



Proequality
EQUAL Transnational Cooperation

**Final Evaluation Report
Transnational Cooperation
2007**

Austria.Germany.Poland.Portugal.Slovakia



Pro  quality

EQUAL Transnational Cooperation



Final Evaluation Report

Transnational Cooperation

Pro(e)quality

Austria



Germany



Poland



Portugal



Slovakia

CENTRUM
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Introduction

The following report describes the evaluation process and results of the Transnational Cooperation „Pro(e)quality“ from the beginning of 2005 until June 2007. In this Cooperation, which took place in the context of the EQUAL Community Initiative, national Development Partnerships (DPs) from Austria, Germany, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia were involved.

Pro(e)quality achieved its aim of promoting gender equality in the labour market - documented in the Transnational Cooperation Agreement (TCA) - by developing four products, focusing on different aspects in specialised Working Groups (WGs):

1. An internet-based knowledge management system on gender mainstreaming and diversity management in the workplace (WG 1),
2. Gender/diversity criteria for public funding (WG 2),
3. Quality standards and criteria for gender mainstreaming and diversity audits in the workplace (WG 3)¹, and
4. Quality standards and criteria for gender and gender mainstreaming training (WG 4).

The Transnational Cooperation was coordinated by a nine-member transnational Steering Committee (SC) with at least one representative from each country. Additionally, a multinational evaluation team of five persons worked together to monitor and evaluate the ongoing working process of the Cooperation, whose results are summarized in this final report².

After a short description of the aims of the evaluation in chapter 1, the methodology and the instruments are depicted in chapter 2. In the third chapter, the results of the Transnational Cooperation - divided into challenges and success factors - are specified.

Chapter 4 deals with the conclusions that can be drawn from the experiences and the results within this Partnership. And finally, a list of recommendations is presented in Chapter 5.

1. Aims of the evaluation

The evaluation of the transnational cooperation project „Pro(e)quality“ was designed as a utilisation focused evaluation. Results of the evaluation served to support the work of the Steering Committee by providing prompt and useful feedback. The evaluation focused on the main principle of the TCA – its product orientation. Therefore, the working process and factors that support or hinder goal achievement are addressed through several evaluation instruments.

The evaluation team was affected by the fluctuation of participating countries in the TCA. In the beginning, the Dutch partners actively participated in the development of the evaluation design. When the Dutch partners left, the Portuguese DP joined the TCA. Finally, the evaluation team consisted of four members coming from Austria, Germany, Poland and Portugal. Three team members were also involved in evaluating their national Development Partnerships. Slovakia did not delegate a representative to the evaluation team, but participated in all evaluation activities.

2. Methodology and instruments/ evaluation design

The evaluation is based on a set of different tools (written questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, participant observation, and attendance in Steering Committee meetings).

1. Halfway through the project, The Netherlands left the Partnership and Portugal was able to finally join it. As a result, the Working Group composition changed and its product was redesigned into „Principles for the Successful Implementation of Equality Measures (Gender Mainstreaming and Diversity Management) into Enterprises/ Organisations.“

2. The fifth evaluation team member (Lorenz Lassnigg from Austria) was not involved in writing the final report.

These tools were addressed to Steering Committee members, Working Group members and people participating in Working Group meetings or the transnational final conference.

There were **two interviews conducted with Steering Committee members** (November 2006 and February 2007). These interviews focused on the development of the TCA, the working process in the Working Groups and an assessment of the potential degree of goal achievement. In that context, supportive factors as well as hindrances were discussed. The interviews were conducted by the evaluation team member of the national DPs (Austria also interviewed the Slovakian Steering Committee member).

In addition, two **Working Group surveys** (written questionnaires sent out via e-mail) were conducted. The first survey took place in November 2006 and focused on the respondents' role within the Working Group, an assessment of the working process and on links or synergies between work in the transnational project and the national DP. 26 Working Group members participated in this survey.

21 persons participated in the second survey in November 2007. This questionnaire focused on satisfaction with the cooperation within the transnational project and assessed the working process.

In addition to specific surveys, participants in transnational meetings (Berlin, December 2005; Warsaw, September 2006) and in the transnational final conference (Vienna and Bratislava, April 2007) were also asked to answer a **feedback-questionnaire**. The response rate of these feedback questionnaires is rather high – at least three-quarters of participants provided feedback. The focus of the questionnaires was on organisational aspects and the working process within Working Groups.

Reports on the findings of each WG survey and TC meeting questionnaire were prepared for the Steering Committee and Partnership members shortly after gathering the results. Additionally, a **comprehensive interim evaluation report** was written in February 2007.

3. Results/ Findings

Challenges

The development of the transnational activities and products within Pro(e)quality was not exempt from problems and challenges, at different levels.

The first set of challenges relates to bureaucratic and organisational issues, namely deriving from the design of EQUAL in different countries.

Different start and end dates of national partner projects impacted on transnational work, especially in some WGs, since working rhythms and deadlines at the transnational level were not always compatible with national level projects' timings.

This was particularly hard to handle when combined with administrative and financial difficulties related to national EQUAL management authorities.

An additional challenge, at this level, was the fluctuation of national partners, especially when this resulted in changes of Working Group members and leadership. The early drop-out of The Netherlands and the late joining of Portugal had to be dealt with and accommodated by the other transnational partners during the working process. One consequence of this major change was the design of WG 3's final product. Instead of developing a document on quality standards for gender mainstreaming and diversity audits, the group amended the task and developed a set of principles for the successful implementation of equality measures for the workplace.

Pro(e)quality was also challenged in terms of being able to find the right balance between the clear product orientation of this partnership and the need to achieve good knowledge and exchange among national partner projects. Even though the importance of establishing intercultural and conceptual understanding at the beginning of the working process was assumed, a number of participants expressed a concern that there was not enough time during the meetings to discuss and exchange experiences, cultural backgrounds and expectations.

Another problem, particularly felt at the WG level, refers to sensitivity to language and communication needs. English was adopted as the common working language in this transnational partnership, though English was not the mother tongue for any of the partners. Thus, given the lack of financial resources budgeted for translation, lower levels of proficiency in English prevented full participation of some partners in the exchange processes.

Difficulties were also experienced in combining national and transnational work. On the one hand, in some cases, priority was given to national work compared to transnational work. On the other hand, a lack of resources (namely working time, personnel and travel) for transnational work was felt by some national partners.

The absence of a direct link of some transnational activities to national work for every partner constituted, in practice, an obstacle to a balanced representation and contribution in all working groups by country.

Success factors

During the working process as well as at the end of the transnational cooperation, the majority of the participants were satisfied with the results of the cooperation. Which success factors - that could surpass the difficulties described above - were responsible for the positive outcome?

The success factors are described according to the organisation of the Transnational Cooperation, grouped by factors related to the Steering Committee and factors related to the Working Groups.

The Steering Committee met 8 times in addition to the three common meetings. During those meetings they discussed the status quo of the Transnational Cooperation and planned the next steps. The number of meetings seemed to be appropriate for discussing the strategic and organisational questions.

The continuity of the persons, their roles and responsibilities and the rotation of the secretary were positive factors, not only ensuring efficient communication within the SC, but also ensuring commitment to the common agreements. Another aspect that facilitated the goal-orientation was the clear product-orientation of the TCA. The 2-level organisation of Pro(e)quality - Steering Committee and 4 Working Groups, each with a Working Group Leader responsible for coordinating the Working Group and reporting to the Steering Committee - made organisation easier and communication more efficient.

The four Working Groups met 3 times at common meetings, namely in Berlin, Warsaw and Vienna. The opportunities for personal communication and practical exchange of experiences at these meetings were very helpful for fostering cooperation, motivation and networking of the participants. Thus, it was important to provide enough time for cooperation in working groups, but also for common meetings and informal contacts. Other factors that turned out to be crucial for the success of the Working Groups were:

- Strong leadership and clear communication structures that ensure good moderation of discussions and good flow of information. In detail this aspect comprises:
 1. good moderation (paying attention to time schedule, avoiding digressive discussions, good summarizing and systematizing, motivating participants)
 2. precise and detailed minutes sent out in time
 3. good coordination (practical work instructions - next steps after each meeting, paying attention to deadlines, ensuring a good flow of information)
 - The clear definition of concepts, responsibilities and goals - and sufficient time to come to an agreement on these respective issues - is another aspect that was important for successful cooperation. The product-orientation was a helpful strategy for supporting goal-orientation. The following steps were central:
 1. development of common understanding of the topic
 2. definition of clear targets
 3. clear and realistic work plan
 4. clear assignment of responsibilities
 - Focusing more on the personal than on the organisational point of view, high motivation of working group members and an open working atmosphere supported cooperation between the group members. The good atmosphere is reflected in the following attitudes:
 1. participation: high level of motivation and dedication of the members
 2. equal engagement in decision making
 3. readiness to raise doubts and critique
 4. individual culture to listen to different opinions and look for compromise
 5. flexibility and mutual acceptance of differences
 6. participants were not dogmatic (not focused on their own view)
 7. readiness to share experiences
- Other aspects that turned out to be helpful were:
- Support of Steering Committee
 1. SC members participated in the WGs and had an idea of the processes, development and needs of the WGs
 2. Good organisation by the Steering Committee members
 - Diverse composition of working groups - national as well as organizational
 1. high level of professional experience of experts participating in several WGs for each DP
 2. wide variety of organisations involved in the process and work on the TCA
 - Resource flexibility - some Working Groups had additional meetings
 - Overlap/complementarity between national and transnational work

4. Conclusions

Achievement of Transnational Cooperation Agreement (TCA) Aims

The aims set forth in the TCA served to guide the work of this product-oriented transnational partnership. When taken in its entirety, we are able to conclude that most of these aims have been achieved, though some more directly than others:

Objective 1: To deal with barriers at company - and institutional level (gender mainstreaming implementation, gender diversity implementation and audit, quality criteria for gender mainstreaming implementation, analytical indicators of women's situation in company environment)

Each Working Group focused on a different, practical product that serves to overcome institutional barriers to gender equality. Using a wikipedia design, information, resources and tools on diversity, gender and gender mainstreaming are available in one place on the Internet as a result of the Knowledge Management System (WG 1). WG2 is targeted to public sector institutions, developing a review of how gender equality can be promoted and monitored through the public procurement process, based on the experiences of Germany and Austria. The booklets of WG3 and WG4³ provide specific approaches, guidelines and examples to achieve this aim in the workplace through training and implementation, be it in the public, private or non-governmental sector. Furthermore, including these brochures in the Knowledge Management System allows them to be further developed and expanded in the future as additional experience is gained.

Objective 2: Strengthen the labour market participation (horizontally and vertically) of women.

Whether or not the intended targets of the project decide to use the developed products will have the most impact on the achievement of this aim.

Survey results of the final TCA common meeting indicate that most TCA members (33 out of 37 survey respondents) intend to disseminate these products among their partners, cooperating institutions and use them in future work. 13 of the 17 "guest" respondents at this meeting also plan to share or use these products at their workplaces. All but one "guest" respondent⁴ assessed the Working Group 3 and Working Group 4 brochures as "very useful" or "partly useful", giving some idea about the utility of this work to Pro(e)quality participants. What we do not know yet is the level of acceptance and use by EU structures. The products will be sent to 30 EU institutions at the end of July 2007.

Objective 3: Facilitating gender mainstreaming / gender diversity management in regular human resource management of companies and institutions.

All the products relate to this aim, as each strives to facilitate gender equality, though in different ways – through knowledge-building, learning about quality gender mainstreaming/diversity management implementation principles, requiring public bidders to address this aspect in their work, or setting standards for quality training in this field.

Objective 4: Promote gender equality and women's situation in the labour market.

All Working Groups focused on this aim, as it was the main motivating factor for the partnership itself and the products being developed. Promotion of the products is the main strategy being used to operationalise this aim, and as the products have just been or are still being completed, it is too early to assess the results of its achievement. The Steering Committee has been developing a dissemination

3. Principles for the Successful Implementation of Equality Measures (Gender Mainstreaming and Diversity Management) into Enterprises/Organisations (WG3), and Quality Standards for Gender Equality and Diversity Training in the EU (WG4)

4. Nine of ten respondents to the question on WG 3 brochure, eight of nine respondents to the question on WG 4 brochure.

strategy that is currently being finalised in order to be implemented at national and European levels. This activity will be monitored by the national Development Partnerships remaining in the project after June 2007⁵.

Objective 5: Work on joint transcultural understanding and learning.

This has occurred throughout project implementation, facilitated in large part through features of its design, especially in the use of the rotating secretariat of the partnership and the multinational character of the Working Groups for product development and evaluation. It may have been less evident in WG2, with its two members from Austria and Germany, but the German partner was also a member of the Steering Committee and the Austrian partner attended all of the TCA common meetings.

There are several issues that the Steering Committee is currently working on to sustain the results of the Partnership. These include:

- The establishment of an internet platform for Pro(e)quality members at the Knowledge Management System internet site:
 1. to coordinate and report on product mainstreaming at the national and EU levels,
 2. to promote continued networking among members,
 3. to facilitate contact with partners for future transnational projects, and
 4. to share information about developments in gender equality/ gender mainstreaming/ diversity occurring at the national and EU levels.
- Securing a stable and permanent home for the Knowledge Management System upon termination of the project.

5. Recommendations

The success factors listed in the section on “Results/Findings” above provide excellent guidelines for achieving an effective and satisfying international partnership, whose strategy is to develop specific products with multinational teams. Even in the face of crisis halfway through the project - the loss of one partner and introduction of another - Pro(e)quality was able to continue and complete its planned work, in large part thanks to the commitment and professionalism of its members.

The following recommendations are based on our experiences in developing and managing a successful multinational, product-oriented project. They are intended for two audiences: persons planning to engage in international projects, and the management authorities of such projects.

Recommendations for Project Implementers

- Composition of Working Groups
 1. Have enough members to accomplish the work in the planned time schedule and adequate representation from the countries involved in the project in each Working Group. This may not always be possible due to personnel constraints or lack of interest, but our experience has shown that those groups with two or more representatives from each country were more satisfied with the outcome of their work and were consistently more able to reach their targets than smaller, more homogenous Working Groups. Even in the larger Working Groups, individuals who were the only representative of their country expressed the desire to have the additional involvement of another national colleague.
 2. It is important to consider the profile of Working Group members. One of the key factors contributing to the success of several Working Groups was the mix of expertise and talent. Not only are persons needed who are knowledgeable in the topic, but also those

5. Germany, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia

who have strong leadership and group work abilities. Two of Pro(e)quality's more successful Working Groups were led by persons who perhaps would not be considered experts in the group's main topic, but who, through excellent leadership and group work skills, were able to manage the process of successfully achieving the groups' aims.

3. Have more members in a Working Group, rather than less. This provides a better chance for the team to compensate for problems that may arise with individual members, such as lack of time or loss of leadership.
- Establish a base-line of understanding the national context and status of the topic being addressed. This provides a foundation enabling the group to progress in developing a common product (for example, brief status reports and glossaries). The time and effort spent on this at the beginning of the working process allows group members to present their points of view, to see the differences and similarities among the participants and to understand each other better in the negotiating process of developing a common product.
 - Transnational work should complement work occurring at the national level. Achieving a specific end product of multinational team members is more successful when the work also contributes to products being developed at the national level. Members understand that they will personally benefit from the effort of working on a common product, resulting in higher commitment, motivation and experience sharing. This issue should be considered when selecting partners with whom to work and in designing the project.
 - Prepare clear guidelines and management/communication structures at the Steering Committee and Working Group levels. At the beginning of the project, the Steering Committee prepared a document on their expectations for the products, but the final format, content and design was left to the decision of the Working

Groups. Good communication and reporting between the Steering Committee and Working Group Leaders ensured appropriate information flow about progress towards project aims. Many Steering Committee members also participated in Working Groups, facilitating information flow between the structures. Working Groups set up mutually-agreed upon and clear guidelines about tasks, time schedules and responsibilities, enhancing their ability to develop the products.

- Do not underestimate the resources required (time, people, travel, communication) to achieve the aims of a transnational partnership. Groups need to meet to move work forward (even the best electronic communication cannot substitute for face-to-face meetings), products need to be replicated if they are to be disseminated, adequate representation and involvement must be ensured. This can be achieved by good planning of the project at the design stage.
- Language – English was the working language of the partnership and the native language of only one member.
 1. Adequate translation support both at face-to-face meetings and in written communication ensures the full participation of everyone at all times, regardless of their language level. By only including persons with a good facility of the working language, we may be denying ourselves much needed expertise. Therefore, this must be considered when planning interpreting and translation resources for a project.
 2. There is also an issue of language sensitivity among group members. There are times when full understanding of a concept or idea must happen first in one's native language, and only then can it be transferred to the working language. This sometimes occurs in "real time" during meetings. As a result, sensitivity is required both to allow this process to occur, but then also to ensure that what

was communicated in one's native language is shared with the entire group.

- Have each group establish some basic rules for communicating between meetings and secure everyone's agreement to the rules. For example: responses are expected within one week of receiving an e-mail; all group members are sent copies of intra-group correspondence. This may seem obvious, but setting communication guidelines that are agreed to establishes group norms and mutual expectations on an issue that may differ culturally.
- The ongoing type of evaluation conducted in this project was very useful for the Steering Committee and Working Group members. Feedback was provided quickly about transnational meetings enabling changes to be made to following events, Working Group progress and process was tracked, and the interim report allowed a number of recommendations to be incorporated into the project before its completion.

Recommendations for Management Authorities

- Greater flexibility is required on the part of management authorities in allowing national Development Partnerships to allocate resources required to participate in transnational projects. One TCA partner was allowed only one person per national partner to participate in transnational activities by its management authority, despite complementarity of a number of topics in both projects. Another partner was unable to budget additional resources for interpreting.
- Participating Development Partnerships should have similar beginning and end dates. In Pro(e)quality, a national partner is terminating its country project six months before the remaining partners. This meant that the transnational products had to be completed before the final results developed in the national partnerships could be fully incorporated into transnational work. This also has implications for mainstreaming and dissemination activities at the EU level, as not all partners are able to be involved in this activity.
- More uniform policies and procedures among national management authorities would facilitate transnational projects. There was considerable variation among countries in budgeting flexibility, extent and quality of fiscal and programmatic oversight that impacted on transnational work. Because of decisions made by national management authorities, one partner suspended its involvement in the TCA for over half a year, while another terminated participation altogether seven months after the project began.

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