

# **Equal**

## **LISBON: CONNECTING POLICY WITH PRACTICE**

**Theme: Lifelong Learning**

**Bridges over Borders**

**Final Report**

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## SUMMARY REPORT

Lifelong learning (LLL) is a growing issue for the European Union (EU) and is one of the pivotal concerns of the Lisbon strategy of sustainable economic development. Within the EU Equal programme, the Transnational Partnership (TP) BRIDGES OVER BORDERS (BOB) has brought together organisations from cities and rural districts in five Member States.

The five transnational partners are: Learn Forever, Austria; Engage, Birmingham, U.K; Bridges to Work, Eastern Bavaria, Germany; Bohemia Switzerland Community Project, Krasna Lipa, Czech Republic and Fuzesbony Rehabilitation Centre, Hungary. In its work from 2005-2007 Bridges over Borders aimed to develop an integrated approach to the multidimensional problems of participation in lifelong learning (LLL) activity.

By pooling efforts and resources, the BOB partnership sought to develop common goals and find innovative solutions to jointly defined problems. The ultimate goal for this joint working was to develop new methods for piloting and delivering LLL in effective ways for the various communities that traditionally do not learn or are excluded from the formal learning environment. The project was designed to help these citizens to become involved and eventually to be equipped to enter the European labour market.

What are the main policy lessons to draw from the work of the Bridges over Borders partnership?

### **Break down barriers to training and employment**

There needs to be a better understanding of the target group when it comes to training and employment.

- Consider community **based, specific sector programmes for women**, especially women from Black and Asian communities.
- Consider cultural and historical issues with regards to particular communities.
- Employ community **champions** who are based locally and act as role models as one way of reaching out to communities.

### **Utilise ICT to combat labour market disadvantage**

Bridges over Borders has shown a range of ways in which new technology can help combat labour market disadvantage.

- **Invest in ICT training within communities** and allow people to use the computers as gateways to a world they are not familiar with.
- **Encourage the use of ICT in new ways.** Bridges over Borders has pioneered the use of case study DVDs of people with learning

difficulties; has indicated the potential of digital CVs (DCVs); and has shown the value of a website containing true life learner stories (Learning Voices website). Such initiatives can reach those parts of the potential labour force that have previously been overlooked.

- **Embed innovative ICT initiatives.** Don't let good work lapse.

### **Support Networks and Users**

Three aspects – local, cross-boundary networks, direct user engagement and transnational learning – have been evident in the activity of the Bridges over Borders partnership.

- **Recognise the importance of direct user involvement.** Initiatives such as learner forums and learning champions have enormous potential.
- **Bring together organisations irrespective of local authority boundaries.** In this way networks can overcome fragmentation and make their voice heard.
- **Embed cross-boundary networks and user organisations.** National and regional agencies should embed these in their policy and funding strategies. They should recognise that organisational costs need to be set aside to sustain these networks.

### **Excluded groups**

- **Target activities in order to inform people about their rights and the opportunities available to them.** This applies especially to migrants and people with disabilities.

### **Funding**

- **Make full use of the new European Social Fund (ESF) programmes.** All parts of the European Union are eligible for ESF and during 2007-2013 there will be national ESF programmes in each Member State. The experience of this study suggests that the theme of lifelong learning should be included as a core area of activity within all national ESF programmes.
- **Make full use of the new Lifelong Learning Programmes worth almost €7 billion during 2007-2013.** This report has drawn attention to the EU's investment in these programmes. The policy lessons from this report should be utilised and applied in initiatives undertaken within those programmes.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Lifelong learning (LLL) is a growing issue for the European Union (EU) and is one of the pivotal concerns of its Lisbon strategy of sustainable economic development. Within the EU EQUAL programme, the Transnational Partnership BRIDGES OVER BORDERS (BOB) has brought together organisations from cities in five Member States.<sup>1</sup> In its work from 2005-2007 Bridges over Borders aimed to develop an integrated approach to the multidimensional problems of participation in lifelong learning (LLL) activity.

By pooling efforts and resources the BOB Transnational Partnership (TP) sought to develop common goals and find innovative solutions to jointly defined problems. The partnership actively explored specific issues that impact on participation in LLL, which included methods of engagement, learning delivery, motivation, basic skills, culture and unemployment. The ultimate goal for this joint working was to develop new methods for piloting and delivering LLL in effective ways for the various communities that traditionally do not learn or are excluded from the formal learning environment. The project was designed to help these citizens to become involved and eventually to be equipped to enter the European labour market.

# 2. POLICY

The scale of current economic and social change, the rapid transition to a knowledge-based society and demographic pressures resulting from an ageing population in Europe are all challenges which demand a new approach to education and training, within the framework of lifelong learning.

In the context of these challenges, lifelong learning was given a high priority at the European Council meetings of Lisbon and Stockholm, and the European Commission's Communication on **Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality** responds to a specific mandate of the Feira European Council (21/11/2001)

Lifelong learning is defined in the Communication as "*all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective.*"

Therefore it affects all aspects of European education - mobility programmes, e-Learning, research, vocational education and recognition of qualifications.

Learning opportunities should be available to all citizens on an ongoing basis. In practice this should mean that citizens each have individual learning pathways, suitable to their needs and interests at all stages of their lives. The content of learning, the way learning is accessed, and where it takes place may vary depending on the learner and their learning requirements.

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<sup>1</sup> The five partners are: Learn Forever, Austria; Engage, Birmingham; Bridges to Work, Eastern Bavaria; Bohemia Switzerland Community Project, Krasna Lipa, Czech Republic and Fuzesbony Rehabilitation Centre, Hungary.

Lifelong learning is also about providing "second chances" to update basic skills and also offering learning opportunities at more advanced levels. All this means that formal systems of provision need to become much more open and flexible, so that such opportunities can truly be tailored to the needs of the learner.

A focus on lifelong learning has become one of the guiding principles for the development of education, training and employment policy in Europe. It has a central role to play in achieving the goal of the Lisbon Strategy: *'to make the EU the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy in the world, capable of sustaining growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.'* ([www.europeunit.ac.uk](http://www.europeunit.ac.uk))

### *EU educational objectives*

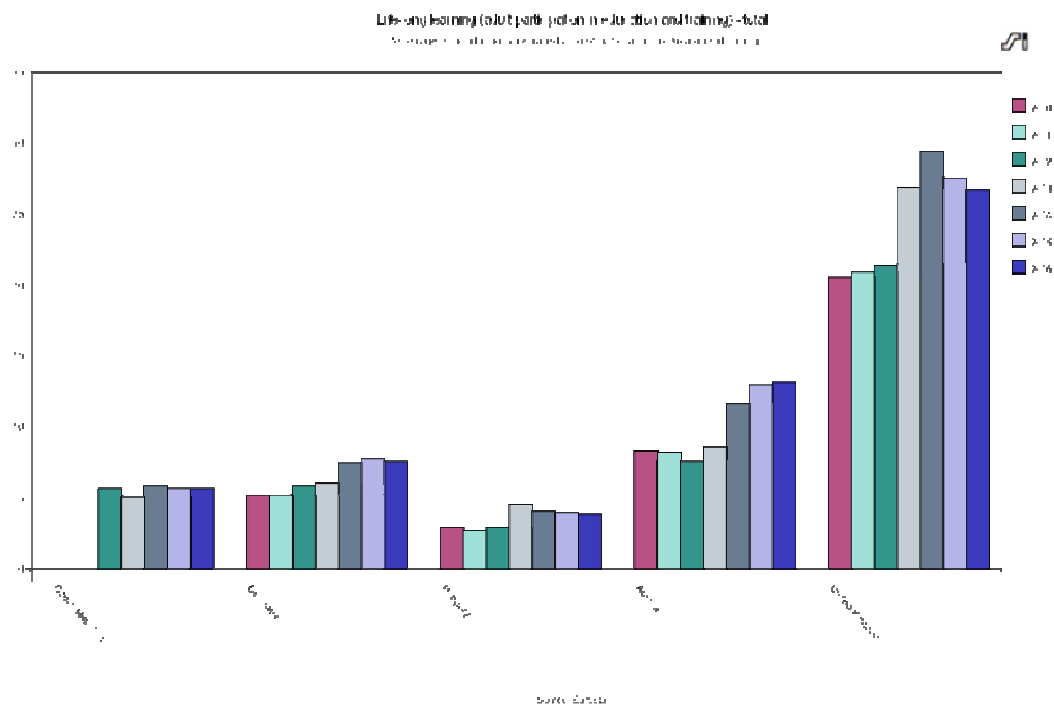
The EU has educational objectives for 2010 designed to provide all citizens with the basic education they need in a knowledge-based society. The core responsibility here lies with individual Member States but the common goals are:

- at least 85% of 22-year olds should have completed upper secondary education
- no more than 10% of those aged 18-24 should have left school before completing upper secondary education or vocational or other training;
- the total number of graduates in mathematics, science and technology should have increased by 15% while the gender imbalance should decrease
- the percentage of 15-year olds with low achievement in reading literacy should have decreased by at least 20% compared to 2000 levels;
- the average level of participation in lifelong learning of those aged 25 to 64 should be at least 12.5%. (in a four week reference period)

Reaching the Lisbon benchmarks in the field of education would imply that in 2010, 4 million more adults would participate in lifelong learning.

Close observation of the data illustrates inequalities across the board, but overall, a rather reasonable indication that the Member States involved in this project are working towards the 2010 goal.

## Lifelong learning (adult participation in education and training) – total percentage of the adult population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training



	<u>2000</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>
<b><u>EU (27)</u></b>	7.1	7.1	7.2	8.5	9.3	9.7	9.6
<b><u>Czech Republic</u></b>			5.6	5.1	5.8	5.6	5.6
<b><u>Germany</u></b>	5.2	5.2	5.8	6.0	7.4	7.7	7.5
<b><u>Hungary</u></b>	2.9	2.7	2.9	4.5	4.0	3.9	3.8
<b><u>Austria</u></b>	8.3	8.2	7.5	8.6	11.6	12.9	13.1
<b><u>UK</u></b>	20.5	20.9	21.3	26.8	29.4	27.5	26.6

Lifelong learning refers to persons aged 25 to 64 who stated that they received education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey (numerator). The denominator consists of the total population of the same age group, excluding those who did not answer the question 'participation in education and training'. Both the numerator and the denominator come from the EU Labour Force Survey. The information collected relates to all education or training whether or not relevant to the respondent's current or possible future job. From 2004, this variable is derived from two variables: 'participation in regular education' and 'participation in other taught activities'. Self-learning activities are no longer covered.

The EU is reaching a significant number of its citizens directly through its education and training programmes. The general objective of the lifelong learning programme is to contribute towards the development of the EU Community as an advanced knowledge society in accordance with the objectives of the Lisbon strategy. By supporting and supplementing action by the Member States, it aims to foster interchange, cooperation and mobility between education and training systems so that the Community becomes a 'world quality reference'.

The main responsibility for meeting these Lisbon targets falls on Member States. However, there are important European dimensions to this strategy. The implementation of the lifelong learning strategy has been driven forward in a coherent and coordinated way by the various processes, strategies, programmes and instruments involved in the field of lifelong learning at European level<sup>2</sup>:

### **Lifelong learning programme 2007-2013**

Showing how important the issue of lifelong learning is to the European Community, the new Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013 encompasses all the European programmes in the field of lifelong learning. It is based on the previous programmes for the period 2000-2006: Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci, e Learning and the Jean Monnet action. The new LLP comprises four sectoral programmes: school education (Comenius), higher education (Erasmus), vocational training (Leonardo da Vinci) and adult education (Grundtvig), and is completed by a transversal programme focusing on policy cooperation, languages, information and communication technology and dissemination and exploitation of results. Finally, a Jean Monnet programme focuses on European integration and support for certain key institutions and associations active in the field. The programme budget will be € 6,970 million for the total period 2007-2013.<sup>3</sup>

A single Community support programme in the field of education and training is more rational, coherent and effective. It should thus lead to greater interaction between the different areas, and better visibility, particularly with regard to the capacity to respond to developments in this field and better cooperation.

It is intended that it will help achieve the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy, including the environmental dimension, and of the European area for higher education (the Bologna process), particularly relevant, the objective of making education and training a global quality benchmark by 2010 and of focusing on learning foreign languages in line with the conclusions of the Barcelona European Council in 2002.

### **Legislation**

Article 149 of the EC Treaty states that the Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States through a range of actions, such as promoting mobility, exchanges of information or the teaching of the languages of the European

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<sup>2</sup> These include: Community action programmes – Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Youth; Follow-up to the Report on the Concrete Objectives of Education and Training Systems; European Employment Strategy; Task Force on Skills and Mobility; European Social Fund; EQUAL Community Initiative; European Social Agenda; 6<sup>th</sup> Research Framework Programme;

<sup>3</sup> For more information see:

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/newprog/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/newprog/index_en.html)

Union. The Treaty also contains a commitment to promote lifelong learning for all the Union's citizens by encouraging co-operation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing what they do "while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of their education systems". The Article says that, among other things, Community action should aim to develop exchanges of information on issues of common interest.

The EU's new Integrated Action Programme in Lifelong Learning came into force on 1 January 2007 and runs until the end of 2013. The new proposal is built on experience gathered from the previous generation of programmes including Socrates (education) and Leonardo da Vinci (vocational training). The format of the new programme has been informed partly by a public consultation process in which all major stakeholders in the field of education and training had the opportunity to participate.

The decision to establish a new Lifelong Learning Programme (previously known as the "Integrated action programme in the field of lifelong learning") was signed by the Presidents of the European Parliament and of the Council on 15 November 2006 and was published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 24 November 2006. It came into force on 14 December 2006.

### **3. THE EQUAL INITIATIVE**

The Equal Initiative seeks to explore and test effective ways to counter all forms of discrimination present in the labour market. Its transnational component is designed to help promote the conditions that will create a more inclusive labour market across Europe. Transnational cooperation partnerships are seen as a tool for the kind of lateral thinking required to achieve innovation.

The inclusion of lifelong learning is an expected and much appreciated development. It indicates recognition within the Commission of the importance of this issue – no doubt driven by the comprehensive range of policies, strategies and initiatives arising from this area of activity.

The TP Bridges over Borders is an integrated approach to the multidimensional problems of participation in LLL activity. Within cities and regions, project activity has been undertaken in large co-operative alliances called Development Partnerships (DPs). They have opened the potential for experiments and pilots focused on countering discrimination in the labour market. In terms of best practice, each DP involves all the project organisers, participants and partners working at the political/strategic level to achieve a common objective, with an integrated approach to find solutions to labour market problems.

## **4. THEMATIC FRAMEWORK FOR POLICY ANALYSIS**

### **Lisbon Guidelines**

At the EU Council of Ministers meeting in Lisbon in March 2000 the European Union set itself the ambition of developing as the world's most successful and dynamic economic region within the decade. The period until 2005 proved extremely disappointing in meeting these aspirations. The Council of Ministers meeting in 2005 acknowledged that limited progress had been made, and tried to provide a tighter focus on growth and jobs by outlining a set of Guidelines with 24 key tasks, the first 16 relating to broad economic policy and the last 8 relating to employment policies.

The document as a whole has a strong supply-side emphasis, seeking to draw more European citizens into the world of work. Thus the Employment Guidelines begin by setting as their Lisbon target an overall employment rate of 70% by 2010, with a specific target of a 60% rate for female employment to be achieved by that date. (Guideline 17) The following 7 Guidelines then outline a range of activities that Member States are expected to pursue in order to achieve these targets. While the Member States and the European Commission have not been explicit, the reality is that contemporary European working patterns are vastly different from those of three decades ago. In sociological terms, what we have seen since the 1970s is the demise of the traditional, male, manual working class and the appearance of a much more heterogeneous, diverse labour force. The Lisbon Guidelines are designed to help Member States to respond effectively to this new paradigm and to promote labour market participation from all sectors of the population.

Transnational Partnerships (TPs) Bridges over Borders, Concentus, Equilibrium and Wings have each been tackling a range of issues highlighted by these Guidelines. Birmingham University's policy work has examined the practices and experiences, which the different partnerships have been developing in relation to these Guidelines. From this we have selected eight common themes relating to these Guidelines that emerge from the four TPs. These relate to different aspects of European labour markets but are all concerned with reaching all sections of the population and finding ways to maximise their potential for engagement in economic activity. The eight themes overlap on occasion and their relative significance differs between the four Transnational Partnerships. But overall, there are potential lessons for policy-makers across the EU, within national government and among regional and local partners in all eight themes.

### **Our eight themes are:**

1. Outreach: Connecting with the most excluded
2. Maximising capabilities and capacities

3. Utilising Information and Communication Technologies to Address Labour Market Disadvantage
4. Encouraging women into business
5. Challenging the barriers to women
6. Working with employers and developing Corporate Social Responsibility
7. Managing labour flows within the European Single Market
8. The role of support frameworks and networks

This Report will follow this common framework. It looks at the experiences of the Transnational Partnership in these areas; highlight examples of good practice within the individual cities and regions and through their transnational work; assess the strengths and weaknesses of their joint working; and draw appropriate policy lessons.

The BRIDGES OVER BORDERS (BoB) DP has brought together partners from Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary and the United Kingdom. Their individual activities within their ESF funded programmes and their joint transnational activities have focused on many of these eight themes. The specific focus of Bridges over Borders (BoB) on Lifelong Learning has meant that the weight of its activity has been on themes such as: outreach, ICT and networks rather than, for example, maximising capabilities and capacities and women into business. In many respects BoB runs alongside Europe's wider Lifelong Learning Programme, specifically the Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig programmes focussing on vocational training and adult education. Within the BoB partnership main working groups were established on: developing sustainable networks, ICT, engaging new learners and improving skills. So what have the Bridges over Borders partnership and its individual partners achieved both transnationally and nationally?

## **5. THEMATIC ACTIVITY**

### **5.1 Outreach: connecting with the most excluded**

Given the changing composition of the EU's demography and the ever-changing face of Europe's communities, reaching out into all parts of the population is an increasingly important task. Bridges Over Borders has focused much of its activity on tackling the barriers faced by particular groups of EU citizens. It has focused attention on how to reach into particular communities vulnerable to exclusion: older people, ethnic minorities, refugees, and those with disabilities and learning difficulties. Outreach work encourages practitioners (ideally local people) to identify barriers to participation and take appropriate action to address them – maybe by encouraging the community to make demands on existing providers to ensure individual and group needs are met. This type of work can encourage the community to explore their own

learning needs and to identify opportunities for self-help in meeting learning needs, such as confidence boosting sessions and counselling.

Individual projects and joint transnational initiatives within Bridges Over Borders have undertaken a wide range of outreach work.

One particular strand has been to recognise the importance of the **direct engagement of users** themselves to maximise the effectiveness of this outreach activity.

A transnational product focusing on connecting with the most excluded in a community has been produced as a result of this project. This is the **Engaging New Learners DVD**. The product explores the impact of diverse innovative approaches to connecting with the community each partner serves. It shows five very different examples, emphasising the message that '*one size does not fit all*' and that the conditions, circumstances and the need of each community are unique. Therefore diverse and creative approaches are necessary to engage people into learning. The product highlights each partner's creative approach to linking with the most excluded in their area. These are the **Learning Points** in predominantly rural Eastern Bavaria (Germany), the **Roma Mentor Project** in Hungary, and **Mobile ICT** for women in Austria, **Learning Champions** in the UK and the **Promotion of independent living and learning for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities** in the Czech Republic.

### Case Study

#### Outreach activity: users as mentors, Hungary

The **Roma Mentor Project, in Vilmany, Hungary** involves developing a network of Roma mentors to support, advise, encourage and help Roma people to develop skills and find employment. The mentors contribute to the implementation of upgrading projects for Roma people with the regional civil organisations and local municipalities by finding the target group and engaging with them as community champions. The main target group for the Roma mentor programme is those who are registered as unemployed with at least secondary qualifications. The Roma mentors' job is to counsel their clients with personalised solutions tailored to their needs. It is envisaged that the project activities of the Roma project will contribute to the long-term social and labour market integration of unemployed Roma people. The aim is that this will, in turn, lead to a reduction in social prejudice against the Roma people, and a greater willingness by employers to include them in their workforce.

Another element of this approach is to use users to reach other potential users:

## Case Study

### Learning champions, Birmingham and Solihull

Thus Learning **Champions, Engage, Birmingham and Solihull**, is a project where current and past learners voluntarily talk with others in their communities or workplaces to let them know about the value of learning, and what is available to support them to make those first steps back into learning. They usually feed back to learning providers about issues and barriers so that the situation for learners can be improved. There are no more effective champions of learning than those who have shared all those anxieties about putting themselves into a learning situation, done it and come through it, enthusiastic and inspired. Winifred, a learning champion talks about why learning champions are important and the need for ongoing support:

*“ People are more likely to talk with their friends and peers than they are to professionals....they (learning champions) are real people with a real interest in education. If you look at what we’ve achieved, imagine what adult education will be like in the future with the right funding.”*

#### *Engagement with black and minority ethnic communities*

The growing multi-racial character of many European cities makes it all the more important that lifelong learning reaches right into the heart of these communities. Within **DP Engage, Birmingham ‘My Time’** is a therapeutic and educational project that has the central aim of increasing an individual’s self-esteem and reducing the effects of high levels of depression and anxiety. It is an eclectic approach that has been derived from a variety of Eastern and Western philosophies and therapeutic approaches. The programme is focused on black and Asian women in inner city Birmingham and looks at raising the self-esteem of this group to engage them into positive paths of learning and employment.

The Czech partners in the Bohemia Switzerland Community Project DP in Krasna Lipa have worked successfully on the *engagement of adults with learning difficulties and disabilities* and the promotion of their independent living. This project helps this target group find sustainable employment and a better quality of life. At the heart of this project is the issue of human rights and the entitlement of all adults to work and independence. This project has produced a DVD with case studies, which illustrate the journey of individual users as they strive for their rights whilst living with learning difficulties and disabilities and their claim for independence.

## **Case Study**

### **People with learning disabilities: Czech Republic**

Peter, a Czech, is a man with learning difficulties who, like many in similar circumstances, has been institutionalised in a “social welfare asylum” from a young age. Many of those living in the “asylums” have the potential to live independent and fulfilling lives. The challenge is how to break out of the circle of dependency created by the policy of closed institutions.

Peter’s story shows a possible route as a result of the Czech project. He has lived in an asylum from the age of four, but at the age of 36 won a legal process through which he gained full legal competence, the first case in the Czech Republic. Peter now has independence: learning to manage his own money, to live independently – shopping, cooking and washing –and crucially gaining employment outside the ‘institution’. Peter’s example has inspired others to claim independence.

Within DP Bridges to Work in Eastern Bavaria, Germany, *flexibility* is the dictum. Learning points and Regional Skills Centres have been set up to encourage hard-to-reach-groups to access learning. This includes women and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities. Transport is offered to work-placements and a great effort made to comprehend each individual’s circumstances and needs. Within learning points, a counsellor helps individuals to plan and guides them through the learning process. The counsellor listens to their needs and organises appropriate training ranging from language to competence skills.

## **5.2 Maximising capabilities and capacities**

This links in with what outreach workers often offer themselves or signpost communities towards – namely support services including counselling therapy. It is not unusual to find a need for confidence boosting sessions when people have been away from learning for extended periods of time for a variety of reasons. Bridges to Work also found that resources such as language classes and crèches, need to be actively offered in order to encourage access and sustain attendance.

## **5.3 Utilising Information and Communication Technologies to address labour market disadvantage**

ICT can be used to improve access to learning. Guideline 9 from the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005-08) focuses on facilitating the spread and effective use of ICT and building a fully inclusive information society. The diffusion of information and communication technologies, in line with the objectives and actions of the upcoming ‘i2010’ initiative, is also an important way to improve productivity and consequently, economic growth. This Guideline is designed to help the EU to become equipped to reap the full benefits of the increased use of ICT.

The TP Bridges over Borders and local DP partners have focused their activities on introducing ICT to people with no previous experience. Thus **Learn Forever, Austria**, has reached out to those with no previous experience.

### Case Study

#### Mobile ICT workshops, Austria

The Austrian project focuses on non-traditional female learners aged over 45 and living in the more isolated parts of Austria. This has led them to focus on mobile ICT workshops to train their users. They essentially work via learning networks. These consist of a maximum of eight learners and aim to develop computer and internet skills within the group. The aims of the learning networks are: to develop basic knowledge about computers and the internet, to raise awareness and experience of methods of self-organisation, and to motivate women to take further steps in learning.

Project co-ordinator Elke Beneke expresses the importance of the ICT dimension:

*"The computer is like a knife and fork. Women need to know how to use a computer for almost all work except cleaning and caring."*

The Transnational Partnership has helped those with little ICT experience to develop a **Digital CV (DCV)**. This showcases an individual's skills, abilities, experience and qualifications through video clips and digital photographs, combined with references by tutors and employers. There is a general recognition that for specific sectors of the disadvantaged population, for example those with mental health or physical disability, this could be an alternative way for users to present themselves. The German variant is interesting since this utilises a software programme for CV development which those with limited IT skills can use for the creation and preparation of a well-organised, clear CV. There is the capacity within it for uploading specific filmed clips, e.g. a reference from a former employer. Therefore, this is a cheaper, less complicated variant. This format could have significant potential for those at the lower end of labour market. The DCV has been mainstreamed in the UK already. Two secondary schools and the Probation Service in Solihull (West Midlands) have adopted the product to work with their students, offenders and ex-offenders – to prepare them for the labour market. The Local Strategic Partnership has also started using this with people with disabilities. Birmingham City Council is now also very keen to support the Birmingham Adult Education Service to trial this product more widely in Birmingham's schools.

The Transnational Partnership has also produced a '**Learning Voices**' **website** which is designed to showcase good practice and use real life case studies which capture people's experiences in learning. The website trialled the method of learners talking to learners by sharing experiences and stories of previously engaged learners, good practice, problems encountered and solutions found. The videos on the website provide advice and motivation for future learners to engage in further personal development, particularly those

who may have been marginalised in the education system and/or have few qualifications. The objectives of such a transnational product are to influence future learners to engage in learning, to offer resource information, and to inform policy makers, funders, practitioners/providers, and learner networks by reinforcing key messages: learning changes lives for individuals and societies, learning pays for individuals and societies; conversely, that it is sometimes not easy for new learners to engage, or for providers to engage under-represented groups. These approaches need recognition and funding.

Businesses are also using ICT to improve their own internal work organisation. Projects have been working with companies so that they can use diagnostic tools quickly and easily to boost company performance and tackle workforce issues.

### **Case Study**

#### **Encouraging business use of ICT, Bavaria**

Within the '**Bridges to Work**' project in Bavaria, SMEs have been successfully approached to train and adopt ICT as a core medium to manage and communicate their work. One very satisfied female, middle-aged owner of a farm in Bavaria stated:

*“ Investing in my learning has helped my business adapt to the technological age”.*

#### **5.4 Encouraging women into business**

At this stage this has not been an area taken up to any extent by the four partners within the BoB TP.

#### **5.5 Challenging the barriers to women**

Boosting female economic activity is a crucial component of meeting the overarching Lisbon goals. Herein lies one of the largest reserves of potential labour available to the EU. Guideline 18 states the task clearly. It calls for “resolute action to increase female participation and reduce gender gaps in employment...”

## Case Study

### Working with black and asian women, Birmingham

**My Time Engage, Birmingham** has worked on raising the self-esteem of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women to engage them into positive paths of learning and employment. This type of work is essential in identifying groups requiring support, their barriers to learning and ideas to address these barriers. Of course, such work needs cultural and religious awareness but is an exemplary example of working with communities and generating solutions to problems. Alongside many recommendations, the project has indicated a need for community based specific sector programmes for women - especially women from BME communities. All participants (19) reported an increase in their confidence and self-esteem and that they feel better informed to go out into the community in the knowledge that they will be perceived as worthwhile to the wider community. The course has enabled some previously very isolated individuals to meet others and make friendships, whilst increasing their confidence and gaining a qualification.

Within areas targeted by the **Learn Forever DP, Austria**, women with a low educational level and older women still suffer discrimination. Educational opportunities for those unaccustomed to learning are few, and barriers are still very high. The opportunities are not attractive for people who are not used to learning. They often feel inhibited or afraid, confused in the maze of educational opportunities, or they may simply lack the time, facilities (e.g. childcare) or financial resources to engage with learning opportunities. By reaching out, by communicating clearly, and by putting the learners themselves at the centre of the learning process, it becomes possible for local education providers to engage those women who have been excluded from education and training opportunities, to motivate them and to provide access to education and learning.

### 5.6 Working with employers and developing corporate social responsibility

In the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs 2005-2008 the European Council recommended that Member States should “encourage enterprises in developing their Corporate Social Responsibility.” Guideline 21 makes the case for “innovative and adaptable forms of work organisation with a view to improving quality and productivity at work.” This is the hard-edged business case for corporate social responsibility.

Bridges over Borders recognised the purpose of adopting LLL as a route into employment and the importance of trying to work with partners. Thus in Bridges over Borders, a fundamental medium has been the use of Digital CVs – specifically working with disadvantaged groups. The DCV is a transnational product and works as a video-based replacement for a traditional CV. The product has been tested with both SMEs and larger employers across the five partner countries. In some it worked better than others, but overall the DCV has been well received by the employers who have piloted it.

Within Eastern Bavaria, Germany, regional skills centres offer flexible training adapted to the need of the target group and the SMEs to which the project has access. To ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of their work the centres work in close co-operation with companies and people in the region in order to provide customised training. As a result SMEs have also recognised the value of training their employees. Through co-operation with businesses and the employment agency, a new pool of potential learners and opportunities for new courses are created for the educational providers. At the **ERAK training centre in Northern Hungary**, training is provided to learners based on the needs of the SMEs – thereby enhancing the chances of employment for the trainees.

## **5.7 Managing labour flows within the European Single Market**

The development of the European Single Market and its recent enlargement has had several unforeseen consequences. Within the context of lifelong learning, the discussion in this section will be around the migration of skilled labourers mainly from Eastern Europe to Western Europe since 2004 and the resultant consequence of skills shortages within the former member states.

Guideline 20 has the stated goal to “improve matching of labour market needs through ...removing obstacles to mobility for workers across Europe.”

We are living in an era of unprecedented global movement. This presents new dilemmas to policy makers seeking to address weaknesses in their local educational and training infrastructure. An unexpected consequence of providing initiatives to address a local skill shortage in one area is that the newly trained workers re-locate to use their new skills in another member state, due to wide differentials in wages and social costs.

This situation is both complex and fluid. But it is important to note that this dearth of skills has led to an influx of other workers from countries such as Russia and the Ukraine, whilst in some cases there are the first signs of a return home of Diaspora workers as a result of assured employment opportunities and significantly increased wages. Currently, a significant skills leakage from East to West is still ongoing and labour flows evidently need to be managed.

From within the DP, an example of migration transfer from East to West comes from Northern Hungary from the ERAK training centre in **Miskolc** where skilled training is offered in carpentry, plumbing and metalwork. All the trainees on these courses are male and it is reported that the majority of them leave the area shortly after completion of training in search of better economic prospects. This is leading to a skills shortage within the area itself – not untypical of many eastern European countries.

## **5.8 The role of support frameworks and networks**

21<sup>st</sup> Century Europe is an increasingly networked society. This report shows that the successful achievement of Lisbon goals depends on the benefits of a network society and supporting frameworks being spread widely. Three

dimensions to this issue are evident from the work of this Transnational Partnership:

- the importance of local, grass-roots networks;
- the potential of self-organisation and user engagement;
- and the value of transnational learning.

#### *Local, grass-roots networks*

Bridges to Work has brought together groupings with common interests that did not previously exist. By bringing together people and intermediary organisations it has helped strengthen their joint capacity to promote lifelong learning in their region.

#### **Case Study**

##### **Working across administrative boundaries, E.Bavaria**

**Bridges to Work DP, Eastern Bavaria**, Germany is a partnership specially created for this programme, which brought together within Eastern Bavaria the city of Passau, four district councils and four Volkshochschule into a company in order to tackle common problems that cross local boundaries. For Perdita Wingerter, its Managing Director the key issue has been to get all the agencies to work together in order to overcome institutional and district boundaries.

*" We have begun to do this and to get the technical colleges and the semi-private providers of nurse training to work together. It's a question of economies of scale. We don't need expensive research. But we need to get the key players together."*

EQUAL has provided that impetus, which has enabled partnerships to co-operate together and overcome parochialism.

#### *User engagement*

A number of projects have developed an active engagement with their users and drawn them into their policy and planning process. The **Learners' Forums, Engage, Birmingham**, which bring together adult learners in local areas to influence policy and planning around adult education provision, are a good example here. These groups of learners come together to discuss their experiences of learning and local learning needs, gaps and barriers. Their focus of activity may vary and include: research – finding out what people think and what the issues are; discussing and making sense of experience, and issues; reaching out and encouraging local people into learning; dialogue with local providers; campaigning and lobbying. They are the direct voice of the learners themselves.

#### *Transnational learning*

Another aspect of networking within the EQUAL programme is that of the transnational working groups. All practitioners indicated how valuable they

have found the transnational activity. Participants have learned by seeing, meeting and discussing. By working together partners have developed innovative ideas and new products. This was especially valuable for partners from the new Member States. As Lucie Martinkova, Manager of Education, Bohemian Switzerland Community Centre, commented:

*"I have learnt about peer champions in the community. and the value of Learner Forums. I am wondering if I can apply this to the Roma community where we are."*

## **5. CONCLUSIONS: The key messages for policy makers**

The fulfilment of a successful Lisbon strategy is a long-term task for the European Union. The creation of a Single Market of this size, composed of 27 member states with very diverse social and cultural traditions, educational standards, technological proficiency and welfare systems inevitably means that the establishment of fully functioning, optimal labour markets will take decades.

Currently, too many people fail to enter or to remain in the labour market because of a lack of skills, or due to skills mismatches. To enhance access to employment for all ages, raise productivity levels and quality at work, the EU needs higher and more effective investment in human capital and lifelong learning for the benefit of individuals, enterprises, the economy and society. Proficiency and efficiency are increasingly valued by employers and can boost an individual's career potential in terms of pay, promotion and role. LLL is recognised by the EU as fundamental for workers to keep abreast with the latest developments within their field of work. Education, training and LLL go hand-in-hand and are vital aspects of a vibrant economy. The EU has educational objectives for 2010 designed to provide all citizens with the basic education they need in a knowledge-based society.

The purpose of transnational programmes such as Equal is to gain greater understanding of the realities of the contemporary European labour market; to allow innovation to occur; and to test out potential new developments that if applied more widely will help the EU to meet the goals set in its Lisbon guidelines. Learning from the project should influence the understanding of different communities and processes of working and make the 2007-2013 Lifelong Learning programme even more effective. The following evidence-base policy conclusions are drawn from the experiences of partners within the Bridges over Borders Transnational Partnership:

### **User engagement and voice of the learner**

**There needs to be greater impetus on finding more innovative ways of engaging end users.** The trend towards stronger citizen participation means that the ability to have more innovative and effective **engagement** with user

groups is crucial. The **voice of the end user** has to be embedded into the design, management and delivery of services and activities.

### **Breaking down barriers to training and employment**

**There needs to be a better understanding of the target group when it comes to training and employment.** The diverse nature of contemporary European society means that policy-makers need to be flexible in their approaches. When they are looking at the disadvantaged sectors of society they have to recognise that one size does not fit all. Amongst the possibilities for improving the accessibility of lifelong learning policy-makers should:

- Consider community-**based specific sector programmes for women**, especially women from black and Asian communities
- Consider cultural and historical issues with regards to particular communities.
- Employ community **champions** who are situated locally and act as role models as one way of reaching out to communities.

### **Utilising ICT to combat labour market disadvantage**

Bridges over Borders has shown a range of ways in which new technology can help combat labour market disadvantage. Policy makers need to:

- Consider how to **invest in ICT training within communities** and allow people to use the computers as gateways to a world they are not familiar with and thus open new opportunities and aspirations.
- **Encourage the use of ICT in new ways.** Bridges over Borders has pioneered the use of case study DVDs of people with learning difficulties; has indicated the potential of Digital CVs; and has shown the value of a Learning Voices website. Such initiatives can reach those parts of the potential labour force that have previously been overlooked.

### **Support frameworks and networks**

For lifelong learning there needs to be more in terms of policy around the issues of networking, user engagement and their importance. Policy makers need:

- **To recognise the importance of direct user involvement.** Initiatives such as Learner Forums and Learning Champions have enormous potential. User forums are significant and invaluable as they are the voice of learners and residents. They are not one-off events. They enable learners and residents to have an ongoing dialogue with each other, and with providers.

- **Bring together organisations irrespective of local authority boundaries.** In this way networks can overcome fragmentation and make their voice heard. National and regional agencies should embed this outlook in their policy and funding strategies and recognise that organisational costs need to be set aside to sustain these networks.

### **Excluded groups**

**There is an urgent need for more targeted activities informing people about their rights and opportunities available to them.** This applies especially to migrants and people with disabilities. Both groups are vulnerable within the labour market. Many migrants work without contracts in the informal economy, while people with disabilities are often undervalued and therefore never learn of new opportunities and raised aspirations. The in the Czech Republic worked in a targeted manner specifically to find sustainable employment and a better quality of life for adults with disabilities and learning difficulties.

### **Funding**

There are two key policy messages on funding.

- **Firstly, make full use of the new European Social Fund (ESF) programmes.** For the 2007-2013 period the EU has decided that the pilot programmes such as EQUAL that it ran during the 2000-2006 period, designed to tackle specific issues of disadvantage, should be mainstreamed within the core Structural Fund programmes financed by the EU. This primarily means ESF. All parts of the Union are eligible for ESF and during 2007-2013 there will be national ESF programmes in each Member State. The experience of this study suggests that the theme of lifelong learning should be included as a core area of activity within all national ESF programmes.
- **Secondly, make full use of the new Lifelong Learning Programmes worth almost €7 billion during 2007-2013.** This report has drawn attention to the EU's investment in these programmes. The policy lessons from this report should be utilised and applied in initiatives undertaken within those programmes over the next seven years.

### **Transnational learning**

**To recognise the added value of transnational programmes and the transferability of the transnational products created as a result of transnational working.** All citizens should benefit from the Single Market. Those engaged with the lower end of the labour market have as much to learn as the 'high-flyers'. Transnational programmes allow an opportunity for this to happen and for fruitful exchanges and new policy initiatives so that "it is not so hard to work with strangers." **The European Commission should embed this dimension into its future programmes.**

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