data is based on 80% of NMS DPs and has little worth at this stage for EE, LT, PL and SI.

Some evaluation reports give details on the legal status of the lead partner :

- in LV, according to the evaluators, lead partners are 5 NGOs and 5 public institutions. ECDB data is different.
- in SK, 70% of the lead partners are NGOs, while 25% are coming from state organisations and 5% from the private sector. The ECDB data is slightly different. The evaluators noted that the structure of lead partners corresponds to the aim of the EQUAL CIP which wants to reinforce and develop the NGO sector.
- In HU, the managing organisation is a foundation, association, or non profit company in most cases (59% of DPs), while local governments or central budgetary agencies or institutions have a good representation with 31% of DPs as managing organisation.

According to the ECDB, there is a prevalence of non-profit private organisations amongst the organisations managing DPs for the NMS to a much greater extent than in the OMS where the private sector is better represented.

Table 11.8 - Legal status of organisations managing DPs

| In % | CY | CZ | EE | HU | LT | LV | MT | PL | SI | SK | All NMS | All MS |
|--|------|------|----|------|------|----|-----|------|----|-----|---------|--------|
| Non-profit private organisation (including NGO...) | 28.5 | 57.5 | 61 | 57.5 | 51.5 | 60 | | 63.5 | 58 | 63 | 58.5 | 36 |
| Public organisation | | 10 | 23 | 35 | 38 | 20 | 100 | 27 | 23 | 25 | 26 | 31 |
| Private | 43 | 20.5 | 8 | | 10.5 | | | 5.5 | 15 | 6 | 9 | 24 |
| Semi-public organisation | 14.5 | 7 | | 2.5 | | 20 | | 1 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 4 |
| Union, Confederation... | 14 | 5 | 8 | 5 | | | | 2 | | | 2 | 3 |
| Without legal status | | | | | | | | 1 | | | 0.5 | 1 |
| Co-operative | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Total NUMBER OF DPs | 7 | 59 | 13 | 40 | 29 | 10 | 5 | 107 | 26 | 101 | 397 | 100 |

Source : ECDB – April 2006.

According to the ECDB, 46% of the organisations managing the DPs have less than 10 employees and 76% have less than 50 employees. More generally, DPs from NMS are managed by organisations which have a smaller staff as compared with all MS: only 9% of the DP lead partners in the NMS have more than 250 employees, while 21% have more than 250 employees all MS included.

Table 11.9 – Size of the organisation managing the DPs

| | Staff < 10 | Staff 10-50 | Staff 50-250 | >250 | Total: |
|-------------|------------|-------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| CY | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 7 |
| CZ | 20 | 25 | 11 | 6 | 62 |
| EE | 5 | 4 | 4 | | 13 |
| HU | 14 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 40 |
| LT | 11 | 12 | 4 | 2 | 29 |
| LV | 2 | 4 | | 4 | 10 |
| MT | 1 | 1 | 3 | | 5 |
| PL | 41 | 38 | 18 | 11 | 108 |
| SI | 12 | 12 | 1 | 1 | 26 |
| SK | 76 | 15 | 8 | 2 | 101 |
| Total | 185 | 120 | 60 | 36 | 401 |
| NMS% | 46% | 30% | 15% | 9% | 100% |
| MS % | 30% | 31% | 18% | 21% | 100% |

Source : ECDB – April 2006.

11.4.3 Partnership composition

According to the ECDB, **partnerships include a wide variety of organisations**. Though public authorities represent more than one fourth of all partners involved in the new Member States, other types of organisations (such as training organisations, organisations working with the target groups or firms) are also involved in a relatively equal proportion (around 15% each). The weight of employer organisations and trade unions involved in EQUAL DPs is very low. The overall pattern of partnership composition is similar in the OMS.

Public authorities as well as education and training organisations are involved in all NMS. Firms are involved as partners in all MS except in MT. According to the ECDB, organisations providing support and guidance for disadvantaged groups, i.e. NGOs, are only involved in 7 NMS (all except CY, LV, SK). However this latter result is more likely to be a problem linked to the ECDB categories: for example in LV, the evaluators find that 45% partners are NGOs, 33% are in the ‘public sector’ (which we suppose means central government), 20% are municipalities and 2% are from the private sector which did not appear in the ECDB. As suggested above, it is thus likely that what is counted in the ECDB as ‘social services’ are in fact NGOs, and could have been categorised as ‘organisations providing support and guidance for disadvantaged groups’.

Social partners are as little involved as partners (5%), as they are as managing organisations. This share is close to the one obtained for all MS (6%).

Table 11.10 – Partnership composition: type of organisations involved

| | CY | CZ | EE | HU | LT | LV | MT | PL | SI | SK | All NMS |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|-----|----|-----|------|------|---------|
| Public authority (national, regional, local) | 16 | 23 | 50 | 10 | 17 | 32 | 44 | 26 | 19 | 50 | 25.8 |
| Education / training organisation | 4 | 17 | 14 | 19 | 20 | 11 | 8 | 12 | 19 | 3 | 13.9 |
| Organisation providing support and guidance for disadvantaged groups | | 20.5 | 9 | 19.5 | 14.5 | | 8 | 19 | 12 | | 14 |
| Enterprise | 17.5 | 18 | 4.5 | 13 | 6 | 4 | | 14 | 25.5 | 10 | 14.5 |
| University / Research organisation | 9 | 5 | | 2 | 11 | 7 | | 9 | 4.5 | 6 | 6.6 |
| Employer organisation | 14 | 0.5 | | 1.5 | 3 | 1.5 | 8 | 5 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 2.8 |
| Social services | 28 | 3 | | 18.5 | 12 | 38 | 4 | 2 | 0.5 | 14 | 8 |
| Trade Union | 11 | 0.2 | | 2 | 1.5 | 1.5 | 12 | 4 | 3.5 | 0.5 | 2.5 |
| Employment services | | 3.3 | 22.5 | 8 | 14 | | 16 | 4.5 | 11 | 14.5 | 7.3 |
| Social economy enterprise | | 1.5 | | 3 | | | | 1 | 1 | | 1 |
| Chamber of commerce | 2 | 8 | | 3 | 1 | 2.5 | | 3 | 3.5 | 1.5 | 3.6 |
| Financial institution | | | | 0.5 | | 2.5 | | 0.5 | | | 0.3 |
| Total number of partners | 57 | 451 | 22 | 187 | 189 | 74 | 25 | 611 | 204 | 263 | 2083 |

Source : ECDB, April 2006

Most evaluation reports also underlined the wide spectrum of organisations included in the partnerships. Some of them provided a more detailed analysis of the composition of partnerships in their country and of how they were formed:

- In PL, NGOs seem to be the most involved and proactive stakeholders in the partnership: a great majority of projects were initiated by non-governmental organisations (56% of total funding). The remaining 44% of the programme budget was allocated to applications submitted by public administration units (19%), educational institutions (18%) and private companies (7%). However types of organisations involved as partners differed significantly from one theme to another. While non-governmental organisations were prevalent in themes 1A (facilitating access to the labour market), 2D (social economy) and 4G (reconciling family and professional life), in theme 3F (adaptability) private companies represented the largest share of partners. This is the only area where surveyed representatives of the private sector are DP administrators. The PL evaluators made some interpretations to explain the results observed about partnerships: 1) The fact that NGOs are project initiators can be explained by their more important experience as beneficiaries of assistance programmes than administration or private companies, 2) having a public administration in the partnership raises the credibility of the application, and increases the mainstreaming potential, 3) greater participation of private companies can be probably linked to their role as potential suppliers of specialised services. If this latter interpretation is valid, this means that the relatively important role played by the private sector in the PL programme should not be equated with an important participation of employers – since it is not as potential employers of the beneficiaries that they are involved but as service providers.

- In CZ, the evaluators confirmed the great variety of partners already mentioned above. The organisations involved include public authorities, employment offices, municipalities, regional governments, universities, different sorts of associations, private limited companies, joint stock companies etc. The prevalence of NGOs is not surprising as the programme objectives and target groups coincide with those of these organisations. The main reason for selecting a public authority as a partner usually is related to the need of pre-financing the project with public funds, but is also due to the necessity of creating the bases for mainstreaming. The participation of firms is much more important than is normally the case in Europe, for two reasons: 1) an unusually high weight given to the priority ‘adaptability and entrepreneurship’ and a very high rate of approval of applications related to this priority; 2) the fact no co-funding is required (But this is the case in most NMS). In such a context, DPs faced no problem in finding and convincing business partners.
- In HU, the evaluators noted that a large variety of organisations were involved: 8 main types as lead partners, and as many as 14 different types as partners. NGOs were well represented (more than 44% of DP partners), as public authorities (local governments, local or central budgetary agencies or institutions: 31% of DP partners). According to the HU evaluators, the relatively high proportion of NGOs engaged in DPs is a good opportunity; as a result of their close relationship with the target groups, they are able of bringing such special skills, knowledge and innovative impetus. The inclusion of organisations working with or representing the Roma community has been important for DPs in themes 1A (facilitating access to the labour market) and 3E (lifelong learning).

On the other hand, very few educational or research institutions, employee and employer organisations can be found among partner organisations.

Table 11.11 – Types of organisations involved as managing organisations and as partners in HU

| Types of organisations | MANAGING ORGANISATION | % | PARTNERS | % |
|---|-----------------------|------|----------|------|
| Foundation | 11 | 28 | 32 | 22 |
| Central budgetary agency and institution | 6 | 15.5 | 31 | 20.5 |
| Association | 7 | 18 | 28 | 18.5 |
| Firm | 0 | 0 | 19 | 12.5 |
| Local Government body, budgetary agency and institution | 5 | 13 | 13 | 9 |
| Non profit company | 5 | 13 | 6 | 4 |
| Local minority governments | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2.5 |
| Trade unions, employees' interest groups | 2 | 5 | 4 | 2.5 |
| Public body budgetary agency | 1 | 2.5 | 3 | 2 |
| Local government partnerships | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 |
| Other non profit organisations | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 |
| Church-led institutions, organisations | 2 | 5 | 2 | 1.5 |
| Public bodies | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.5 |
| Schools managed by public foundations | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.5 |
| TOTAL | 39 | 100 | 150 | 100 |

Source : national evaluation report for HU

- In EE, the evaluators consider that several DPs were able to convince ‘strategic’ partners, i.e. partners who provide access to target groups, knowledge, and/or facilitate implementation. However this has not always been the case. They note the absence of employers in most DPs. However, in our opinion, in many cases, especially in theme 1A - facilitating access to the labour market, DPs are dealing with highly marginalised groups, for whom employer involvement might best be negotiated later on. In some DPs, more presence of State partners would have been required in the evaluators’ opinion. In one DP which wants to establish a local refugee centre, no local government is involved. Another issue is that some of the organisations appointed for project management or for delivering training have no experience in the field. The evaluators stress that there should have been more public tendering involved especially for organisations delivering training.
- The LV evaluators provide a typology of partnerships, which is simple but quite relevant: they look at the number of partners from different types (NGOs, governmental sector, municipal sector, and private sector): thus, 3 DPs include partners of the 4 types, 3 DPs include partners of 3 types, 3 DPs include partners of 2 types, and 1 DP only includes NGOs. The evaluators consider that for those partnerships with less diversity of partners, vertical mainstreaming may be more difficult, and

therefore it will be all the more important to link with strategic partners in the future, and to take part in the national thematic networks.

- In LT, the evaluators emphasise that some organisations (NGOs, consultants) are active in several DPs, and indeed, according to them, in many European projects. This veiled criticism of the possibly undue prevalence of organisations specialised in EU funded projects is also found in the EE report. This is indeed a development to monitor, however it may also be thought that experienced organisations are welcome especially if this facilitates transnationality and more generally the administration of the DPs.
- In SI, the evaluators state that in general terms the DPs are rather inclusive, but that the large number of partners in some partnerships (up to 40) might represent a risk as regards the effective implementation of the work programme. However this might be balanced by the fact that the role of each partner was already adequately defined in the applications (at least for those selected applications which were investigated). The involvement of firms as partners is very high, while the involvement of social partners is quite low despite a relatively high degree of unionisation (above 40% in 2002, Source: European Foundation). According to our analysis, this may be linked to the fact that existing local partnerships have been mobilised for EQUAL, and these partnerships include regional economic development agencies which are in a position to approach private companies and include some of them as partners in the DPs.

To conclude, these assessments of the composition of the partnership have proved particularly relevant when they permitted to highlight DPs' greater or lesser capacity for project implementation, innovation and mainstreaming.

On the other hand, only few national evaluation reports provided an analysis of the way in which partners were found and selected.

- The results of the DP survey carried out by the PL evaluators indicate a significant role of previous joined experience in accounting for the formation of partnerships. DPs formed on the basis of personal contacts constitute over 40% and initiatives relying on previous cooperation experience represent 33%. The evaluators also insist on the time which is needed to build up the partnership. 'Creating relations between institutions that have not cooperated before is not a simple and short process. The basis for cooperation between institutions is always linked to the relationship between people and they need time to understand and trust each other'. 'It is wrong to artificially force cooperation between entities which do not have much in common. Cooperation develops correctly if it is based on the conscious and common interest of all parties' said DP representatives.
- In CZ, the evaluators counted how many partners from R1 (10 DPs in total) were present in R2. They found that 9 organisations out of a total of 23 were involved in R2, two of them as lead partners and 7 as partners. Two thirds of R2 partners thus had not been involved in R1. Half of the R1 participants followed in the same theme as in R1. More generally, to find partners, most of CZ project initiators contacted their traditional partners. According to the evaluators, this method of selection seems to be natural, as it eliminates the risks of an 'unknown' partner. However, it restricts the possibilities of new inspirations, which come from unknown and new horizons. Nevertheless, the evaluators report that many of these 'traditional' partners were not necessarily enthusiastic about taking part in such a new programme, and securing their adhesion required some work on the part of the DP initiators.
- This was also the case in HU where the partnership, according to the evaluators, was based on old cooperation in 50% of the cases but also included new partners. In 24% of the cases, there was no tradition of cooperation between organizations forming the partnership. The main considerations for selecting new partners were professional competence of partners, quality of professional work, adequate experience in project management and/or implementation, basic knowledge of the target group and suitability for informing the public, publishing and distributing project results. To sum up, the HU evaluators noted that applicants strove to make good use of their existing professional contacts, so they would thereby reduce any possible business risks, and ensure stability within the consortium. At the same time, new partners were included in professionally justified cases.
- A similar pattern as observed in LV by the evaluators, who noted that previous collaboration was a determining factor in the building up of the partnership. However in some cases, there was also a

partner search on the basis of qualifications and specialisation in certain fields. Partners were sometimes selected after a ‘long search process’, including a study of potential partners, informing potential partners about project goals and ‘discussions’.

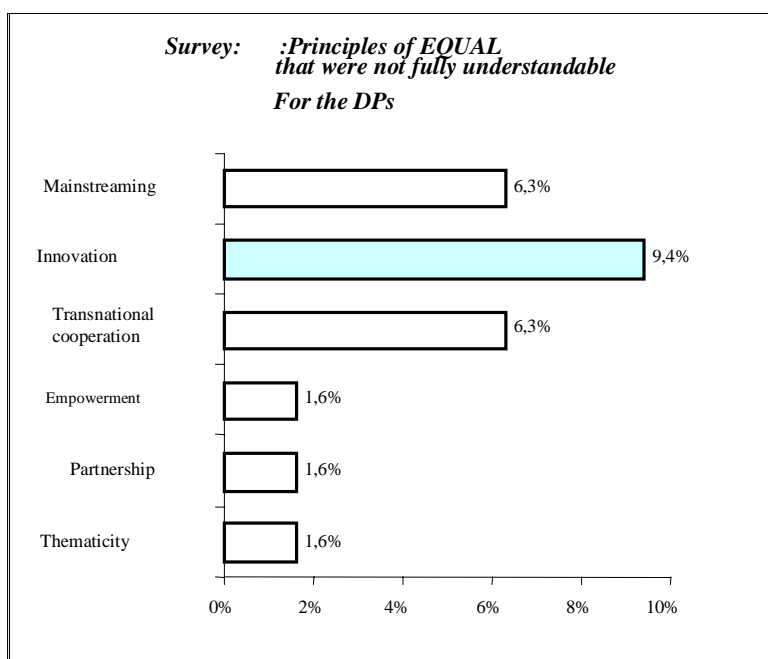
11.5. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE KEY PRINCIPLES⁶

In most cases, the CIP formulation of the key principles follows that provided in the EQUAL Guidelines, with few variations.

Although evaluators were not required to assess the implementation of the principles, some have provided elements of analysis. As can be seen below, these analyses show that, at the time of report writing, i.e. at an early stage of the programme, DPs were facing difficulties in understanding and complying with the principles. This pointed to the need for further guidance by MAs and NSSs, even though the guidance effort seems to already have been important in some countries (e.g. guidance had been provided to *applicants* in CY and MT).

In PL, where the DP survey sought to assess DPs’ understanding of the principle, the results show that a large majority of DPs found the concepts embodied in the EQUAL principles convincing. However the evaluators noted that innovation and mainstreaming comparatively raised more difficulties of understanding (see graph below).

Graph 11.1 – Surveyed DPs’ opinion on clarity of principles in PL



The implementation of the **partnership principle** may vary a lot from one NMS to another, in part according to the more or less developed tradition in partnership work.

- For example, the partnership principle is per se nothing new in SI, and we could even state that SI is already rather mature in terms of partnership approaches. It is interesting to note that in this NMS implementation of the partnership principle seems to be particularly important with regard to the

⁶ Transnationality is addressed separately, in chapter 13. The implementation of the partnership principle is also addressed in section 12.2 (Management and monitoring at DP level).

integration of the Roma community: there are two DPs addressing this target group and both of them are very large. In one of those two DPs, the mayor of the town in which the DP is located (which are in both cases regions with Roma population) is leading the DP.

- On the contrary, the partnership principle is absolutely new in SK and represents in itself an innovation. However, according to the MA, DP initiators have been very active in finding partners. On the basis of their monitoring visits, MA/NSS staff have reported the formation of informal networks between DPs for mutual help and co-ordination (they seek not to duplicate work).
- In HU, the surveyed DP co-ordinators reported a positive partnership experience in a large majority of cases: 90% of those surveyed mentioned benefits in terms of professional experience, knowledge and skills. DP members complemented each other well. As could be expected, DP respondents tended to account for weaknesses by mentioning external factors – such as the lack of resources (human and financial). Overall the partnership was perceived as clearly strengthening project quality and as favouring the exchange of experience to a considerable extent.

Two evaluators (HU, SI) explicitly refer to the planning and implementation of the empowerment principle, highlighting the difficulties of DPs and the CZ evaluators are also critical of the low extent of implementation of the principle.

- In HU, the evaluators note that ‘enforcing the principle causes difficulties to DPs and the involvement of the target group is only realised in part and largely indirectly (interviews, questionnaire surveys) : the DPs need the support of the NSS to understand this concept and such support could take the form of a presentation of practices and methods established in other MS’.
- The SI evaluators provided a thorough analysis of the way in which DPs were planning to implement the principle (on the basis of DP applications) and highlighted the potential pitfalls. The evaluators’ questions very much echo those raised earlier by OMS national evaluators (e.g. UKgb). There was a tendency among applicants, especially in theme 1A (Facilitating access and return to the labour market), to equate empowerment and the inclusion of members of the target groups in all phases of the DP process and activities. Inclusion however does not give rise to any transfer of power, all the more so that beneficiaries may lack the skills to formulate their ideas in the ‘politically acceptable idiom’. However, the DPs targeting the Roma community were planning to involve them in decision-making as well. In theme 5I, the specific comment of the evaluators refers to the fact that asylum seekers are not organised into pressure groups or other forms of self-organised groups, and it is therefore not really possible to speak of the empowerment of this target group, as it has no power in the host society. The AS DP is concerned with integrating individuals, but it would also be necessary to work on raising the awareness of the entire SI society in order to prevent asylum seekers from being pushed into a position of even greater powerlessness.

Some evaluation reports show that most DPs addressed **innovation** in terms of new objectives (i.e. new target groups) : DPs are involved in developing actions for target groups which up to now were not well addressed, which is consistent with the already mentioned CIP focus on target groups. The EE evaluators point out that this may mean only ‘moderate’ innovation, since what is done is to adapt actions which are already being implemented under the SPD (e.g. training, business incubators) or which had been developed in previous projects (PHARE). This is contradictory, they argue, with the focus of the EE CIP (which required innovation in methods). The moderate, ‘incremental’ character of innovation and its chief materialisation in the adaptation of existing methods to reach new groups had been pointed out in the OMS as well.

Conversely, other evaluators (in CZ, SI) show that most planned innovation is process-related, and especially linked to the partnership principle. In MT, innovation is, according to the evaluators, both process and goal oriented, working with new partners, approaching the provision of activities from a new point of view while addressing new target groups.

However these assessments are sometimes made in a context of explicit or implicit debate or fuzziness on the notion of innovation. This is the case at the DP level, e.g. in CZ or in SI, where

the evaluators comment that innovation is understood relatively loosely by most DPs⁷. They nevertheless identify quite promising innovations, such as the creation of new professional profiles (personal assistants, Roma mentors), new campaigns for the promotion of lifelong learning, or holistic approaches to support to asylum seekers.

Divergences of view also occur between evaluators and Managing Authorities. For example in MT, the evaluators consider that the only rejected DP was potentially the most innovative (an IT project directed to people with disabilities) – an opinion grounded perhaps on a technology driven conception of innovation which is not the one promoted in EQUAL. Another example is the debate held between the EE MA and the EE evaluators on the intensity of process innovation (the evaluators pointing out that innovation in methods is likely to remain an exception in the EE programme, whilst the MA accepts that the focus on new target groups is already an important innovation and that adaptation and tailoring of existing methods is already an achievement).

As to **mainstreaming**, both the PL and the CZ evaluators state that DPs have no clear idea about how to carry it out. In EE, the evaluators estimated that most DPs have planned satisfactory dissemination activities, but that they also under-estimated the obstacles to the take up of their project results. In that sense they argued that it would be important that the MA clarified how the results of EQUAL DPs would be integrated in the preparation of the 2008 labour market policy.

Finally, concerning the **equal opportunities principle**, it seems that, as in the OMS, it will perhaps be understood in different ways across the new Member States. Some CIPs advocated that each thematic field should be fully accessible to all groups subject to discrimination (in particular in EE and LV), and on the other hand, some evaluation reports (HU, CZ) clearly show that DPs understood the principle as equal opportunities for men and women.

Divergences of view can also occur within one and the same Member State, as in HU where the situation is rather confused. According to the HU evaluators, 'there is a conceptual difficulty caused by the fact that the EO guide published by the MA in the tender documentation interprets the concept more widely than the CIP document which only emphasises EO for men and women. DPs need clear guidance as to what is expected'. The evaluators also note divergences between the NSS conception of EO, strongly oriented towards gender issues, and the broader view held by the MA. As a result, some recommendations have been formulated by the evaluators: 1) organise collective training courses at each phase of the programme implementation 2) provide regular consultation opportunities with the involvement of an equal opportunities specialist in the NSS and 3) publish the existing methods and documents on the programme website.

Such difficulties did not seem to occur in CZ. Equal opportunities is considered important by EQUAL DPs and they have planned implementation in concrete ways, according to the CZ MA: through dedicated working groups, declarations, the appointment of EO specialists, equal opportunities audits, research and training etc.

Overall, and to conclude this section on the implementation of the principles, we would subscribe to the recommendation made by the HU evaluators, for MAs/NSS to provide more guidance on the implementation of the principles, although, since the evaluation reports were written, probably much of this has started to take place.

⁷ Thus one DP, citing an example of an innovative approach it employed, states that it organised an exhibition of paintings in an elementary school, which was aimed at encouraging elementary school pupils, their parents and the local community to think.

12. MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION SYSTEMS IN THE NMS

12.1. MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING AT THE PROGRAMME LEVEL

The Terms of Reference for the extension of the EU-wide evaluation included the following evaluation questions regarding the implementation of programme management in EQUAL in the New Member States:

- What types of organisations are involved in the management of EQUAL?
- What procedures for project selection have been put in place?
- What procedures have been put in place to develop a strategy, to identify key priorities for activity and to select projects?
- What criteria have been applied for the selection of DPs? How have these been weighted? Has the gender perspective been taken into account?
- What types of core partners are participating in the DP? To what extent have relevant partners been involved? Have DPs succeeded in involving non-traditional partners?
- To what extent did the key principles had an impact on the management and implementation system?
- How effective are the monitoring systems at CIP and at DP level?

Our main sources have been the 9 national evaluation reports available for 2005 in the NMS as well as our interviews with the Managing Authorities and national evaluators. We have complemented these with an analysis of ECDB data⁸.

12.1.1. Programme management

All NMS involved 3 types of actors in programme management: the Managing Authority, the Paying Authority and the Monitoring Committee.

Acting as Managing Authority, the Department/ Ministry of Labour is the main actor involved.

In most cases, the Managing Authority is a department of the Ministry of labour which has different names depending on the NMS: Ministry of Employment and Labour (PL, HU), Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (CZ, SK, EE, SI), Ministry of Social Security and Labour (LT).

In 3 cases, the Managing Authority is under the responsibility of other Ministries: Finance in CY, Prime Minister Office in MT and Welfare in LV. For this last case, the national evaluators carried out an assessment of these options: for the MA, the choice was between the Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Finance. They found, in accordance with the experts interviewed, that given the relevance of the EQUAL themes for the Ministry of Welfare it was sensible to choose it.

⁸ For more details on the methodology of the EU-wide evaluation and on the scope and methodologies of national evaluation reports in the NMS, please see Chapter 1 (Volume 1).

The Ministry of Finance or the state treasury acts as paying authority in most of the NMS.

In some MS, some difficulties have been mentioned with regard to paying authority procedures:

- In CZ, the Ministry of Finance, which is the paying authority, has problems with the frequently low volumes of budgets which are requested by DPs. Discussions between the Ministries are engaged to check how the process can be rationalised (e.g. by cumulating financial requests for a longer period of time which would reduce the administrative tasks and speed up the payment process).
- In EE, the evaluators point out problems regarding eligibility of expenditure (rules are not clear and changing) and with payments (long chain of decision making which makes payments very slow).
- In SK, according to our interviews, payments from the Ministry of Finance are late in most cases.

12.1.2. Composition of the Monitoring Committees

The composition of Monitoring Committees is usually very broad and mainly follows the European recommendations. They generally involve a variety of government departments, ministries and institutions.

Involvement of regional and local actors in the management of EQUAL often takes place through the MC, as regional or local stakeholders are invited to participate: in PL, one third of the members are representatives of territorial authorities; in SI, representatives of local authorities and regional stakeholders are members of the MC. No NMS has opted for a regionalised management of the programme.

Similarly, involvement of social partners and NGOs in the programme happens through participation in the Monitoring Committees.

In 2 NMS, other structures have been set up:

- In MT, an ESF consultative working group has been set up including some members of MC and additional representatives from Public institutions (university of Malta, national commission of persons with disabilities), Social partners and NGO (foundation for Human Resources) that are involved in the field of Human Resources, labour market and social inclusion. This group will act in the future as the steering committee responsible for mainstreaming in EQUAL, and presently has a consultancy and advisory role.
- In CZ a ‘Council of Final Beneficiaries’ has been set up. It was created by DPs and is supported by the Deputy Ministry. The purpose of this Council is to claim for payments and to find solutions to avoid future delays in payments.

Only a few national evaluation reports provided an assessment of the composition of MCs.

- The LV evaluators consider that the composition of the MC ‘is able to guarantee the representation of opinions and interests of all parties involved in the policy planning and implementation in accordance with the EQUAL thematic fields in LV, namely, providing representation on the national, regional and municipal level’. The involvement of the social partners and municipalities is particularly relevant since they are ‘active participants in the development of the policies of employability and fighting against social exclusion’ and because of the already long experience of collaboration with the Ministry of Welfare. In spite of some difficulties in attracting NGOs (which wanted to be able to

bid for EQUAL funding and therefore were reluctant to take part in the MC), the evaluators consider that the final representation obtained is adequate.

- The HU evaluators assessed that MC membership was established in the spirit of partnership. The MC undertakes a more active role through its subcommittees: the Equal Opportunity subcommittee has 6 members, the thematic and innovation subcommittees have 10 members each. In addition to ministries and professional organisations, associations representing the target groups were also involved.
- In SI, it can be noted that the ‘Monitoring Committee’ is replaced by a Supervisory Board which has the same responsibility. A representative of the Managing Authority is chairing the Supervisory Board but the evaluators recommended that the position of the MA representative in charge of EQUAL implementation and the position of chairman of the Supervisory Board be held by two different persons.

12.1.3. Place and Role of National Support Structures

The table below provides a mapping of the location of the NSS in the NMS (i.e. whether they are within MA structures or whether they are externalised) and the assessment carried out by national evaluators when available.

Table 12.1 – Mapping of NSS

| | Location | Assessment |
|----|--|--|
| CY | in the Ministry of Labor while MA is located in the Ministry of Finances | There is no evaluation report and no evaluator so far. |
| CZ | During preparation phase, the role was assumed by the National Training Fund. For the implementation of next phases, a new organisation, a private consultancy (Price Waterhouse Coopers) obtained the contract to function as NSS. | N/A |
| EE | The Labour Market Board is in charge of implementing active employment policies and administrating the 16 regional employment offices (these offices are both in charge of providing labour market services, registering the unemployed and paying unemployment benefits). | N/A |
| HU | OFA : the National employment public foundation, a non profit organisation in the area of the Ministry of employment and labour | There have been problems linked to the distribution of roles between the MA, NSS and MC (see main text). |
| LT | Within the MA | N/A |
| LV | Within the MA | N/A |
| MT | ESF unit acting as NSS is located inside the ministry of family and social solidarity while the MA is located in the Prime Minister’s office. | Operating smoothly. Good internal organisation applied for all ESF programmes, based on the fact that staff works in pairs. |
| PL | The Cooperation Fund Foundation is a state owned foundation also in charge of other European programmes. | Assessment by DPs (good, although more technical assistance required, and not just administrative; lack of clarity of roles and relationships between the MA and the NSS). |
| SI | Within the MA. It was established late. | N/A |
| SK | Within the MA | N/A |

Source: Evaluation reports.

The table shows the diverse choices made in terms of organisational location. Three main models of organisational location of NSS can be identified:

- In 5 cases, the NSS is located inside the same ministry as the MA (EE, LT, LV, SK, SI). This situation can facilitate the coordination between the 2 teams. In EE, the CIP justified this decision by arguing that the ‘transaction costs’ of outsourcing were thus avoided, and in LV the national evaluators remark that in some countries (they do not specify which) in which private organisations have been contracted, inefficiencies and conflicts of interest have been generated. In both cases, the NSS are in charge of the implementation of the

mainstream ESF programmes. This, according to the LV evaluators has proved satisfactory (for cutting administrative costs, increasing the speed of decision-making, and simplifying the communication between DPs and the MA).

- In 2 other NMS, the NSS was located in other Ministries (CY, MT). In CY, the ESF Unit of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance (MLSI) has been designated as the National Support Structure for the Programme and, in MT, the ESF unit inside the Ministry of Family and Social Solidarity supports the MA in its different tasks and functions.
- In the last 3 cases (PL, HU, and CZ), the NSS role was allocated to an external organisation, often NGOs operating in the field of human resources policies or programmes: in HU, OFA is the National Employment Public Foundation (established in 1991 jointly by the Ministry of employment and HU government as a non profit organisation). OFA has 60 employees today. The PL NSS is the Cooperation Fund Foundation. In CZ, the National Training Fund was in charge of the technical assistance during preparatory phase but was replaced by a private consulting company, Price Waterhouse Coopers for the implementation phase. Unfortunately, the evaluators did not explain the reasons for that change, mainly because they did not focus their work on the assessment of the NSS or on the relationship between the NSS and the MA.

The main differences lie in the role of the NSS in the selection process. In most MS (except in CZ), the NSS have been involved in the selection process; however in some they have mainly taken an administrative role, whereas in others they have also taken part at least in one of the ratings of applications. Furthermore, some NSS are more involved in financial issues than others (e.g. EE, PL) which can account for important differences in the size of staff (see table below).

The table above shows that most evaluators have not carried out any analysis of the positioning of the NSS nor of the relationship between the NSS and the MA (the performance of NSS is revised in the sections below on the preparation and implementation phases). Only two have done so in depth (PL and HU), although elements can be found in other reports. On that basis, two main issues emerge at programme management level.

Firstly, co-ordination problems between the MA and the NSS are underlined in PL and in HU.

- In HU, this is mainly due to the fact that OFA has normally a role of design in employment policies. Its position in EQUAL, as mere provider of technical assistance, was not easy to understand. According to the HU evaluators, 'the most serious concern is the cooperation between the MA and the NSS and the evaluation team pointed out that the lack of coherent and transparent working relations and responsibilities between the MA, the NSS, and the DPs to be the biggest threat to the success of the programme at the beginning of implementation phase'. According to the NSS, there were many uncertainties at the beginning of the programme about the use of technical assistance, which took some time to clarify. The use of the technical assistance budget was also unclear (in particular for staffing). In 2005, no contract was signed between the MA and the NSS before the end of the year, which compelled the NSS to advance funding. The revision of the cooperation agreement between the 2 organisations will probably take place quickly.
- In PL, the lack of clarity of the respective roles of the MA and NSS was pointed out by the DPs interviewed by the evaluators, which shows that such problems can directly affect them in their experience of the programme.

As the NSS and MA are the 2 main actors responsible for implementing the programme, a more systematic and generalised evaluation of the way they are functioning together could have been interesting to improve the programme management as EQUAL is a new programme with new modalities of functioning compared with other ESF programmes. Furthermore, the first

evaluation report in NMS was made one year after the beginning of the programme, just on time to appreciate how the 2 actors were functioning and how the relationship could be improved.

Secondly, staff problems in the NSS and in the MA are pointed out in 3 NMS from 2 perspectives: quantitative (understaffing) and qualitative problems (inexperienced people, turn-over).

- In CZ, the evaluators explained that there had been problems during the preparatory phase due to the understaffing of the NSS (some payment delays were also pointed out).
- In SK, understaffing problems have been encountered at the beginning of the programme both in the MA and the NSS. The SK evaluators stressed that staff training represented a major challenge in a context of high turn-over.
- This was also pointed out by the HU evaluators. The NSS (OFA) was understaffed until 2005, and the end of 2004 was a very busy and difficult period with the launch of the call for proposals, the campaign of information and the organisation of the selection procedure. For selection, the problem was solved by the decision to recruit. The OFA staff increased from 2 members in 2003 to 13 at the end of 2005. NSS understaffing has been one of the causes of the lack of co-operation mentioned between the MA and the NSS.

Some evaluators anticipated future difficulties: thus the LT evaluators considered that the human resources allocated during the preparation phase had been sufficient, but that they could become insufficient during the implementation phase.

Table 12.2 – Human resources in MAs and NSS

| NMS | MA | NSS STAFF | Number of DPs selected |
|-----|---|---|------------------------|
| CY | NA | 3 | 7 |
| CZ | 7 | 11 but not all dedicated exclusively to EQUAL | 59 |
| EE | 2 | 2 Full time specialists + 4 half time staff | 13 |
| HU | 4 | 13 since 2005 | 39 |
| LT | 4 | 8 but only 4 project managers | 29 |
| LV | 2 | 7.5 since June 2005 : one head, one deputy head, 4 senior experts and an accountant + 0.5 information system officers | 10 |
| MT | 1 + transversal functions ESF (evaluation, financial..) | 3 | 5 |
| PL | NA | 30 in total composed of 3 managers, 16 project managers and 11 people working in the financial department ; part of them only are working on the EQUAL programme. | 107 |
| SI | NA | 3 | 26 |
| SZ | 10 | 14 | 101 |

Source : evaluation reports, interviews with MA and NSS officials.

12.1.4. The launch and preparation phases

The global architecture of the EQUAL programme (in 3 main phases) seems to be well assessed by the different categories of actors involved. In particular, the usefulness of having a preparation phase was confirmed even though, as will be seen below, its practical implementation was not without problems.

12.1.4.1. A positive assessment of the activities for the launch of the programme

Only few evaluation reports provide an assessment of the way in which the launch of the programme was organised. It would have been very relevant to assess what types of potential applicants were targeted and how many, what had been the attendance in the information sessions and seminars organised and where they had taken place, the nature of the information provided to applicants as well as the general organisation of the launch. Such information would have been useful to analyse further the composition of partnerships in the NMS, as well as the quality of applications.

When an assessment was done, results were globally positive.

- In HU, the NSS organised the application stage in three stages. In the introduction stage, general information was provided on the programme. The second stage focused on thematic issues with NGOs working with people with disabilities, the Roma and ex-offenders. In the third stage, direct help was offered, through individual advice or workshops, e.g. regarding application forms. Meetings were also organised in the regions. The NSS has good connections with NGOs working in the field of labour market integration, so that they were successful in the mobilisation of potential applicants. More generally, the evaluators found that the NSS had been very proactive in promoting the programme. This assessment was based on a survey of successful DPs, which asked them about their satisfaction with the organisation of the call for proposals, and more specifically with the overall administration of the call, the formulation of the notification letter, the quality of the advice received on the preparation of applications (76% of the DPs were satisfied or more or less satisfied), the clarity of programme expectations as stated in the call for proposals (76%) and with the available call material (82%). The regional and thematic information days organised as well as the training courses were assessed very positively.
- The CZ evaluators found, on the basis of a telephone survey with DPs, that most respondents had derived their initial information from websites. Regional seminars, offers made by consultancies for the preparation of applications and e-mail messages from the NSS were also mentioned. According to respondents, the NSS provided personal, telephone and e-mail consultations during the launch phase. The evaluators conclude that the launch phase was satisfactory.
- The MT evaluators also find that the guidance given during the launch phase was very satisfactory. All DPs selected expressed their satisfaction about the communication activities of the NSS although the respondent from the rejected DP stated that he was informed very late. Enough time was given to potential DPs to look for others partners: as a result, the 5 DPs selected involved 30 partners in total. Communication and training efforts were particularly important: inspired by the twinning light project (TLP) with ES, the MA/NSS raised awareness about EQUAL, prepared stakeholders to present applications and organised some workshops on the EQUAL principles. Further communication was organised through the website, through one to one consultation meetings, a press release, information sessions and meetings for possible applicants (one in La Valette, one in Gozo which is another island of Malta and defined as a backward region in the sense of economic development).

12.1.4.2. A more mixed assessment of the preparation phase

Generally speaking, interviewed actors highlighted the role and usefulness of the preparation phase:

- In HU, the MA argued that the distinction between a preparation phase and an implementation phase is interesting from a financial point of view;
- In LT, the evaluators pointed out the fact that ‘almost all DPs’ valued very positively the period of 5-

6 months of the preparation phase, as it provided space for discussing the project with partners, and especially for revising detailed budget plans;

- The CZ MA especially valued the possibility of improving the quality of DPAs. Similarly, in SI, as well as in SK, the MAs stressed their role in renegotiating initial proposals and giving guidance to DPs on how to develop a fully elaborated and well constructed workplan.

NSS guidance during the preparation phase was sometimes very substantial.

In PL it took the form of:

- Training sessions and seminars from very early on, e.g. on how to build the partnership, the TCA (identify the problems and transform them into innovative solutions; how to find a project 'niche'), as well as on each CIP priority. For each subject, 3 to 5 training sessions (each session lasting 2 or 3 days) have been organised. DPs were not obliged – but highly encouraged – to participate. In fact, the NSS acknowledges having difficulties to fulfil all the expectations and to give a positive answer to all the requests of participation. Globally 100 participants were admitted per seminar. In 2005, 30 seminars took place, on 7 different subjects, with a total of 2085 participants.
- Publications, guides (7), 1 bulletin, leaflets, posters, all provided to DPs.
- Direct contact – by telephone or face to face – between project managers in the NSS and DP members.

As a result, according to the PL evaluators, the quality of the projects, which initially was very poor, has been improved. PL DPs had had difficulties in understanding what was really expected from them, what was an 'innovative result' and how results could be mainstreamed in various economic contexts. Most DPs called the NSS on a regular basis and asked for more training sessions, more contacts. The NSS provided the technical assistance needed but also resorted to external experts on specific issues (such as public aid or the social economy). Despite these difficulties, the support system for DPs is comprehensive and is usually valued positively.

The HU evaluators also directly questioned DPs on the preparation phase and programme administration. According to the evaluators, uncertainties in replies, delays in forming opinions and often changing administrative conditions hindered DPs' work in the preparation phase. Thus, dissatisfaction with the assistance provided rose by comparison with the launch period: overall 50% of respondents were satisfied and 50% dissatisfied with the work of the NSS. Seminars, preparatory training courses, guides, and materials were evaluated as positive and useful but it was pointed out that they could have been used more effectively, if they had been available on time. Comparing these results with those of the launch phase, the evaluators concluded to an important discontinuity in DPs' assessment of the NSS before and after selection.

Other national evaluation reports are less developed on the question of the guidance proposed by the MA/NSS during the preparation phase. Nevertheless, the conclusions are in most cases quite positive.

- According to the SK evaluators, the MA/NSS provided valuable support for partnership build-up within the limits of their capacities (due to the understaffing already mentioned above).
- According to LV evaluators, the DPs were satisfied with the explanations and training provided on the Information System and on financial procedures, although they also said that this did not make the systems less cumbersome and bureaucratic.
- The MT evaluators provide a very positive assessment of the management and support structure of the programme, although their evidence basis is unclear except on the organisation of the NSS, where they show that the spread of project monitoring across staff secures a greater sustainability and continuity of guidance, as well as more interaction between staff.
- In LT, the MA has been very forceful in promoting the take up of the 'project cycle management' (PCM) method by DPs (even at the application stage, since the application form required the

adoption of PCM)⁹. During the preparation phase, a 2 days training workshop took place on the PCM method, and external experts were mobilised to assist DPs in designing their DPA with the help of that method. The evaluators report that DPs were particularly satisfied with the PCM training provided.

- The LV evaluators only mentioned that support and guidance were mainly focused on self-assessment, information system and on TN cooperation.

The CZ evaluators, however, are very critical about the implementation capacity of the programme actors. Indeed DP dissatisfaction resulted in the already mentioned formation of the 'Council of Final Beneficiaries' which is a council of DPs involved in the programme. DPs dissatisfaction was mainly due to the, in their view unnecessary, MA's requirements of a whole series of documents. However the fact that each DP has within the NSS its own project manager and financial manager can be evaluated very positively and this helped solving many problems. Areas of guidance have included: self-assessment and DP monitoring, the implementation of the principles, and extra-support to financially weak or less experienced DPs. As a result of the already mentioned change of institution in charge of the NSS, the evaluators stressed the need for the new NSS to establish a good relationship with DPs and increase the guidance provided in the next phases (implementation and transfer and mainstreaming).

At this stage, only two other evaluators formulated recommendations with regard to guidance, which is to be regretted given the crucial role of programme actors for the quality of programme outputs and mainstreaming.

- Thus, the PL evaluators proposed to improve the guidance by increasing even more the training effort, and above all by paying more attention to technical issues (the current focus being too administrative, which also corresponds to the competences of NSS staff): for example the NSS could be more pro-active on questions related with partnership management.
- The HU evaluators recommended to dress a list of all activities related to programme implementation, in order both to redesign administrative procedures and processes with a view to simplify them and ensure that they are transparent and understood by all and to establish a clear distribution of work between the MA, the MC and the NSS. Simpler procedures could also ensure that there are no further delays in implementation. They also recommended to take more advantage of the programme website as mechanism in the project support system.

Finally, we noted a lack of support on self-assessment during the preparation phase. Only a few MAs/NSS seem to have been active on this issue at that stage:

- In LV, self assessment plans were evaluated at the selection stage and the quality of these plans formed part of the criteria for the selection of DPs. The Managing Authority therefore provided support on self-assessment during the application phase, through training to all people interested (although not developing any specific method), and by answering individual demands. Support was also provided in the implementation phase: the NSS has noted that the level of preparation of DPs for self-assessment varied substantially from one DP to another, and they are preparing further training for DPs on this subject.
- In CY, during the pre-selection phase, in a letter sent to them by the MA, DPs were asked to develop mechanisms of internal and external evaluation and handle internal evaluation as one sub-theme, with the help of indicators. DPs will additionally receive guidance for self-assessment, which should be done mainly with the help of indicators that will vary depending on the nature of DP's activities and should differ from the monitoring indicators of the programme.

⁹ LT is one of the 8 MS involved in the European 'planning group' which seeks, among other things, to promote the PCM approach, and has been a very proactive member (e.g. with the organisation of a dedicated seminar in Vilnius in November 2005).

- Self-assessment became more of an issue for the MA/NSS during the implementation phase, as far as we could judge from our interviews at the end of 2005. In CZ, the new NSS is planning to offer more guidance on this issue. In MT, CZ and SK, training sessions will be organised in 2006. In PL, the NSS itself produced a guide on self-assessment, a major task, according to them.
- In LT, the evaluators had been asked to produce a self-assessment guide for DPs for the end of 2005. The starting diagnoses are to form an important part of these self-assessments. The first self-assessment exercise by DPs was due to take place in early 2006. The self-assessment model proposed by the evaluators adopts the Project Cycle Management approach, consistently with the option taken in the LT programme since the beginning. Thus it is meant as an on-going project management instrument, and is meant to encourage on-going precise feed-back on the actions carried out and project responsiveness to changing circumstances.

12.1.4.3. Focus on the selection process

The selection process has been analysed in most national evaluation reports, with the exception of the EE report, which provides no overview of the process (although partial assessments are provided). Indeed, the Commission's model of the terms of reference did not require any analysis of the selection process, only of the selection criteria. Thus, in LV, it was the initiative of the evaluators to study this process, and it was acknowledged by the Managing Authority, who saw this positively.

In all new Member States, there were mainly 3 stages, sometimes more, in the selection process implemented:

- a first step generally focused on administrative checks;
- a second one, often involving experts, and focusing on the technical and financial assessment of the applications. Sometimes, experts were involved in the 2 steps; and
- the final decision stage.

Different kinds of committees were involved in the different MS (selection committees, advisory committees, the monitoring committee, sub committees of the MC). Sometimes, the Selection Committee was involved very early on in the process, as it could be made responsible for defining the assessment criteria when this role was not fulfilled by the Monitoring Committee. However the final decision belonged to the Managing Authority in most cases, except in EE where, quite surprisingly, it seems to have been the responsibility of the NSS alone. In this particular case, the evaluators pointed out that the ministry of Social Affairs was both the Managing Authority and involved as a partner in one DP, but the MA explained in a comment on the evaluation report that its participation in projects could be positive for mainstreaming and that the fact that the NSS was in charge of selection precisely ensured that no conflict of interests arose.

Within that broad picture, each NMS had its specificities. Thus, in a small programme such as the MT one, the selection process was entirely under the responsibility of the NSS and the MA, unique members of the selection committee, and the low number of applicants allowed the MA/NSS to have individual interviews with all the potential DPs which was probably the only case across the 10 NMS. Conversely in a large EQUAL programme such as in PL, as many as 4 different types of actors were involved at different stages with various responsibilities in the selection process, as is shown in the table below. The PL evaluators explained the selection procedure in a graph (see annex 12.1) which highlights the breadth of participation in what was a long and heavy process.

Table 12.3 – Tasks related to the PL selection process for each of the actors involved

| MA | MC | NSS | Subcommittee for Project Assessment (Experts) |
|---|---|---|--|
| <p>Introduction of mechanisms for ensuring adequate number of effective Development Partnerships and carrying out partnership selection procedure.</p> <p>Overall responsibility for publishing calls for proposals within adequate time and concluding agreements with Partnerships at the right time.</p> <p>Developing procedures of application submission, preparing information, promotional and training documents, with NSS support.</p> <p>Appointing members of Subcommittee for Project Assessment, SPA.</p> <p>Presenting own opinions about applications during the MC EQUAL meetings.</p> <p>Approving the choice of Development Partnerships on the basis of rating lists approved by the EQUAL Monitoring Committee.</p> <p>Taking final decision on application approval.</p> <p>Informing the applicant about the grounds for project rejection following formal assessment and substantive assessment.</p> | <p>Examining and approving criteria of Development Partnerships selection.</p> <p>Approving experts appointed for Subcommittee for Project Assessment.</p> <p>Giving opinion on the choice of Development Partnerships on the basis of rating list submitted by MA.</p> | <p>Supporting MA in developing procedures for submitting applications, information, promotional and training documentation.</p> <p>Checking eligibility of proposals put forward by Development Partnerships.</p> <p>Appointing selection Panel Application (SPA) consisting of NSS representatives.</p> <p>Obliging members of SPA to sign the impartiality, fairness and confidentiality declaration.</p> <p>Carrying out formal verification of applications submitted by the initiators of Development Partnerships.</p> <p>Choosing candidates for Subcommittee for Project Assessment members and appointing SPA once the list of experts is approved by MA and MC.</p> <p>Organising training for SPA members, based on the same documentation as is made available to the applicants.</p> <p>Providing SPA with technical assistance.</p> <p>Evaluation of Development Partnerships proposals with the support of external experts, with the use of evaluation by points in conformity with the evaluation criteria.</p> <p>Preparing a rating list and a short description of each application for MC members.</p> | <p>Pool of experts created to assess the technical value of the project.</p> <p>These experts are university representative, practitioners well-known for their expertise of the labour market. The experts were trained on EQUAL.</p> |

Source: national evaluation report for PL.

- In CY, according to our interviews, in the first phase, the proposals were checked and evaluated by a 3-member selection committee made up of two members from the NSS and one from the MA. To be selected, a proposal had to obtain a ‘Yes’ in all categories and sub-categories of the criteria of acceptability and eligibility. Out of the total of 23 submitted proposals in the first phase, 14 proceeded to the second phase to be evaluated by a 5-member advisory committee, which consisted of one member from the MA, one member from the NSS and three experts knowledgeable in each of the proposed themes. It is interesting to note that DPs which were not selected were informed by letter of their result and of the reasons why their proposals were rejected, reminding them the possibility of appeal. This might have been the case generally in all NMS, as a similar procedure was set up by the LV MA¹⁰, although in that case at the end of the selection process. Eight such appeals were submitted. They were examined by a 3-member Appeals Committee, which accepted all 8 proposals to get to phase two. The 5-member committee of the second phase graded the 22 proposals (14+8) and distributed them by theme. In the second phase, the proposals were evaluated on the basis of compatibility and selectivity criteria, ending up with a final average grade. Considering the budget per thematic priority, 7 DPs were finally selected. The results of the selection process were presented on the web site and a letter was sent to all candidates, successful and unsuccessful about the final results of the selection.
- In LV, there was a first stage, for administrative and technical checks and a second stage, for a quality and financial assessment. For both steps experts were hired (the same experts intervened in the 2 steps) on the basis of a public announcement, with a special focus on their qualifications and experience, which was considered very adequate by the evaluators. The selection committee selected 33 experts out of 38. Each application was analysed by 2 experts. In case of disagreement (which occurred in 1/3 of the cases) a third expert’s opinion was requested and final. The selection committee then made the final decision, but in all cases it agreed with what the experts had proposed. Finally, 10 DPs were selected out of 39 applications.
- In LT, the selection procedure was organised in 4 stages after the official opening procedure (during which 1 application was already rejected): an administrative assessment (carried out by the MA) which led to the rejection of 2 applications, an eligibility assessment (carried out by the MA) which

¹⁰ However, as our interviews with MAs/NSSs had to be focused on transnationality, we did not systematically gather this information.

led to the rejection of 9 applications, and the technical and financial selection (this part of the assessment was carried out by independent assessors, experts of social policy in LT). The applications, once they had been rated by these experts, were sent to the project Selection Committee. Finally, the project selection committee performed a selection according to 'horizontal' criteria: regional distribution, thematic distribution, and coverage of groups at risk. 29 DPs were selected out of the 130 applications received.

- In CZ, in the first stage of the evaluation, the proposals were assessed with regard to the fulfilment of the EQUAL principles and horizontal themes. This evaluation of applications was conducted by the MA/NSS. In the second stage, two independent evaluators were in charge of the evaluation of applications. At this stage, the assessment focused on relevance, proposed method, sustainability, management capacity and budget. Based on the total number of points obtained and the approved financial allocation for individual priorities, a list of successful applicants was prepared. It was submitted for approval to the monitoring committee, which established the list for financial support.
- In HU, during the first stage, the NSS checked minimum admissibility requirements. A technical and financial evaluation was then carried out by experts selected through an open tender. The 63 experts selected ranked the applications with the help of the 2 subcommittees of the MC (the thematic and innovation subcommittee and the EO subcommittee). The third stage consisted in a vote by the selection committee, which drafted a list for MA approval. 170 applications were received and only 39 succeeded.
- In SK, the selection process took 62 working days and included the following steps:
 - Registration of applications;
 - Checks of completeness by the Monitoring Manager;
 - Written assessments by the Financial Manager (on the basis of budget and cost eligibility, equal opportunities and employment strategy);
 - Drafting of an evaluation report by the Monitoring Manager, based on the submitted assessments and sub-assessments including a recommendation to approve or not to approve the project;
 - Assessment by the Head of Department on that basis;
 - Presentation to an Evaluation Committee, which reviews the quality of applications in line with the criteria approved by the Monitoring Committee, and is responsible for selection.
 - Drafting of a grant contract by the Managing Authority which is submitted to the Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Family/State secretary for final decision. In total, 101 applicants were selected out of 161.

The composition of the selection committees or the bodies having the final decision vary from a NMS to another: In CZ, there were no selection committees but the monitoring committee acted like a selection committee. In other member states, the composition was nearly the same as that of the monitoring committee (PL, LV, HU). In LT and in SI, only representatives from ministries participated in the process including the MA. In MT and CY, the selection committee was composed by members of the MA and the NSS.

Eight national evaluation reports gave a description and sometimes an analysis of the **selection criteria** which proved quite varied. For example, the potential for implementing the EQUAL principles was everywhere included, as is logical, but, as will be seen below, the weight given to the different principles varied considerably from a NMS to another. For example, according to our analysis, the weight given to innovation and mainstreaming in SK was very low, whereas in SI and HU innovation featured as an important criterion (see below). In any case, we usually have no information about how specific criteria were assessed: in the case of innovation, this was a quite sensitive and difficult matter. The LV evaluators stressed (but this was probably the case in more countries) that opinion largely depended on the degree of expert awareness of political development trends in the areas concerned, but it is difficult to see how it could have been otherwise.

Some NMS gave a lot of importance to the managing capacity of the DPs (SK, HU, MT, SI, LV). According to the MT evaluators, the readiness to set up the projects and evidence of a good organisational basis were the main criteria in MT. This was justified in their opinion, given the very short programme period, which meant that DPs had to secure a quick start of activities. The way in which potential beneficiaries would be chosen (i.e. avoiding creaming effects) was also assessed, as well as the share of women participating. In some cases, the selection committee asked the applicant DPs to increase the rate of women participating when possible.

As far as we know, LV is the only NMS which took into account self assessment plans as a selection criterion.

- In EE, 5 criteria with different weights were used (relevance, methodology, capacity, impact, budget, sustainability), but the evaluators pointed out some lacks: for example, with regard to the criterion of relevance, the objectives, planned results and activities of the DPs were assessed. However, ‘the needs of the target group and description of the problem should also have been assessed’. The evaluators find that the application form did not require sufficient information in this respect. The Ministry argued that they used independent experts for the evaluation precisely for their knowledge of the target groups, and in order to assess the relevance of DP’s proposals for the target groups. (See the evaluation grid in annex 12.2).
- In SI, 4 criteria were used: relevance, quality, operative and horizontal (See the evaluation grid in annex 12.3). The ‘quality criteria’, for assessing the potential of implementation of the EQUAL principles, were allocated most weight. Among these ‘quality criteria’, innovation could contribute for a maximum of 8.3% of the total rate, and the transnationality principle for a maximum of 5.5% of the total rate. Next came the ‘Relevance criteria’ which assessed the relevance of the target group and activities as well as the clarity of the objectives and of the work plan. The managing capacity of the DP, which was part of the ‘operative criteria’ had the same weight as the relevance criteria. The final criteria were the horizontal criteria. It is interesting to note that equal opportunities between men and women did not range among the horizontal criteria, but formed part of the criteria on relevance. Instead, the complementarity was checked as a ‘horizontal criterion’.
- In PL, two criteria conducted to rejection : a formal one and a substantive one, based on innovation, equal opportunities, use of technologies, complementarity in partnerships; in more than 70% of the applications rejected, a lack of complementarity and innovation were used as arguments.
- In HU, a bidding guide was elaborated where evaluation criteria used for assessment could be found: professionalism of the bid, key EQUAL principles, operative criteria and cost efficiency featured with identical weight. Among the EQUAL principles, innovation played a special role while participation/empowerment, partnership and EO for men and women were awarded the same weight. According to the evaluators, high priority was given in the selection process to DPs that developed the most innovative approach.

Table 12.4 – Criteria outlined in the HU tendering guide

| | |
|---|----|
| Professionalism of the bid | 12 |
| Grounded nature of the project | 12 |
| Budget | 12 |
| Target group | 10 |
| Resources for conducting the project, project management experience | 10 |
| Innovation | 8 |

Source: HU evaluation report

Outcomes of the selection process and conclusions

The selection rates varied considerably from a Member State to another: from 14% in PL to 70% in MT.

In some NMS, it was decided to select more DPs than planned in the provisional budgetary allocation, and as a result the MAs had to cut DP budgets to some extent: this was the case in HU and in SI, where the ministry considered that a higher number of DPs with smaller budgets would allow to minimise the risks inherent in a new programme.

Table 12.5 – Outcomes of DP selection in the NMS

| NMS | % of DPs selected for entry in preparation phase |
|-----|--|
| CY | 30% |
| CZ | 45% |
| EE | 19% |
| HU | 23% |
| LT | 22% |
| LV | 26% |
| MT | 70% |
| PL | 14% |
| SI | 33% |
| SK | 63% |

Source : national evaluation reports, NSS-MA interviews

As far as we know¹¹, some NMS decided to carry out a new selection for entry in the implementation phase. In SI, 20 DPs were selected out of the 26 initial DPs at the end of the Preparation phase. In LT, experts called ‘evaluators’ were contracted by the MA to help DPs formulate their work programmes during the Preparation phase, and it was made clear to DPs that there was a possibility not to move to the Implementation phase. However this took place through an interactive and constructive process which differs from traditional selection. One DP did not ‘pass’ as its DPA did not fulfil the minimum quality requirements.

In most cases, no difficulties were pointed out concerning the selection process, with some exceptions. However, in a number of countries (LV, LT, PL), the low quality of applications was pointed out by evaluators.

- In LV, the Managing Authority indicated that there were, at the time of our interview, 5 appeals by non selected DPs in the Courts. However this was not a major source of concern, as the Managing Authority had issued a letter to DPs which had not been selected inviting them to join those selected. This decision was made because there were more DP applications which had passed the 75 points rating than funds available. Indeed 3 non selected DPs decided to join selected DPs. One of them is the Red Cross, which had submitted an application in the asylum seekers theme, where there had only been 2 applications. The NSS co-ordinator did not see these ‘mergers’ as a problem, although special attention would be paid to these DPs.
- In PL, the evaluators noted that many more projects were submitted than the organisers had expected. The group of experts (39 people) turned out to be too small and found it extremely difficult to assess hundreds of applications submitted within 2 weeks. Time pressure undoubtedly influenced the quality of experts' work. The MA pointed out that the experts were not prepared enough, especially on the concepts of innovation and added-value. As a result of great time pressure (due to delays in the legislative process), the large number of submitted applications, and the lack of experts' preparation on EQUAL, the MA decided to question the assessment of many applications on the ranking list. This decision probably reduced the transparency of the process, but was motivated by important reasons. PL risked losing part of its funding if non-complementary projects were financed. Unfortunately, the faulty assessment mechanism was not corrected systematically, which might have led some to conclude that the selection process was manipulated by the MA. However, according to the MA, the circumstances such as the deadline for partnership selection by December 2004, did not leave much room for choice. Having considered all these factors, the national evaluators concluded that the operations of both the MA and the MC in this critical situation should be evaluated positively.

¹¹ The Implementation phase was not included for review in the evaluation reports (including ours), so that we lack systematic data.

- The HU evaluators criticised the length of the process, which had been due to the unnecessarily high volume of documents requested. This had important consequences, as the largest share of selected DPs were those which had their managerial and administrative centre in Budapest, or non profit organisations and institutions which had a secure background, long experience, and outstanding results in specialised areas.

National evaluation reports were in most cases very positive about the selection process but their conclusions were not always argued in great detail and evidence was sometimes lacking.

- In MT, the evaluators assessed the selection process as very satisfactory and efficient on the basis that it was concluded in one month by the NSS: the call for proposals was closed on the 18th of November 2004 and, by mid December 2004, results were communicated to the DPs.
- In HU, the evaluators provided an assessment of the outcomes of the selection process. In their view, the selected organisations were able to contribute the high degree of professionalism required for implementing EQUAL projects. They noted that activities of the DPs extended to less advantaged areas although this had not featured among the priorities of the programme. The target groups addressed and activities planned across the 39 DPs covered a broad spectrum. However they suggested that DPs needed to involve more new partners if they wanted to produce innovation.
- According to the LV evaluators, DP selection was ‘accomplished as objectively as possible and can be considered as adequate’. However, the evaluators mainly based this assessment on their interviews with the experts who took part in the selection process. Furthermore, evaluators saw it as particularly positive that DP applications were sometimes examined by a third expert, and that great care was taken by the experts to justify their decisions, as the selection was overall highly dependent on the experts’ judgement. Nevertheless they also said that the process would have been improved if the experts had received longer training, especially those who had less experience in evaluation. In a few cases, the experts did not know some important documents, such as the Common Inclusion Memorandum.
- In LT, according to the evaluators, the greater competition (than, for example, that which took place for comparable measures in mainstream ESF) may have favoured a higher quality. However they also highlight that the MA thought that ‘the quality of the projects allowed a lot of room for improvement’. The evaluators found that the process had been ‘transparent’: this is based on the fact that no DP expressed doubts on the impartiality of the process, as well as on the level of competence of the experts and especially on the fact that these are ‘influential’ people on whom it is difficult to exert pressure (however it is unclear why this ‘influential’ status would prevent them from supporting specific DPs). Finally, concerning the use of the logframe matrix, the evaluators do not say much on the added value of implementing such an approach, at the selection stage and for the further validation process.
- In CZ, the evaluators concluded that the process was fair and transparent and in accordance with the defined priorities and financial resources. However they put forward that it could have been useful to engage members of thematic groups of the first round EQUAL in the selection process in the 2nd round and, if that was not possible, each project (as a whole) could have been evaluated by two internal and two external evaluators.
- In PL, in spite of the difficulties explained above and the use of detailed criteria which were not included in the Directory for the applicants, the evaluators conclude that formal criteria were used fairly. The scale of operations and their overall correctness, especially in the light of the problems mentioned, shows the great commitment of the Cooperation Fund staff. On identifying a problem which might have influenced project selection, the NSS always decided to over-check all applications affected by the problem. Unclear cases were usually settled in favour of applicants. One might say that the bodies responsible for formal assessment were particularly careful and according to the evaluators, the quality control was one of the most emphasised elements of the system: each application was assessed by at least four people, and some controversial projects by as many as 7-8 people. The Managing Authority did not hesitate to question expert ratings whenever it found them inadequate, while the Monitoring Committee performed its control tasks very actively and demanded detailed justification of all modifications of the ranking list. Such reliability should be appreciated as

it helped to overcome many obstacles connected with imperfect criteria and assessment tools (the substantive assessment criteria used in the application selection process is considered one of the weakest elements of the system). To conclude, it can be noted DPs' responses to the question: *'Do you consider the application selection process to be generally fair, and the deficiencies or weaknesses of the selection procedure to stem from poor experience rather than from ill will or 'obscure activities'?*, were unambiguously positive.

- However the SK evaluators were quite critical of the process: too many DPs were selected; some NGOs are leading various DPs; some NGOs are without any experience (created just a few days before the deadline of the project call); and in 17 cases negative evaluations were not taken into account and the applicants were selected.

12.1.4.4. Monitoring system

In theory, the MA monitors the implementation of the programme on the basis of data collected by the NSS through the Monitor Bulletins submitted by DPs and stored in the Integrated Information System (which have a specific name in each NMS). The monitoring of the physical product is carried out with the help of Quarterly Bulletins and financial monitoring takes place through Monthly Bulletins (except in MT where there is no monthly bulletin), submitted by DPs. This information is complemented with on the spot visits to DPs by the NSS. A system of indicators is used by DPs for submitting the above monthly and quarterly reports, which are both qualitative and quantitative. These reports are checked by the NSS and then by the MA.

Evaluators have not looked thoroughly at the monitoring system, probably because the evaluation period covered only the beginnings of its implementation. Furthermore, the focus of assessments varies from one NMS to another.

With regard to the efficiency of the whole monitoring system, only the following basic statements can be made at this stage of the programme :

- In a number of countries the implementation of the information system has been delayed; even when it is built on the basis of the system used for the structural funds;
- DPs appreciate in situ visits, and they even consider such visits as a suitable opportunity for consultation;
- But the monitoring system is almost everywhere perceived as too heavy and restrictive, and difficult to use by DPs; more guidance should be provided.

Delays in implementation occurred for example in HU and MT. In HU, the monitoring system was not in operation in the period examined by the evaluators. In theory, the monitoring system is based on EMIR, an internet based support system used for structural funds, where sub-modules were established for the CIP. The MA is responsible for all data being forwarded in the appropriate form at the appropriate time. The NSS checks and endorses the forwarded data, and then enters it in a sub-module. The HU state treasury acts in a similar way with financial data. In MT, the database is not specific to EQUAL either but is based on the structural funds system; the software allowing for direct communication between DPs and the administrator had not been installed into the IT system of the lead partners by the end of 2005.

In most of the NMS where information was available, 3 main types of monitoring could be distinguished in practice: checks on activity, financial checks and guidance; and 3 main instruments: monitoring reports (financial and technical), workshops and in situ monitoring (i.e. visits to DPs).

- In LV, monitoring by the NSS takes place through regular workshops with DPs, correspondence with DP representatives and participation in DP meetings. In addition to the monthly and quarterly bulletins mentioned above, the Information System set up is based, according to the evaluators, on the NSS checks of activities and declared expenses (2 audits per DP and per year), random checks on the spot, carried out by the Ministry of Welfare's department of internal audit (at least one per DP during their whole lifetime). The LV NSS organised training for DPs to master the information system (this was also the case in MT).
- In SK, each DP has to be visited at least once during its life-time. In PL, the NSS organises regular monitoring visits to the DPs, to monitor the implementation of foreseen actions and to assist DPs in their tasks (answering to their questions, preparing the document for submission, checking payment procedure).
- In CZ, the study of monitoring reports carried out by the evaluators reveals that, at this stage of implementation, the MA's focus was more on the quality and details of financial reports than on those of technical reports. The time required by the NSS for approval of monitoring reports was too long. On the other hand, the DPs often took a lot of time to deal with the comments of the MA and the NSS and to supply the required documents.
- The EE evaluators found that some of the monitoring reports submitted were very succinct and even made no mention of important developments in the projects, such as the involvement of a new partner or the replacement of a project manager. The evaluators advocated more guidance on what a monitoring report should look like.
- In LT, the evaluators noted that intermediary reports were required and that there were 'checks' on the spot (mainly 2 checks per year and per DP were planned).

There seems to be broad consensus across evaluators that the procedures are heavy and constraining.

The HU evaluators remark that the preparation of progress reports requires a great deal of time and energy from DPs. In PL, most of the DPs interviewed by the evaluators put forward that the system was overregulated and that the formal and administrative requirements were excessive. According to the LV evaluators, the monitoring system was assessed in contradictory ways by DPs. On the one hand, they agreed that it would provide them with 'a realistic understanding of the course of the project development'. On the other hand updating the data was time consuming and rather bureaucratic and a considerable amount of time was diverted from project activities. DPs thought that the guide on the use of the information system, which was being prepared by the MA, would be useful in that respect. In LT, the evaluators highlighted as particularly cumbersome and ill-suited the obligation to require approval for any change in the DP (any change to the project content, budget, activities, timing of implementation has to be approved before by the ESF agency), the checking of *all* bills, and public procurement procedures (for which thresholds are very low). The MA was aware of these difficulties and was seeking ways of introducing more flexibility into the system. To conclude, as suggested by the CZ evaluators, it would be useful if attention was shifted to the *quality* of technical reports in the implementation phase.

The PL evaluators expressed doubts about the reliability and the updating of the monitoring system. Indeed, they state that they faced difficulties to use monitoring data. DP lead partners have a good overall information concerning partnerships, but they do not systematically fill and update monitoring tables. The most common practice is to provide such tables when they are requested. The situation with financial data seems to be better, yet it leaves a lot of room for improvement as well.

The indicators used in the monitoring systems were discussed in some reports.

- In SK, according to the MA, it now appears that the developed indicators were not realistic and difficult to explain. The MA would like to change the monitoring indicators but this would then have to be agreed by the Monitoring Committee.
- In MT, the evaluators recommended to elaborate a clear definition of the indicators included in the system as well as to collect information about participants, which were missing in reports elaborated by DPs.

12.2. MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING AT DP LEVEL

12.2.1. DP management

Two to three types of different organisation models have been implemented within the New Member States so far.

- In LV, the evaluators found that the mode of organisation was generally one of functional distribution of activities according to each partner's specialisation, what the evaluators call the horizontal co-operation model. Each partner is thus accountable for the implementation of its own function. Management committees gather all partners and organise meetings to review quarterly and annual reports. The LV evaluators view this 'equalitarian model' as optimal. However, these results have to be taken with caution as only lead partners have been interviewed, given the short time frame for the evaluation.
- The LT evaluators provided a first approach to the internal distribution of responsibilities: they distinguished between 'centralised distribution of power', where the lead partner takes on most management tasks, and 'diffused distribution of power', based on 'long-term cooperation between peer organisations' and an equal distribution of administrative tasks. The first configuration tends to be found in larger DPs, e.g. 2 large DPs are managed by 'influential structural funds consulting and evaluation companies'. The 2nd configuration corresponds to partnerships where partners have already an experience of joint work, and where 'NGOs are interested in having a position for their staff which will be remunerated from EQUAL funds'.
- According to the CZ evaluators, there are two partnerships models: the centralised and the decentralised one. The centralised model is characterised by the fact that the lead partner takes up most of the responsibilities and the involvement of other partners is rather limited. This model is dominant. In the decentralised model, working groups are established and take over the responsibility for a particular area of work.
- In PL, a vast majority of respondents (64%) in the DP survey carried out by the evaluators claim that decisions are taken on an equal basis. However, almost 28% of respondents say that the position of partners and DP 'administrators' is not equal, whereas 8% openly state that implementation of the project takes place under full control of the DP leader. The role of administrators for DP finance is dominant in most cases. 58% of the partnerships manage activities jointly - through appointed working groups; in the rest of cases activities are coordinated by the Administrator. In three DPs (out of 71 which provided an answer to this question) the role of the Administrator is so strong that DPs operate according to a 'main contractor- subcontractors' model rather than as a partnership in the EQUAL sense.
- According to the HU evaluators, DP managers reported that cooperation with partners was effective and smooth and that they included their partners fully in all tasks from the outset. Decisions were largely adopted on the basis of consensus. Thus 82% of respondents to the DP survey included partners in planning and establishing projects to a large degree. In implementing the preparation phase, 71% replied that the collaboration of partners took place on a large scale. However the capacity to involve DP partners in transnational work was much lower: only 38% respondents

reported a high mobilisation of partners. Partners' participation in strategic decision making was real, but in operational decision making the project managing organisation had a dominant role. The project management core was generally formed by 4 persons: the project manager, the finance manager, the international manager and the communication manager. This was in line with MA recommendations.

- In EE, the evaluators distinguished between DPs involving large organisations with pre-financing capacity and their own waged workers and DPs where lead partners as well as some other partners were non profit organisations with restricted resources. In some cases, it happened that partners were represented by the same person, which of course considerably reduces the added value of partnerships. In some DPs, project management has been outsourced to experienced project managers, which is viewed positively by the evaluators. Nevertheless, the evaluators estimated that outsourcing should have been organised through public tendering, but they also recognised that when there had already been previous collaborations between the project manager and the organisations forming the DP, it could be seen as 'an added value'.

12.2.2. Funding issues at the DP level

Many evaluation reports mention funding difficulties.

- In LV financial monitoring is perceived as too 'petty' by DPs, i.e. looking at unnecessary details. This strict and centralised financial monitoring is deemed contradictory with the innovation principle, it makes it more difficult to change workplans and implement new ideas. Our interviews provided further evidence, e.g. each DP is required to open an account for EQUAL with the State Treasury, and all trips require a prior authorisation.
- In LT, for a majority of DPs which are run by NGOs and municipal organisations with small budgets of which EQUAL represents a large share, the main issues at the time of the evaluation report were definitely financial issues. The main problems were payment delays, mainly due to problems with expense claims and the low advance payments – in particular the amount planned in the regulation for the advance payment in the implementation phase was only 10%, but the MA has now obtained an amendment by the Ministry of Finance (30%). DPs have to subscribe an insurance for advance payments, with a guarantee on property (which sometimes they do not have). For the same reason it is almost impossible for most DPs to borrow. These difficulties are thus particularly acute due to the great vulnerability of DPs and their dependency on EQUAL Funds.
- The PL evaluators stress that DP have suffered from the procedures and payment delays due to:
 - The complex verification of eligibility costs: the average waiting time for intermediate payments was as long as 55 days. It was a source of serious administrative burdens in partnerships.
 - The late conclusion of agreements with the NSS caused serious financial problems for project promoters. Many partnerships had difficulties remunerating people employed on the project and were forced to use loans to finance their current activities.
 - The unclear VAT situation (with partners treated by some Tax Offices as service providers rather than executors of a publicly subsidised project) led to conflicts between partners and DP administrators. Despite intense efforts on the part of the MA, the tax situation of partnerships has not been clarified yet.
- Advance payments are the main difficulty according to the SK evaluators. Long negotiations had to take place between the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Finance. Finally, the Ministry of Finance agreed to allow for advance payments for NGOs. Nevertheless, some DPs had had to stop their work in the meantime.
- In EE, both according to the evaluators and to interviewees, there are problems regarding eligibility of expenditure (rules are not clear and changing) and with payments (long chain of decision making which makes payments very slow).

- Finally the CZ evaluators pointed to similar difficulties: delays in advance payment in the Preparation phase, delays in the approval of financial reports, problems with eligible costs. Co-funding by the Ministry implies a 100% check of financial requests. There were considerable delays in payments and at the end of 2005, a number of financial reports of DPs bearing on the Preparation phase had still not been approved. However, in the case of CZ, as already said, the delays in payments led to the creation of a Council of Final Beneficiaries initiated by some very active DPs, a unique case in the NMS (and probably in the EU). The purpose of this Council is to claim for payments and to find solutions to avoid the delays in payments in the future.

12.2.3. Self assessment

Less than half national evaluation reports (HU, LV, CZ, EE) provide an analysis of how DPs understand and implement self assessment.

- The HU evaluators stress that some of the DP workplans already contained a presentation of the DP's self assessment system. The MA prepared a self assessment guide for DPs with the assistance of NSS from OMS. A first presentation of the guide was made in August 2005.
- According to the LV evaluators, all DPs have self-assessment plans (as this was a criterion for selection) which are all different. The majority of DPs were rather well prepared as they could describe self assessment methods and division of responsibilities. In general, the DP's lead partner was responsible for self-assessment but in some cases, an external evaluator was appointed. Usually the implementation of self-assessment was planned at the end of each important activity implemented but some DPs only planned it for the Transfer to policy and practice phase (former Action 3). In terms of methods, some DPs developed their own indicators while others used a simplified version of the Information System indicators.
- In EE, like in LV, the self-assessment plans were very different from one DP to another, according to the evaluators. Some DPs used the services of an independent evaluator, others did it themselves. The evaluators seem to favour the latter, as the former is not 'self-assessment' in their view. Some DPs organise it on a continuous basis, others after a period of time. The focus was sometimes on quality, sometimes on innovation and best practices. But the impact on target groups was generally left aside.
- Finally, the CZ evaluators pointed out that self-evaluation was still a weak point of DPs. Nevertheless, DPs proposed self-evaluation and indicators in the framework of their DPAs. The MA organized a seminar on self-evaluation.

In the other New Member States, self assessment was not an issue of the national evaluation report mainly because it had not yet started. As a result, in most cases, the evaluators advocated the development of a general self-assessment method.

12.3. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, a few remarks can be made on the scope of evaluation in the NMS.

The model terms of reference elaborated by the Commission did not require any analysis of the launch phase, nor of the selection process. As a result there was sometimes a lack of analysis of how the programme communication strategy and selection contributed to shape the implementation of the programme.

There has often been a lack of in-depth assessment of the management and implementation systems. From our point of view, the role of evaluators for highlighting facilitating factors, obstacles and problems with programme management should be given more emphasis.

Thus, for the next stage of national evaluation reports in the New Member States, it would be useful to complement the planned assessments on the implementation of the principles with insights in the distribution of roles between programme actors and the performance of the NSS. More recommendations should be made, especially concerning programme guidance and support to DPs especially with a view to promote innovation and mainstreaming. Furthermore, in a context of capacity building, the evaluation of the implementation of the partnership principle should be given particular emphasis.

13. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TRANSNATIONALITY IN THE NMS

This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the implementation of transnationality in the new Member States. However the main findings were integrated in a general chapter on transnationality in the EQUAL Community Initiative (Volume 1, Chapter 6).

13.1. EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The evaluation of the early stages of the implementation of the TN dimension in R2 in the New Member States constituted a separate evaluation exercise for the EU evaluation.

Its purpose was to assess:

- *The role played by prior experience in transnational partnerships;*
- *The partner search process (rationales, methods, obstacles);*
- *Internal DP organisation for the implementation of the transnational dimension;*
- *Internal TCA organisation for the implementation of the transnational dimension;*
- *The extent to which the design of transnational activities is an added-on or has been built in the DP workplans;*
- *The role played by transnationality arrangements by MAs (in particular amounts planned for transnational budgets and guidance provided on this issue to DPs, assessment of transnationality e.g. in the DP selection process etc.);*
- *National guidance and use of this guidance by DPs for the setting up of their TCAs;*
- *The accuracy of the information on TCAs in the ECDB.*

In order to evaluate these issues we have analysed the national evaluation reports, carried out our own field work in the form of case studies on transnational partnerships and conducted interviews with the MAs and the NSSs. This is explained in more detail below.

In this chapter, after a presentation of our methodology and a reminder on the frame of reference for the implementation of transnationality in EQUAL, we analyse the way in which TN partnerships were built – searching for partners, Transnational Cooperation Agreement (TCA) drafting and TCA validation. We then analyse the main features of transnational workplans: planned activities, internal rules and work organisation, budget. In a further step, we look at the guidance received, how this guidance was organised and to what extent it was used. This also includes an analysis of European and cross-national facilitation. Finally we provide a first assessment of added value. Conclusions are provided in section 13.6.

13.1.1. Methodology

Our assessment of the implementation of transnationality in the NMS is based on:

- the analysis of 9 national evaluation reports;
- 10 case studies of transnational partnerships (TNPs);
- interviews with Managing Authorities and National Support Structures in all NMS; and
- a questionnaire sent to all NMS MAs, concerning European and cross-national collaboration and co-ordination for the implementation of the EQUAL principles, including transnationality (response rate 9/10).

The purpose of the **case studies** was to analyse the way in which the TCAs were set up, the patterns of TN co-operation established by DPs in the 10 NMS, and the extent to which support and technical assistance at the European and national levels have been helpful. This is all the more important as DP partners are likely to be quite new to the organisation of TN partnerships.

10 case studies were carried out. In each of these TNPs, at least one TN partner came from a NMS, so that all 10 NMS were represented in the sample. The small number of case studies did not allow for a sampling which would be representative. Furthermore, not all themes could be represented (of course no thematic analysis could be carried out on such a small number of cases, and our case studies in the OMS had shown that themes did not matter as much as issues). Thus, among the chosen TCAs, Theme 1A (Facilitating access and return to the labour market) prevails. 3 TNPs operate in themes 4G/4H (Equal opportunities between men and women), one TNP relates to Theme 3E (Lifelong Learning) and one to Theme 5 I (Asylum Seekers). Target groups include young job-seekers, prisoners, people from the Roma community, asylum seekers (unaccompanied children).

We asked the MAs/NSSs to provide us with examples of 3 DPs which they think could be interesting to study and one of them involved in a potentially ‘good’ TNP, one of them requiring help on TN and one of them experienced in TN. The following table gives an overview of the TCAs chosen.

Table 13.1 – Case study sample

| NMS partner in the TN partnership | Theme | Size of the TN partnership | Leading partner | DP is experienced, is requiring help, TCA a priori is a ‘good’ TN project |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|---|
| EE | 1A (target group: young delinquents) | 7 | UKgb | a priori ‘good TN project’ |
| LV | 4H | 4 | UKgb | Experienced |
| LT | 4G | 5 | LU | Experienced |
| MT | 4G | 3 | FR | Requiring help |
| HU | 3E | 3 | IT | A priori ‘good’ TN project (+DP is experienced) |
| CZ | 5I | 5 | AT | A priori ‘good’ TN project (+DP is experienced) |
| CY | 1A (target group: women) | 4 | GR | Requiring help |
| SI | 1 A (target group: young unemployed) | 6 | FR | A priori ‘good’ TN project (+DP is experienced) |
| PL | 1A (target group: prisoners) | 4 | IT | Experienced |
| SK | 1A (target group: young Roma) | 5 | IT | Requiring help |

We have already seen in our previous case studies carried out for R1 in the OMS, that UK_{GB} as well as IT were often TCA leaders. In the case of UK_{GB} it had been argued that this might be linked to the language and therefore a greater facility to manage more administrative issues and coordinating functions. In the case of IT we could argue that as one fifth of all DPs are from IT the probability to identify a TNP with an IT leader is high.

Finally, our sample shows a variety of sizes of TN partnerships. The TNPs chosen for the case study have between 3 and 7 TN partners.

The TCA documents were analysed, face-to-face interviews on the basis of a semi-directive questionnaire were carried out with the DP leader and the TN coordinator of the NMS DPs .

Additionally, telephone interviews were conducted with transnational partners located in the OMS. In one case, we attended a TNP meeting.

13.1.2. The Frame of Reference for transnationality

The Frame of Reference was set in the second communication of the European Commission on EQUAL as well as by the EQUAL guide on transnational cooperation and the MA/NSS Operational Handbook. According to our interviews and the questionnaire sent to the MAs/NSSs, the two guides were considered very useful.

The framework for implementation of the transnationality principles evolved in R2 in order to overcome the difficulties identified in R1¹². The main changes included:

- The introduction of a 'TN window' (a common period for partner search, opening on 1 January 2005 when information on all DPs would be in the ECDB and ending on 30 April 2005, by which time TCAs should have been drafted and validated in ETCIM by all the DPs);
- The creation of a network of transnationality co-ordinators from all Member States, and organisation of seminars and conferences at European level, which was also intended to create a better basis of cooperation between MS;
- The organisation of a Clearing House in order to help DPs that had found no partners at the end of the commonly agreed searching period ('orphans') to find a TN partner;
- Advice to MAs/NSSs to provide more active guidance and to support DPs in their search for partners, to check the quality of the data entered in the ECDB, to encourage new DPs to cooperate with R1 DPs in order to benefit from their experience, and to encourage DPs to meet in order to prepare the TCA document; and
- Advice to MAs on TCA validation, encouraging them to use common criteria, and not to block TN cooperation by rejecting TCAs (although at the same time a more thorough drafting of TCAs was advocated).

13.2. THE SETTING-UP OF TRANSNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

13.2.1. Searching for partners

13.2.1.1. Identifying potential transnational partners

(a) Methods used to find transnational partners

Basically, the formation of transnational partnerships occurred in two main ways for NMS DPs: either they actively looked for TN partners and set up their own search criteria and / or they were contacted and had the choice between several potential partners.

¹² These were stressed, for example, in the Transnationality Handbook: DPs' slowness in identifying and negotiating with prospective partners, delays in securing ETCIM approval of TCAs and the insufficient communication between some MAs/NSSs with their counterparts in other Member States.

One important tool for identifying transnational partners was the ECDB. In PL, the majority of the respondents in the evaluators' survey stated that the ECDB had turned out to be a great success, in spite of the fact that DP descriptions were often too general and even confusing. Other evaluation reports and the interviews with the MAs/NSS confirm that the ECDB was widely used in all NMS.

The use of the ECDB was most effective when DPs had clear search criteria for screening potential partners and when DPs made a very first check about whether a potential partner could be adequate. The PL evaluators explain that DPs usually followed the suggestion of the NSS to appoint a person or a working group responsible for establishing TN cooperation and setting up criteria for partner selection. These criteria were then applied for 'browsing' the database or analysing the offers received.

The following case study illustrates how the ECDB was used for identifying the right partner:

Case study example - Identification of a TN partner through the ECDB

The transnationality coordinator of a LV DP working on the promotion of scientific and technical career paths for women carried out a partner search in the ECDB according to common theme and common issues. Potential partners were then discussed with national partners in a meeting. On the basis of the results, offers of collaboration were sent to 17 potential partners. Some responses were received quite late. They finally found 2 partners: a UKgb DP who already had found a partner in ES through the ECDB as well, and a FI DP whose current but also past EQUAL projects fitted exactly with the LV DP's workplan.

Other search tools and information channels were also used. Thus the HU evaluators indicate that a special database built up by Racine, the FR NSS, was used in addition to the ECDB. Furthermore, the HU NSS and MA forwarded proposals to their DPs, received from the NSSs and the MAs from other MS.

The support from the MAs/NSSs for partner search varied from one NMS to another. In general however, the contacts established between MAs/NSS in common seminars at the European level (see below) were helpful for the partner search process. For example, the MT MA/NSS was very active in facilitating partner search. The MT case study DP explained that they had not had to look actively for partners as they had received a lot of offers to cooperate, many of which came from contacts made by the MA/NSS in international meetings and conferences such as the Warsaw conference.

The EE case study DP received offers of cooperation from other Member States very early on, thanks to the presentations made by the EE MA to the MAs of other countries (presumably in the Birmingham transnationality conference of January 2005). However, the EE evaluators argued that DPs could have been more active in finding TN partners. In most cases, the initiative to begin a co-operation had come from abroad.

CY DPs faced more problems, despite the assistance of the MA/NSS. Finally, 4 of the 7 DPs found a partner thanks to the 'Clearing House' organised at EU level in Prague in April 2005.

Finally, the formation of TN partnerships was also sometimes based on previous contacts. This was the case of our CZ and SK case study DPs (see box below). These already known partners then brought in further partners.

Case study example - Building TN partnerships on previous contacts

- (1) The case study SK DP knew a CZ DP operating in the same field (integration of young Roma and other vulnerable young people from institutional childcare into the labour market). It was clear from the beginning for the SK partner that they would cooperate with this CZ partner, which brought in the other partners. The TNP is composed of two SK and two CZ partners. There is only one partner of the OMS (from IT), which is leading the TNP. The SK DP stated that they tried to look for some other partners from DE, CY and PL. But at that time these DPs already had enough partners and were not interested.
- (2) In another case study, the CZ DP already knew the DE partner from international networks on the asylum seekers issues.

In many cases, the identification and selection of partners was made in several steps. Typically, a pre-selection was made on the basis of information gathered through the ECDB (independently of whether the NMS DP approached other DPs or was itself contacted) and other databases, as well as through other contacts (previous contacts, contacts resulting from communication between MS). Then a period of first talks and email communication would follow, to check whether common objectives could be agreed on. A more focused selection of potential partners would then be carried out on that basis. This could also be the outcome of TN meetings, as emerged from case study evidence (see box below).

Case study example – The search process

The initiative for this TNP of 6, which includes the SI case study DP, came from a DE DP. This DP hired a consultant to provide guidance for the building up of a TNP. The consultant identified potential partners and organised a seminar in DE in which he invited 8 DPs. At this meeting, it was decided to form two TN partnerships. The DE partner identified two NMS DPs (from LT and SI), so when it was decided to create two DPs, it was also decided to have one NMS DP in each of these TN partnerships. It has to be noted that the SI partner was actively looking for partners by screening the ECDB. The DE partners only represented one option. The SI DP had regular consultations with its DP members to find out which TN partner to choose and during the seminar in DE, they had telephone contacts with their DP members in order to involve them in the final decision.

DPs' selection criteria for identifying and selecting TN partners included one or several of the following:

- Matching of target groups, organisations and activities;
- Search for DPs from MS which are known to be experienced or to have developed specific approaches in a certain thematic areas;
- Language and cultural proximity;
- Previous experience in transnationality and in particular in EQUAL I;
- Interest in developing contacts with a specific country;
- Common objectives.

According to the CZ evaluators, DPs also checked whether TN partners could offer possibilities of methodological inspiration or ground for direct testing of their own instruments.

In LV, the evaluators state that partners were generally chosen on the basis of common themes and/or past experience of collaboration. LV DPs had fears that it would be difficult to find partners in OMS, but these fears were unfounded. However, NMS partners were sometimes preferred due to language and cultural proximity as well as common problems linked to the transition process.

The following are examples of criteria for the choice of TN partners:

Case study examples – screening and choice criteria for TN partners

- (1) The EE case study DP received about 30 offers from potential transnational partners. They screened these offers on the basis of the type of lead organisation (preferably a prison or probation service) and target group (juvenile delinquents).
- (2) The CY case study DP searched for partners through the ECDB, using key words such as ‘women’, ‘telework’, ‘job-sharing’. They made a list of potential TN partners which were studied by 3 persons who rated targets, actions and the similarity of agencies.

(b) The role of prior experience

In general, we were told that DPs from NMS have less experience in TN activities than organisations in OMS. However evidence from the national reports and from our case studies points to a more contrasted situation.

Thus the HU evaluators found that DPs operating under Theme 2D (social economy) had more facilities in building up transnational partnerships than those operating in other Themes: indeed 7 HU DPs out of 16 in this thematic field indicated that they had no problem for finding partners and setting up a transnational partnership mainly because they had members in their DP which previously participated in the Leonardo Programme, or gained experience in the implementation of cross border collaborations. This was also the case in our case study: the lead partner of the HU DP was created through a PHARE project and had since then specialised in running European projects (mainly Leonardo). The CZ evaluators found contrasted levels of experience. In SI the evaluators stated that DPs often had prior TN experience. However, the MA highlighted that this was only of relative help, given the specificity of EQUAL.

Contacts with OMS organisations might have resulted from prior TN projects, but prior contacts existed not only with OMS but, as shown in the previous section, between NMS DPs as well, independently from European projects.

By contrast, lack of prior experience was regarded as a clear disadvantage by national evaluators and interviewees from MAs/NSSs. Thus, the HU evaluators stated that the lack of previous contact rendered the search for partners difficult, in particular for DPs operating under Theme 1A (facilitating access to the labour market).

Other evaluators point to problems linked to lack of experience in transnationality. Thus, according to LT evaluators, the lack of prior experience is one of the factors accounting for an inadequate planning of transnational budgets, which proved too low. The CZ evaluators state that the lack of experience was a barrier for the DPs’ transnational ambition: they were interested in taking on more active roles but felt ill-prepared.

To overcome some disadvantages linked to the lack of experience in particular with the EQUAL programme, NMS DPs have searched for partners who were involved in EQUAL I, as recommended in the above-mentioned handbook. Thus, the LV evaluators state that in general, previous experience was one of the criteria for identifying transnational partners. The EE evaluators stated that the experience of the transnational partners acquired in R1 had been indeed very important for the write-up of the TCA. Our case studies showed that it was perceived as most helpful to have TCA partners who already had gathered experience during R1 for the building up of TN partnerships and work programmes (see also Box below). We could say that in this case capacity building took place.

Case study examples – the role of EQUAL experience

In this TNP of six, the SI DP explained that it benefited from prior experience of partners from ES and AT in EQUAL I. The SI DP itself had experience in TN activities through other projects but logically not from EQUAL. On the basis of experience with EQUAL I, the AT partner strongly recommended that each DP should nominate 3 persons to participate in the TN meetings on a regular basis. In the former TN partnership the number of partners that participated to the meetings and events was too large, according to the AT interviewee, which in his view hindered the deepening of work. A further recommendation of the AT and the ES DPs was to stick to realistic goals and not to be over-ambitious. The AT DP also proposed to elaborate a glossary in order to overcome language barriers.

13.2.1.2. Difficulties faced

National evaluators report difficulties faced by DPs and our case studies confirm the emergence of some of the identified problems. Some of these are linked to specificities of the EQUAL programme itself and some tend to be intrinsic in transnational programmes.

The first set of difficulties is linked with the identification of the ‘right’ TN partner. This can be regarded as EQUAL specific, as potential partners can only be drawn from EQUAL DPs, which limits the possibilities for finding a suitable partner. Thus, the HU evaluators stress that differing target groups represented a problem for identifying the right partner.

Difficulties were particularly pronounced when DPs waited to be contacted rather than taking a proactive attitude. Thus, according to the EE evaluators, finding the most suitable partners among the offers received represented a problem for DPs. The evaluators note that in most cases, EE DPs chose partners from the DPs which contacted them, rather than searching themselves in the ECDB.

The lack of experience is also mentioned (e.g. by the HU and CZ evaluators). This can be regarded as resulting from the Programme design as all DPs had to build TN partnerships, also the inexperienced one. We have seen this problem also among OMS DPs (see 2nd Interim Report of the EU-wide evaluation).

Important divergences in budget volumes for TN between the different partners of a TNP are also a result from the specific Programme design of EQUAL. Divergences in TN budgets are highlighted by the HU and EE evaluators. In HU, the situation is specific as 15% of the DP budget had to be dedicated to the TN activities. As a result, in most cases, the highest contribution to the TN budget came from HU DPs. In EE, the problem was, on the contrary, the reduced size of budgets. Our own field work confirmed the problem of small budgets for NMS DPs.

As compared to R1 DPs, less difficulty arose from programme timing differences, as a ‘TN window’ was agreed. Nevertheless, DPs starting their partner search late had less option left. To give an example, in the case of a CY DP, they could not cooperate with their first choice partners, because they contacted them too late. Finally, they had very little time to draw up the TCA.

Evaluators in NMS refer to a lack of coordination and common understanding of the Programme. Differing administrative expectations, schedules, coordination of differing priorities and differing understanding of concepts are pointed out by the HU, CZ and PL evaluators. A specific difficulty consisted in the different approaches of national programmes to the issue of eligibility of expenditure for transnational cooperation as stressed by the PL evaluators.

Reported difficulties also include lack of time for the proper build up of TNPs. According to the HU evaluators, there were not enough meetings and the time available for getting acquainted and making decisions could not compensate the lack in background knowledge.

Some evaluators mention technical difficulties, such as problems with entering data into the ECDB (PL evaluators).

A specific problem arose from payment delays in some NMS. This can endanger the implementation of TN activities. Lack of funds for financing TN cooperation resulting from delays in signing agreements with the NSS was specifically mentioned by the PL evaluators and by our SK interviewees. Payment delays resulting in the cutting of TN activities were reported by our SK and CZ case study interviewees.

Finally, language problems are intrinsic to any transnational programme, especially if inexperienced partners are involved. Lacks in language skills were mainly a problem for the ‘older generation’ according to the CZ evaluators.

In some NMS such as MT, national evaluators or interviewed programme actors converged to say that the partner search had been effective and had not represented a problem.

13.2.2. Origin of transnational partners

The analysis of the ECDB gives an overview about the origin of TN partners by countries. Before looking at the most important TN partners of DPs from NMS, it is important to have an overview of the distribution of DPs by their country of origin in EQUAL II, knowing that some MS had a large number of DPs, while other MS opted for a small number of DPs and thus the statistical probability of DPs of each MS to be chosen was unevenly distributed.

Table 13.2 – Share of number of R2 DPs coming from one MS on all DPs in %

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|---------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|--------------|
| <i>AT</i> | <i>BE-FRG</i> | <i>BE-NL</i> | <i>CY</i> | <i>CZ</i> | <i>DK</i> | <i>EE</i> | <i>ES</i> | <i>FI</i> |
| 2.5 | 1.8 | 1.6 | 0.4 | 2.9 | 0.9 | 0.6 | 11.3 | 2.7 |
| <i>FR</i> | <i>DE</i> | <i>GR</i> | <i>HU</i> | <i>IE</i> | <i>IT</i> | <i>LV</i> | <i>LT</i> | <i>LU</i> |
| 10.9 | 6.5 | 3.2 | 1.9 | 1.1 | 20.7 | 0.5 | 1.4 | 0.1 |
| <i>MT</i> | <i>NL</i> | <i>PL</i> | <i>PT</i> | <i>SK</i> | <i>SI</i> | <i>SE</i> | <i>UKgb</i> | <i>UK-NI</i> |
| 0.2 | 5.8 | 5.3 | 4.5 | 5.0 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 4.9 | 0.6 |

Source: ECDB

We can observe that in most cases there is a clear concentration in the origins of TN partners:

- DPs from CY had TN partners mainly from GR (36% of TN partners of TCAs in which CY DPs participated were Greek), from IT (14%) and from ES (14%). The predominance of GR partners can be explained by the linguistic and cultural proximity. Besides this, there is also a prevalence of Southern European countries. 14% of TN partners came from other NMS and in particular from PL and SK.
- CZ DPs had TN partners coming from IT (13%), DE (10%), PL (9%), ES (9%), SK (9%), FR (9%), UK_{GB} (8%) and AT (5%). Among the OMS, DE and AT can certainly be regarded as more ‘natural partners’ as they are neighbouring countries. Further, the interviewees stressed that the older generations in CZ were more likely to speak German rather than English. The high share of PL and SK partners can be explained by the geographical proximity and the proximity of these Slav languages. The MA/NSS had anticipated a high concentration of PL and SK partners and they advised the DPs not to choose primarily partners from SK and PL. As regards the UK_{GB} partners, there might be a ‘twinning effect’ as the UK_{GB} NSS played an important role in providing guidance

to the CZ MA/NSS. There were no explanations expressed neither by the interviewees nor in the evaluation report as regards the choice of partners from IT and ES.

- DPs from EE had TN partners mainly from IT (19%), UK_{GB} (15%) which is a higher share compared to other NMS as well as compared to the comparatively low number of UK_{GB} DPs available, ES (11%). DPs from SK and PL are quite well represented among the TN partners (with a share of 8.5% each). The high share of DPs from the UK_{GB} can be explained by the international event organised in Birmingham in January 2005.
- HU DPs more often have partners from IT (19%), followed by FR (11%), UK_{GB} (10%), NL (10%) and ES (9%) partners. Compared to their shares in all DPs, NL and UK_{GB} DPs are clearly overrepresented as TN partners for HU DPs.
- The LT DPs also predominantly have IT partners (17%), followed by FR partners (14%), DE partners (9%), NL (7%), UK_{gb} (6%) and ES (6%).
- LV DPs have in particular partners from IT (14%), UK_{GB} (11%), DE (11%), CZ (11%), PL (6%), NL (6%). FR and ES partners clearly play a minor role (6% each) as compared to TNPs with partners from other NMS. Interesting is the comparatively high share of CZ as well as DE DPs which might both be regarded as more 'natural' partners.
- The main partners of MT DPs come from IT (12%), UK_{Nl} (8%) and UK_{GB} (8%), PT (8%), NL (8%), LT (8%), FR (8%), ES (8%) and DE (8%). The partners are rather widespread with respect to their country of origin.
- PL DPs have a higher share of IT partners than other NMS DPs (around 22%), 12% are ES DPs, 10% DE DPs and 7% were UK_{gb} DPs.
- The SI DPs mainly have IT partners (28%), followed by FR partners and ES partners, as well as DE partners (8%). But AT partners can be also mentioned (5%) especially considering that among all DPs there are only 2.6% AT DPs. IT, AT and DE DPs can be regarded as more 'natural' partners for SI DPs.
- SK DPs also have primarily IT partners (26%). Our assumption would be that this is linked to the focus in both MS to promote the social economy. Further, DPs from FR and ES were frequent partners. The MA explained that SK DPs were contacted by FR, IT and ES partners. Further the MA/NSS interviewees explained that among the NMS partners, there were a lot of PL DPs, and to a lesser extent, HU, SI and LT DPs.

Not in all cases is there an explanation for the relatively high share of partners coming from a specific country in terms of content or tradition of co-operation:

First, as already argued, each MS has a different number of DPs and the probability to have partners from a specific country depends on its initial weight among all potential partners taken together. Thus, IT DPs are involved in more TCAs than DPs from any other MS, as IT has by far the most DPs (the share of IT DPs in all DPs amounts to 20%). The number of DPs from FR and ES is comparatively high as well, each of these MS having 10% of all DPs. Taking this distribution of DPs into account, we can state that in 7 out of the 10 NMS, IT DPs are underrepresented in transnational partnerships with NMS partners. TN partnerships with DPs from SK, SI and PL are clearly the exception: here the prevalence of IT DPs holds, even if we take into account the large number of IT DPs. In the case of SI, we can assume that the fact that IT and SI are neighbouring countries played an important role. Further, we can observe that DE and UK_{gb} DPs are over-represented in some cases. Taking into account the absolute number of DPs in DE (representing around 6% of all DPs) we can say that they are over-represented as partners in LV, LT, PL and CZ. In the case of DE this is not astonishing as DE is a neighbouring country to two of the NMS and has links to the Baltic States through other Programmes. Furthermore economic ties might play a role for the perception of other countries.

Secondly, the composition of TN partnerships results from a compromise between the choices of different TN partners. To give an example, a CZ DP might have chosen a DE DP, which in turn has already contacts with an ES DP.

On the grounds of our case studies as well as national evaluation reports, interviews and the analysis of the ECDB, we found that the OMS DPs had different reasons for looking for NMS partners:

- Constructing a European society: wish to contribute to the integration of the NMS in the EU and to get a better knowledge about the NMS.
- The fact of being a neighbour country.
- Previous contacts. This can be direct prior contacts between the members of the different DPs or prior contacts at other levels (including the above mentioned ‘twinning effect’)
- Specific expectations to learn from the experience in the NMS have motivated OMS to co-operate with NMS (particularly in the area of equal opportunities between men and women).

Examples from our case studies are given in the following box.

Case study example – Interest of DPs from OMS in co-operating with NMS DPs

- (1) ‘Contributing to EU integration’: This can be illustrated by the explanation given by a FR DP of one of our TNP case studies. There was initially the will to include one DP from the NMS for two reasons: curiosity about the NMS and the idea of contributing to the European integration of NMS (in this sense it was more politically motivated).
- (2) In one of our case studies, a TN partnership operating in the area of childcare, in which a LT DP cooperates with LU, BEfrg, DE and IT DPs, the DE DP which had the first contact with the LT DP stated that their interest in cooperating with former communist States consisted in the fact that childcare and women’s employment still have another social status than in Western European countries. Similarly, in another case study, the interviewed UKgb partner stated that they wanted to find a partner in one of the former communist countries, as they assumed that occupational segregation between men and women was less important or different in these countries due to the Soviet system.
- (3) In a TNP including a SI DP concerned with the labour market of young people, the interviewee from an AT DP stated that he was interested in learning from the SI experience in local partnerships. However the IT DP from this same partnership did not have any expectation with regard to the SI partner, the argument being that the social economy is underdeveloped in SI.

13.2.3 Preparing Transnational Cooperation Agreements: Process and results

13.2.3.1. Drafting the Transnational Cooperation Agreement

In many cases, meetings were organised between the TN partners in order to agree jointly on the main features of the TCA document.

The CZ evaluators have analysed the process of TCA write-up in detail. The usual method for writing-up TCAs has been to organise a one or two-day meeting of DPs from different MS. Twenty-two out of 36 DPs confirmed that this method was the most common method for preparing a TCA, together with email communication. In some cases (10 out of 20 analysed cases), the foreign partners came to CZ. Five out of 36 DPs let the responsibility to the foreign partners and did not participate directly in the formulation of the TCAs. The average time for partner search, discussing and preparing the TCA has been reported to have lasted between 6 and 8 weeks. Even in case the TCA was subject to consultations and negotiations, the responsibility for the final version was usually left to the foreign partners.

The LV evaluators state in their report that all DPs signed the TCAs relatively rapidly, except in 2 cases, where no validation had been provided by the MAs at the time of writing the report (for DP partners located in DE, CZ and CY). The reason for the fast drawing up of the TCA document was the fact that some TN partners were very experienced. This is certainly also true in other countries, as we have already argued.

The EE evaluators explain that negotiations between TN partners were complex. Some DPs had to abandon negotiations with some of their potential partners to maintain co-operation with others (the evaluators do not say why). By the time of report writing, all DPs but one had signed a TCA.

The following examples are illustrations of the process of TCA write-up.

Example from case studies – preparatory meetings for the drawing up of TCAs

- 1) In this TN partnership of six, in which a SI DP participated, the TN partners met in order to agree on the possibility of forming a partnership as well as on the workplan. All partners, except one IT DP which joined the TNP later, participated in the design of the workplan. It has to be noted that professional guidance for writing up TCAs was provided by a DE consultant. The final drawing up of the TCA was done by the FR DP, which is now in charge of the secretariat. As said earlier, the AT and ES experience from EQUAL I was quite helpful.
- 2) In this example of a TN partnership in which a HU partner participated, a first meeting took place before preparing the TCA document. At this meeting TN partners decided the rules and tasks of the TN partnership. TN partners also voted to choose the secretary: an IT DP with previous experience in EQUAL I. The contents and structures of the TCA were fixed and the division of tasks between the TN partners was agreed. After this initial meeting, the TN partners exchanged by e-mail and phone on the main activities and on the budget.
- 3) In this TN partnership of 5 with 2 SK, 2 CZ and one IT DP (lead partner) a meeting was organised by the IT DP in Bratislava so that it was convenient for the other TN partners to participate to this initial meeting (problem of low budgets). The IT partner had prior experience through EQUAL and other European Programmes. According to our SK interviewee this experience revealed to be crucial. The SK DP found the process of writing up the TCA very helpful for defining common objectives.
- 4) An EE DP participated twice at preparatory meetings: the first time the EE DP was invited by R1 DPs to participate in their partnership meeting organised in NL. Three partners from NL, FI and UKgb decided to carry on with EQUAL and the EE DP decided to join. The EE DP had also the possibility to make site visits in NL. At the final conference of the Rd1 TN partnership, where the EE DP was invited together with new partners (from IT, FR and PL), the TCA was drafted.

13.2.3.2. Planned TN activities

As this report is mainly concerned with the setting up of TN partnerships, TN activities are not analysed in details. In most cases, we can only refer to planned activities, as the TN partnerships just began their TN work at the time of the interviews and case studies.

We can conclude from evaluation reports and interviews with MAs/NSSs that the main activities are planned around the exchange of information and experience. More concretely, the CZ evaluators report that, the main planned activities were TN seminars, exchange visits of target groups or their representatives and study visits. Parallel development of innovative approaches or transfer of new approaches was not widespread. Similarly, the EE evaluators state in their report that generally activities are exchanges of experience and knowledge or transfers of models, which they consider a limited use of TN co-operation.

The activities planned in the TNPs studied also focus on the exchange of information and experience, study visits to deepen this exchange of experience and comparative analysis, but included some development of common methods and tools as well. In one of our case studies, in the area of gender segregation, the LV DP is responsible for carrying out a survey of 1000 women in science, engineering and technology professions, but the questions of the survey are to be elaborated jointly by UK_{GB} and LV partners, so as to inform a comparative study which the UK_{GB} partner wants to do. The ES partner will contribute by providing a mapping of issues faced by women in these professions and the final seminar to share results will take place in ES.

We have indications that monothematic TN partnerships prevailed: The results of the CZ evaluators reveal that about three quarters of TN partners work on the same theme. The LV evaluators states in their report that out of 40 TN partners, 25 work on the same thematic priorities as LV DPs, and 15 on other themes.

13.2.3.3. Governance models

a) At TNP level

The TCA contains rules about the division of tasks and roles between the TN partners. A common model to organise work consists in establishing different working groups. Each TN partner is then responsible for one working group or for a specific task (e.g. to organise the evaluation). This form of work organisation has the advantage that work can be more in-depth on specific aspects and that responsibility is shared among partners. Furthermore it makes it easier in many cases for DP members to be actively involved in TN work. This view is shared by the PL evaluators. We had already observed in R1 that this model of internal work organisation was quite effective.

The following examples illustrate this form of work organisation:

Case study examples – sharing responsibility for TN work

- (1) In this TN partnership (in which the LT DP participates), the work is organised in working groups and each partner is responsible for convening, planning and monitoring activities. Not all DPs have to take part in all working groups (except 2 of them), which ensures motivation, flexibility and adaptation to partner specific limitations.
- (2) In this TN partnership (in which a LV DP participates), TN work is organised around 5 themes and each TN partner is responsible for a Theme. Furthermore each DP has to organise the events, study visits etc. that take place in its country (independently from thematic responsibility).

Across our case studies we could further observe that in the cases of shared responsibility in the work organisation, equalitarian decision-making models prevailed (however, our case studies are not representative). In one example, a steering group gathered the project manager, a coordinator, and ‘theme leaders’ from each country, with the leaders having to report progress and results of their work to the steering group.

The LV evaluators stressed that in most cases the TCA organisation model chosen is based on the principle of equality, either through shared co-ordination by division of responsibilities (4 TN partnerships) or through regular rotation of the lead partner role (3 TN partnerships). 6 TN partnerships have appointed a management group as decision making mechanism. Nevertheless, even in those TN partnerships where a permanent coordinator is appointed, the responsibilities of each partner are clearly defined. DP representatives assessed the work organisation in their TN partnerships quite positively, in general, arguing that tasks and responsibilities were clearly

defined, although some, involved in TN partnerships without any experienced partner, feared that this was all well 'on paper' but that implementation would be more difficult.

The PL evaluators show that, among established TN partnerships, the most prevalent are those whose members decided to appoint an organisation to perform the role of a formal coordinator of joint activities. In that case, coordination tends to be ensured by an organisation which had experience in EQUAL R1. Some TNPs opted for a rotating secretariat.

Only few NMS DPs are leading TN partnerships as they think they lack experience and/or have too small budgets:

- No MT DP is leading a TN partnership (for budgetary reasons)
- Only one or two HU DPs are leading a TCA
- 7 CZ DPs have assumed the role of TN secretary. The participation of CZ in EQUAL I probably led to a higher capacity of CZ DPs to be TCA leaders.
- In SI and SK, the MAs/NSS recommended DPs to avoid taking on a leading role, for lack of experience. Nevertheless, in SI, 3 DPs are leading a TN partnership. In two cases at least, these DPs are extremely experienced in EU programmes (source: ECDB).
- In CY, DPs followed the suggestion not to take a leading role, and only one DP assumes a TNP Secretariat.

In some cases, NMS DPs can take momentarily a co-ordination function, through the model of rotating secretariats, which can be regarded as a progressive way to gain experience.

b) At DP level

In our case studies we have seen that in general the DP lead partner also manages TN projects. In some cases DPs have appointed a TN coordinator to access transnational expertise. In this case the TN coordinator tended to work closely with the DP leader.

The involvement of DP partners can take place at different moments in the process of the TN cooperation. Two of our case studies, involving a SI and a LV DP, showed that DP members were already involved in the choice of the TN partners, and in the discussion of the TCA, both of which are indeed good ways of securing their further commitment in TN work.

The work organisation fixed in the TCA has major implications for the involvement of DP members. In case of the setting-up of working groups, DP members are involved in the working groups they are interested in. In this way they actively participate to TN activities.

Furthermore, DP members are involved in TN events if they take place in their country. In one of our case studies, the SI DP lead partner had the intention to bring most of their DP members at least once along to a TN seminar abroad.

These mechanisms for DP partner involvement were also identified as effective in our case studies of R1 TN partnerships.

13.2.3.4. Budgets

As already shown in our previous reports, differences in budgets can represent an obstacle to common work and to equalitarian co-operation. The NMS national evaluation reports and the case studies show that in some cases the transnationality budgets of NMS DPs were significantly lower than those of their TN partners.

- Thus, according to the LT evaluators, some DPs admitted that they had not allocated enough funds to TN activities. The differences in costs of living are a significant issue, as the cost of some transnational activities appeared as disproportionate to DPs, which saw this as an unreasonable use of resources. TN budgets were only seriously elaborated in the preparation phase, when the global budgets could not be changed anymore, which limited margins of manoeuvre considerably. The share of TN budgets in DP's budgets fluctuates between 2.8% and 26% of DP budgets. Whilst a majority of LT DPs say that their partners understand that there are differences in the cost of living and that they cannot take part in everything, there were also LT DPs who felt 'humiliated' because they were 'minor' TN partners.
- Among CZ DPs, the variations were less important: according to the CZ evaluators, DPs state that 3–5% of the budget is necessary for the establishment of TN cooperation. This budget depends on the number of partners for TN cooperation. We can clearly see here the influence of the MA / NSS, as they gave indicative budget guidance of 5% for TN budget. According to the evaluators, some of the DPs stated that the TN partners would have preferred to carry out more TN activities if they had higher budgets. Some of the TN partners offered to pay some activities for them (source: interview with the former NSS). In some cases solutions were found based on relative cost advantages: in one case for example, the CZ partner will be responsible for printing documents as this is much cheaper as in OMS.
- In CY as well, the MA gave budgetary guidance and proposed that budgets should amount to 7% as a maximum, and all DPs indicated this maximum in their applications.

But we also have examples among our case studies in which budgets of NMS DPs were not dramatically lower. In a TNP including a HU DP, the IT partner, which already had experience from EQUAL I, insisted on having partners agree on similar budgetary volumes. In HU, the MA had recommended to DPs to allocate a relatively high share to TN activities. It is interesting to note that the HU evaluators criticise this decision and recommend a reallocation of transnational funding to national projects.

We can see from the different statements and assessments that TN budgets represent a difficult issue: TN budgets must allow for full participation in TN activities and therefore should not be too divergent within the TN partnership. One difficulty consists in the difference of purchasing power between most NMS and OMS. The other difficulty consists in different levels of priority between national and TN activities in the DP, a problem already mentioned in our R1 case studies.

A further difficulty emerges in case a DP is involved in two or more TN partnerships as this limits the budget volume for each. In our view the involvement of NMS DPs in 2 or more TNPs has largely been detrimental.

13.2.4. The validation of TCAs

In general, DPAs and TCAs were approved simultaneously. Although some DPs were asked to improve their TCAs, TCAs were in general finally not rejected. We have only one reported case where at the time of the interview one TCA was still not approved. As NMS understood that there was an implicit agreement that no or very little TCAs should be rejected, the validation process consisted more in a process of negotiation with DPs.

- The EE MA explained that they had relied on the guidelines given by the Commission for validation (MA/NSS Operational Handbook on Managing and Supporting Transnational Cooperation). Their DPs were advised to send the draft TCA for consultation already before the approval process in ETCIM to reduce problems and rejections. When the MA received the notification that a TCA needed to be approved, it was also sent to the NSS and if either the MA or the NSS found problems in the TCA, they were discussed together. The overall principle was that they should only reject a

TCA if there were shortcomings on issues that might directly affect the implementation (e.g. budget, division of tasks etc). If they were not completely satisfied with some other aspects in the TCA, which are of more background and informative nature (e.g. common interests, lessons learned from previous actions), they would still accept the TCA, but add a comment on the shortcomings.

- Similarly, in CZ, the interview with the former NSS showed that there was a concern not to block the start of TN activities.
- According to LT evaluators, the approval process was long. This was due to the fact that approval of electronic signatures is not permitted in LT unlike in many other countries. A second reason was that the TCA had to be translated into LT by a licensed translator whose signature is approved by a public notary. Administrative regulations thus considerably slowed down the process.
- In SK, DPAs, TCAs, project planning and budget were looked at at the same time. After the first screening, there were a few rejections. As said, these rejections were not final, as DPs were given the opportunity to review their documents. Reasons for rejection were: 'we couldn't identify the concrete contribution of our DP, planned activities are too expensive'. The DP had then to submit a new version of the agreements. Similar criteria were used in other countries (e.g. CY).

The at times active involvement of the MA/NSS in the construction of the TN partnerships meant that validation could go fast. In MT, the TCAs were built up with the NSS so the validation process was an easy process. In HU, the validation of the TCA was made with the support of ECOTEC (the UKgb NSS) and with some help of a FR student from Caen University who stayed 6 months with the HU MA and participated to the validation procedure.

There was much communication with the MAs/NSS in other Member States in the case of problems with the validation, which in many cases helped to speed up the process.

The appreciation of our interviewees about ETCIM was mixed, some reported to have had no problems (LT and EE), others reported some problems (CZ).

13.3. IMPLEMENTATION CONDITIONS: THE ROLE OF NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN GUIDANCE

13.3.1. The organisation of guidance for TN cooperation at MS level

The organisation of TN guidance in the MAs/NSS falls within three main models, as in the OMS:

- (a) There are one or several persons in charge of TN activities ('internal expert model'). This model has been adopted in most NMS. For example, in MT, one staff member in each organisation (NSS, MA) is dedicated to the TN activities. When there is a TN expert both in the MA and in the NSS, than a division of tasks may take place: the MA will have the contacts with other MS and the European Commission in the first place and the NSS will have the direct contact with the DPs (e.g. in CZ).
- (b) Each MA/NSS staff member provides guidance to a certain number of DPs on all aspects of EQUAL, including transnationality ('global guidance model'). This model has been adopted in the case of PL, SI, SK.
- (c) In practice, we have also seen a combination of both (e.g. former CZ NSS). In this case one person has a specific knowledge, like the use of ETCIM, but all staff members have basic knowledge to give guidance. In LV, all staff in charge of monitoring DPs are also

looking at TN issues. However the NSS head is coordinating TN issues: she took part in the European TN group, in the meetings in Brussels with all Member States, came back with all the relevant documents (e.g. how to write TCAs on line etc.), got them translated and on that basis organised a seminar with the DPs.

From the analysis of the national evaluation reports and the case studies we can not state that one of these models is more efficient. More important seems to be the understanding of the type of guidance given by the MA/NSS. In all models, we have seen MAs/NSSs which have been rather proactive (e.g. MT), and some which were rather passive and only answered questions in case they were approached (e.g. SI, SK). In these two cases understaffing, on the one hand, and the struggle with financial and administrative issues, on the other hand, can be regarded as the main reasons.

Basically, we can distinguish several approaches on how guidance is provided:

(a) Collective guidance

- Publishing guides on TN cooperation (in general the European guide on TN cooperation was translated into national languages).
- Organising seminars on the implementation of TN cooperation (e.g. LV, SK, EE). As we will see later MAs got help from other MS in order to organise this guidance (e.g. HU got guidance from FR, MT organised itself guidance from a DE DP, in SK the FR NSS organised the seminars). In the example of HU, a one day training (February 2005) was organised with the FR NSS: presentation of the TN guide, how to find partners, computer training for using ECDB, how to write a TCA, how to use ETCIM, presentation of the forum opened on the Racine's website (tool that could be used all around Europe). From the DPs point of view and according to the evaluation, the information day was held late and the HU language guide for TN cooperation was received very late.

(b) Individual guidance

- On DP demand: e.g. the LV NSS explained that after the seminar they organised, DPs sent questions, still, on the 'right' number of partners, of TCAs, on the harmonisation of budgets (between the national and the TN budget), on eligible costs. In EE, DPs asked for guidance in the process of choosing partners and preparing the TCA. Questions were asked about budgetary rules, difficulties with finding or choosing the right partners. In HU, only 1 DP asked for help as it could not find a TN partner. According to the former CZ NSS, DPs asked for help on technical issues (especially on how to use ETCIM), on budgetary rules as well as in case TN partners did not get approval or in case communication problems with TN partners arose.
- At the initiative of the NSS: There are only few cases, where the MA/NSS played a more pro-active role. Several MAs/NSS promoted their DPs in the different fora available at the European level. In addition, the MT NSS followed DPs at every stage. According to the interview with the former NSS, they approached each DP and asked them whether they encountered problems with finding partners or other issues related to TN projects.

As regards the content of the guidance, it included both the definition of TN requirements (e.g. with regard to numbers of partners and budget levels) and the provision of concrete help to overcome administrative and technical problems:

(a) Recommendations were made on a number of issues:

- Budget shares for TN : the CY MA/NSS proposed a maximum of 7 per cent of the total budget. The level of the budgetary guidance in SI was not clear to us, as we got different indications from the interviews with the DP and the MA (3% and 10% respectively). The CZ MA/NSS advised to spend 5% of the budget. In SK the MA recommended a 15% budget share for TN. In EE, it was recommended not to dedicate more than 12% of the DP budget to TN.
- TCA leadership: As said, the SK and SI MAs/NSSs discouraged DPs from taking on a lead role at transnational level.
- Number of partners: The LV MA recommended to DPs to form TN partnerships with at least 2 TN partners. The CZ MA/NSS recommended that at least one of the partners of the TN partnership came from an OMS. In particular they recommended not to choose only 1 partner from SK, as this would limit the benefits of exchanges. Further, they recommended to avoid building up too large partnerships.
- Number of TN partnerships: in LV, DPs were recommended not to be involved in more than 2 TCAs. However in practice, 1 DP has 3 TCAs. In MT, the MA recommended 2 TCAs rather than 1, as they anticipated difficulties in finding partners. As a result, 3 DPs out of 5 are engaged today in 2 TCAs which caused DPs some problems in the implementation of TN activities (see below).
- In LT, the MA/NSS explained to DPs that they should ‘give’ and not only ‘learn’ – during the Preparation phase, their understanding seemed to evolve and they became more ready to take responsibility for some activities.
- In LV, in cases of delays in TCA approvals, the NSS advised DPs to start their activities nonetheless.

(b) Technical help

Guidance was also provided to solve:

- Technical problems, e.g. using ETCIM (mentioned by the former CZ NSS).
- Administrative problems: e.g. clarifying which types of cost are eligible for funding.

- (c) Help to find partners, through bilateral contact with other MS and EU seminars, especially the Birmingham conference on transnationality in January 2005 and the ‘clearing house’ in Prague in April 2005 (see section 3.2 above and the section below).

Guidance is provided at many stages of the process: for the application phase, during Preparation phase and for the drawing up of an acceptable TCA document. The guidance capacity of the MA/NSS during the Preparation phase has been assessed very critically by the PL and SI evaluators.

As the objective of the TCA validation process was to make TCAs work as soon as possible, the quality of TN workplans might not be optimal and it will be important to provide guidance in the implementation phase. Some MAs were quite aware of this need (e.g. in LT) but we ignore how much of this implementation-oriented guidance has already started. However, we noted a lack of monitoring of TN activities in some NMS (e.g. SI, SK) at the time of the interview.

13.3.2. Cooperation between Member States¹³

A large number of NMS had ‘twinning arrangements’ with OMS or other forms of bilateral co-operation agreements for support on a number of institutional and organisational aspects of programme implementation, including TN. According to our interviewees this support was very helpful for concretely organising the guidance to DPs as well as for partner search and the TCA validation process.

Further cooperation between MAs/NSSs took place on a case by case basis to help DPs to search for TN partners, or when communication problems between TN partners arose.

13.3.3. The role of European-level facilitation

As we have seen, the TN guide was translated into national languages. Our interviewees at DP level in the NMS overall found it useful, although DPs in HU used the English version as the translation arrived late. As already mentioned, MAs/NSSs found the Handbook on TN cooperation very useful.

The ECDB was regarded as helpful for partner search, although the quality and reliability of the information was criticised (HU, CZ evaluation reports). Our own cross-checking of data confirms this. This means that the ECDB could be used to make a pre-selection of TN partners or to get some information on potential TN partners which contacted the NMS DP. Then, personal contacts were necessary to figure out if a potential DP could really be an interesting partner.

The creation, in R2, of a network of transnationality co-ordinators in all Member States facilitated bilateral contacts and on-going communication between MAs/NSSs during the ‘transnationality window’ period. The meetings of transnationality coordinators organised in Brussels in February and June 2005 were also considered to be quite helpful. For the HU respondent, it permitted to clarify rapidly basic questions.

The European Commission organised a seminar on ETCIM which was found essential. This was immediately used by some NSS to set up training workshops for their DPs (as in LV).

The Birmingham conference, in January 2005, which gathered all Member States at the beginning of the ‘transnationality window’, helped to create contacts which led in some cases to identifying the TN partners (as stated e.g. by the interviewees from CZ, MT, PL). The CZ representative further stressed that the seminar offered the possibility to ask practical questions and to learn from R1 experience.

The Clearing House for TN cooperation was organised in Prague in April 2005, and was most helpful as not all DPs had found transnational partners : DPs from CY, PL, SK, SI needed to find partners. The Clearing House was also found as being useful by NMS which had no ‘orphan’, e.g. the HU, MT and LV NSS/MAs indicated in their response to our questionnaire that it fostered the networking capacity between the transnationality coordinators.

14.4. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TN ACTIVITIES: CASE STUDY EVIDENCE

¹³ Co-operation between Member States and EU networking have not only taken place on transnationality. This is addressed in Volume 1, Chapter 9.

At the time of our field visits, TN partnerships had started their TN work and the first meetings had already taken place or were being prepared. From the interviews with DP members, we can make the following observations (which of course can not be generalised due to the small number of cases, but which might offer some interesting insights into the dynamics of TN partnerships).

- In the case of a TN partnership of six, the AT DP and the IT DP saw the TN partnership as a compromise, as the target groups differed widely (young people but with very different backgrounds). However, after the TN cooperation had started, the AT partner thought that this TN partnership was a good choice and that the differences in target groups were not a barrier but on the contrary offered the possibility to learn more. We would argue that in this case the work programme was well elaborated during a common meeting and partners were flexible enough to refine some of the activities in the course of the project. Further, we could observe a real commitment to TN issues and a will to learn from other countries from most of the partners. This was in particular true for the SI partner. Our interviewees stressed that the setting-up of the TN work takes a lot of time. It is essential to get to know well the different partners and the socio-economic and institutional context in which they operate. The workplan reflects this need as it is envisaged to have the bulk of the TN events at the beginning in order to elaborate a common knowledge base from which the development of a common TN product can start.
- In the case of a TN partnership of 5, in which 2 SK, 2 CZ and one IT partner participated, the implementation of the TN activities was already delayed at the time of our case study, as the SK DP has encountered serious funding problems: they have problems with the advance payments as they are a NGO and the Ministry is delaying payments. In this case, the priority of the SK DP was to pre-finance the activities at the national level. A study visit to the CZ partner needed to be postponed. Nevertheless, the DP leader intended to participate to the next TN meeting after having found possibilities to fly with a very cheap airline. We were informed that the other SK DP would not participate in TN events until they received funding.
- Two of the 10 interviewed NMS DPs were engaged in two TCAs. Problems were already emerging: in one case, there were not enough resources for TN work, as the available budget needed to be shared among two TCAs. In the other case our interviews revealed that the DP showed only a limited commitment to TN activities, as time and efforts have to be shared, which reduces the possibility for in-depth work.
- Low budgets and more specifically large budget differences limit the possibility to be fully engaged in the TN activities, which not only reduces the results but also may lead to a certain frustration.
- The CZ evaluators pointed out language barriers for the implementation of TN: among the staff actively participating in the work of DPs, there were only a small number of people who could really speak a foreign language (mainly English). This understandably led to communication problems. This problem is even more intense when target groups are involved. Furthermore, DPs were worried that foreign DPs would be much better prepared because they had experience from previous programmes and because, in the view of CZ DPs, they had 'better legislation'.

13.5. EXPECTED ADDED-VALUE

On the basis of our interviews with MAs/NSSs, the national evaluation reports as well as the case studies, NMS seem to have high expectations from TN activities, although the added-value is not always explained in very precise terms. As NMS are building up or modernising many social services and infrastructure and are initiating new processes in policy delivery, there is generally a high expectation from the TN exchange.

The expectations voiced by the MAs/NSSs were generally high, especially in the small NMS, and included:

- Import of good practice and know-how.
- Learning from the experience of other MS in the same area of activity (e.g. measures for integrating specific vulnerable groups to the labour market; institutional framework on disability issues).
- In HU, the possible export of their experience with the Roma community was explicitly mentioned.
- Change in attitudes and mentalities, e.g. from ‘charity’ to more ‘professionalism’ amongst NGOs.
- Building links between international institutions (PL interviewee).
- Production of common products.
- The new NSS in CZ expects DPs to gain more self-confidence through TN activities. They do not necessarily expect all DPs to be successful in TN cooperation but are quite confident that for some DPs the outcomes will be positive.
- The CZ MA expects exchange of experience to be very useful for innovation in employment policy and social inclusion, although policy mainstreaming of TN results is an issue.
- Building capacity for applying for future European programmes with a transnational strand (SI interviewee).

Although interviewees from the different NMS stressed different aspects of the expected added-value, it is likely that each of these aspects could have been put forward in more countries as well.

However not all interviewees shared the same enthusiasm and more sceptical voices could be heard, as in CY, where the MA/NSS expected added-value from TN projects, but not of radical kind.

The interviewed DP representatives were often more precise in their expectation from TN cooperation, as is logical. Their expectations included:

- Learning from different legal frameworks and their concrete implications (e.g. in one case study one of the objectives at national level was to prepare legal change in order to get better funding for institutional care and labour market integration).
- Learning from the concrete experience of institutions operating in the same field: the interviewed SK DP, which is active in the labour market transition from institutional care (mainly young Roma are concerned) to the labour market, seeks to learn more about this integration process from a CZ partner which is also specialised in this field: in CZ five times more children are in institutional care compared to SK and they have developed their own approaches. Furthermore, in the past, the leading organisation of the second CZ partner conducted a similar research as the SK DP does within EQUAL at the national level, therefore the SK DP is interested in comparing the results. As stated by the transnationality co-ordinator of a LV DP, DP partners tended to look for foreign partners which could bring added value to their projects and from whom they could learn: the transnationality co-

ordinator sought to persuade them in thinking as well in what they could teach others. This self-depreciative attitude of DP partners, which position themselves as pure 'recipients' of transnationality rather than as actors, may well have been a more general pattern.

- Learning about other methods. In one of our case studies, the PL interviewee from a DP operating with (ex)prisoners specified that DP members expected to learn about building social houses in PT and advice centres in IT. The TN partnership is concerned with the elaboration of a methodological handbook on business start-ups for ex-offenders and of another one on local networks of transition houses and social services. The expectations to capitalise on mutual learning are quite high. Very high expectations about learning from other methods in the area of labour market integration were expressed by our SI interviewee. The SI DP is very eager to import new approaches by learning from pragmatic exchanges.
- A higher credibility for the pursuit of local/national objectives, as has been formulated by the LT, SK and EE DPs (legislative change was aimed for by the SK DP and change in regulation of childcare facilities pursued by the interviewed LT DP).
- There is also the expectation to learn from the experience and to create networks more widely and not just on the issues dealt with in EQUAL (SI DP).
- Help to concretely develop activities at the national level. The interviewed CY DP representative explained that he expected to develop a systemic approach to solve gender equality issues. The focus of the CY DP at the national level is set on the creation of a framework for enterprises. As the TN partners from SK and GR rather focus on the education system, there is scope for putting forward a holistic solution for women in the labour market.

We would assume that the often very precise formulation of expectations by the interviewed DPs from NMS is linked to the fact that they spent much effort on identifying the right TN partners. The interviews with DPs in NMS showed that the DPs were in many cases well informed about what they could expect to learn in different MS. The findings of our case studies are confirmed by evaluators:

- The importance of the right partner is also stressed by the CZ evaluators. Interviews which they carried out with DPs showed that most DPs see TN cooperation as a tool for gaining new experiences from foreign partners. Transnational partners are considered as suitable if they are participating in similar or identical projects and can offer a possibility of methodological inspiration or verification of developed instruments somewhere abroad. According to the evaluators, many DPs believe that TN cooperation is a challenge and increases the attractiveness of the programme. It is also a motivating factor. Similarly, the PL evaluators state that for the DPs interviewed, the possibility to establish TN cooperation was one of the main advantages of the programme.
- The assessment of the expected added-value of TN cooperations made by the EE evaluators is mixed. They started from the consideration that the added value of TN projects in EE is likely to come from the obtention of new knowledge and experience (through implementing new policies) from MS with relevant experience. In their opinion, this means that the best opportunities will take place in DPs which are not focused on training as training related issues are already well-known and not innovative. The 'greatest added value' can be expected from those DPs which plan study visits for their target groups abroad, for example so that the target group takes part in the activities of the TN partner, or so that the target group members realise that what they are doing in their country has already successfully been done elsewhere and gain confidence. Several examples are provided of DPs where such concrete added value is expected. On the other hand the evaluators find that often the plans for TN co-operation are vague, and that differences between target groups may impede any concrete exchange. Some intentions (e.g. learning about corporate social responsibility) may remain abstract, as it is not clear through what activities this learning will take place, and the lack of employer involvement may make this difficult in practice.

13.6. CONCLUSIONS

From the analysis of the national evaluation reports, R2 case studies as well as our interviews with the MA /NSS, we can derive the following conclusions:

In most cases, NMS DPs have been quite thorough in their partner search. The formulation of clear criteria for the search on the ECDB in order either to identify partners or to get basic information on other DPs which took the initiative of the first contact, has proved to be frequent and helpful. Besides using the ECDB, TN partners were found through contacts between MS (e.g. due to the participation to the seminar organised in Birmingham in January 2005). The ECDB is a useful tool at an initial stage of search for partners, although information is often not complete.

Some OMS are 'over-represented' in partnerships with NMS DPs. This is the case of DE in LV, LT, PL and CZ. This could be due to DE being a more "natural" partner for DPs in these countries (e.g. through the "neighbouring country effect"). The same can also be stated in the case of AT. IT DPs were 'over-represented' as partners of SI, SK and PL DPs. In the case of SI, there is certainly a "neighbouring country"-effect and in the case of SK the importance given to the social economy can be an explanatory factor. UK_{GB} DPs were also more present than could be assumed from their DP share in the programme. With regard to UK_{GB} and FR partners, the "twinning partner" effect may have played a role.

The motivation of OMS DPs to contact NMS DPs is manifold: desire to transfer knowledge, expectation to learn from NMS experience (in the fields of gender, as well as with regard to regional cooperation), desire to learn about the New Members and to contribute to constructing Europe. NMS are also interested in partners from other NMS (in particular among former communist countries).

Many NMS DPs had clear expectations about what to learn from OMS. In general, DPs as well as most MAs/NSSs in NMS have high expectations to learn through TN cooperation. Furthermore, there is also the expectation that the national projects get more visibility and credibility through TN cooperation.

In order to draw-up TCAs, meetings have often been organised between TN partners. These meetings have been very helpful. Further, it was perceived as most helpful to have TN partners who were already experienced with EQUAL. Indeed, we observed in our case studies that this experience helped to improve the quality of TCAs and processes.

European-level facilitation was positive and the different tools (ECDB, guide on TN cooperation) were used and were appreciated. EU co-operation fora (e.g. the Clearing house in Prague), the network of transnationality co-ordinators, and the training on ETCIM organised by the European Commission greatly facilitated contacts between MAs/NSS, co-ordination for the validation process and in some cases provided concrete ideas for guidance to DPs. We also gathered positive feedback on the organisation of TN window. However, the guidance capacity of the MA/NSS for the process of building up TN partnerships was rather limited. Only in few cases were pro-active measures taken. The TCA validation process was in general organised more as a negotiation process. The aim was to have as little rejections as possible and not to hinder TN work. This means that further guidance should be provided during the implementation phase.

Divergences in TN budgets still are a problematic issue for agreeing and implementing TN partnerships. This problem is heightened by large differences in purchasing power. Parts of the problem can be solved by organising TN activities to some extent by taking purchasing power

differences into account and allocating the tasks accordingly. Planned activities focus on the exchange of information and experience.

Finally, cooperation between MS proved to be effective: in particular the assistance given by OMS to NMS was very helpful for the implementation of the EQUAL principles.