

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction to EQUAL

1.1.1 The EQUAL Community Initiative

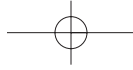
EQUAL is one of four Community Initiatives co-financed by the European Union 2000-2008. The programme is co-funded through the European Social Fund (ESF) and will operate between 2001 and end-2007, with a total ESF budget for Ireland of €34 meuro.

There are two funding periods. The first funding period (end-2001 to mid 2005) provided support to 21 Development Partnerships (DPs) in Ireland (see www.equal-ci.ie). The second round of EQUAL funding in Ireland runs from January 2005 to end-2007 and 22 DPs will be supported over that period.

EQUAL seeks to identify and address fundamental forms of discrimination and inequality in the labour market through the development of new and innovative policies and practices initiated by EQUAL Development Partnerships. In that regard the programme is relevant to a number of policy areas as outlined in Section 2 of this Manual.

1.1.2 Key Players

The Managing Authority (MA) for EQUAL is located at the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment. The MA has overall responsibility for the management of the programme. Amongst other things, the Managing Authority chairs the Monitoring Committee and the associated Selection Committee, attends meetings with the European Commission, leads thematic work at European level and interacts with the



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Paying Authority for the European Social Fund and the programme's auditors. Critically, the MA also set up and co-chairs the Equal Mainstreaming Policy Group (MPG).

The Work Research Co-Operative (Social and Economic Consultants / WRCsec) provides technical support to the MA. In that capacity, WRCsec is what is known as the National Support Structure (NSS) for EQUAL in Ireland. The NSS acts as a direct interface between the MA and selected projects. It supports the MA in preparation of materials for monitoring, thematic, mainstreaming and other functions and events. The NSS produces documentation to support project managers, co-ordinates the monitoring information connected with EQUAL and produces a range of other materials including newsletters and papers on relevant subjects. The NSS also sits on the Monitoring Committee, the MPG and leads thematic work at domestic level as well as supporting the MA in thematic work at European level.

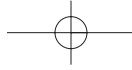
The Equality Authority is represented on the EQUAL monitoring committee, the selection committee and, perhaps most importantly, co-chairs the Mainstream Policy Group together with the Managing Authority.

The SEUPB is one of six North/South implementation bodies established under the Belfast agreement. The SEUPB has an administrative role in the operation of the cross border dimension of EQUAL and the Community Initiatives; LEADER and URBAN. It also seeks to develop linkages between the Interreg 3 and Peace Programmes. The SEUPB sits on the EQUAL Monitoring Committee and the EQUAL Mainstream Policy Group and also Chairs the North/South Committee established under EQUAL.

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1.2 The Development Partnership (DP)

EQUAL is designed to operate through DPs that are composed of actors (geographically or sectorally organised) that have the capacity and capability to tackle the different forms and levels of exclusion, discrimination and inequality identified.

Organisations that operate in the public, private and third sectors are invited to collaborate with a view to combining experience, perspective and expertise towards developing and agreeing a strategy to tackle fundamental forms of labour market discrimination and inequality.

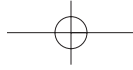
DPs are also required to collaborate at European level. Each DP will be required to have a formal transnational co-operation agreement (TCA) with at least one DP operating under EQUAL in another Member state and many DPs will have opportunities to work in thematic networks on a pan-EU basis.

1.3 The Architecture of EQUAL

EQUAL is broadly structured and designed in line with the four-pillar approach of the European Employment Strategy (employability, adaptability, equal opportunities and entrepreneurship) with an additional pillar focusing on Asylum Seekers. Within each pillar there are specific sub-themes. Member states are invited by the European Commission to select both pillars and themes that best reflect and anticipate national labour market needs and priorities.

In Ireland, for both Round 1 and Round 2 funding periods, the Pillars and Themes selected by the Managing Authority for EQUAL at the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment are as per Figure 1:





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Figure 1: EQUAL Pillars and Themes 2001-2007

1A – Employability

Facilitating access and return to the labour market for those who have difficulty in being integrated into a labour market which should be open to all;

2C – 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;

3E – Adaptability

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

3F – Adaptability

Supporting the adaptability of firms and employees to structural economic change and the use of ICT and other technologies;

4G – Equal Opportunities

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

5I – Asylum Seekers

Supporting the social and vocational integration of Asylum Seekers.



1.4 EQUAL Programme Budget

The European Social Fund (ESF) will co-finance EQUAL activity up to a maximum of 75% of the total project cost. The total ESF budget for the second round of EQUAL in Ireland is approximately €16.5 million across the various pillars as follows:

Table 1: EQUAL Programme Budget per Pillar 2005-2007

<i>Pillar</i>	<i>Budget</i>	<i>% of total</i>
Employability Theme A	5.45 million	31%
Entrepreneurship Theme C	1.80 million	10%
Adaptability Theme E	6.20 million	34%
Adaptability Theme F		
Equal Opportunities Theme G	2.00 million	12%
Asylum Seekers Theme I	0.89 Million	5%

1.5 The Six Principles – Defining Action Under EQUAL

EQUAL is built on a set of six principles that are intended to underpin activity at all levels of the programme. The six principles and their respective definitions are provided in Table 2 below:


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Table 2: The Six EQUAL Principles

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Description</i>
Partnership	The establishment of a Development Partnership that brings together the key players in a geographic area or economic sector.
Thematic Approach	DPs will work in thematic networks both at National and EU level with a view to generating critical mass towards engagement in policy and practice.
Empowerment	The programme encourages all stakeholders to develop clear empowerment strategies both at participant and DP level. Ideally, these strategies should include substantive involvement of participants/target group members in the design, delivery and evaluation of activity.
Innovation	The design and implementation of new and innovative policies and practices to tackle exclusion, discrimination and inequality.
Transnational – Co-operation	The establishment of transnational co-operation agreements with EQUAL projects in other Member states that detail strategies, activities, costs, products etc.
Dissemination & Mainstreaming	This is a fundamental within the programme and has implications at all levels i.e. project level, DP level, local, national and EU levels. In an Irish context, the MPG acts as the central mechanism for the planned transfer of policy lessons although this will not preclude other policy and practice transfers on the vertical and horizontal axes.



1.6 EQUAL In Operation – The 3 Action Periods

EQUAL operates under three distinct but interrelated activity headings:

- ⊙ Action 1 – Planning and development;
- ⊙ Action 2 – Implementation;
- ⊙ Action 3 – Networking, Dissemination and Mainstreaming.

In brief:

Action	Description of Action Period	Timeframe for Action
1	Action 1 is the planning phase during which you will be required to complete a range of specific tasks including the establishment of a transnational partnership, completion of an Action Plan and Development Partnership Agreement.	1st January 2005 to end-June 2005. The end-June date is a deadline that can be anticipated by DPs that have completed all required activities to the satisfaction of the MA and NSS.
2	This implementation phase will involve pursuit of agreed strategies and actions.	Early 2005 to end-December 2007.
3	The networking, dissemination and mainstreaming phase runs concurrently with Action 2 although the emphasis here is likely to be in 2006 and 2007.	Mid 2005 to end-December 2007.

