

EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF THE IMPART NETWORK

SUMMARY OF FINAL REPORT

1. Introduction

IMPART is an ESF transnational learning network led by Berlin Senate and involving twelve partners from seven member states¹. It is focused on improving the labour market prospects of migrant and ethnic minority (MEM) groups across the EU.

The external evaluation was a two-stage process. This final stage was conducted through winter 2011/12. It comprised an inclusive process with the following steps:

- Review of IMPART documents – including administrative sources (such as the funding agreement) and partnership working papers
- Participation in the study visits to England and Sweden
- Participation in the Thematic Working Groups (TWG) Workshop in Berlin, December 2011
- Interviews with Management Committee members and the network moderators
- An electronic survey of IMPART peers and representatives of host organisations
- Analysis and reporting
- Presentation to final events in Brussels and Berlin

2. Background

The overall objective of IMPART is to:

“...promote the use of Structural Funds to increase the participation of migrants and ethnic minorities in employment as well as to enhance the effectiveness of policies focusing on the following main themes:

1. Assessment and validation: Valuing immigrants’ competencies and qualifications
2. Fostering anti-discrimination skills as a professional competence
3. Integrated territorial approaches”

The partnership drew upon the existing evidence base on MEM employment (created by EQUAL and other EU programmes) in determining these themes. They also took a key decision not to focus their resources on gathering further examples of good practice in this field. Instead, they developed a peer review process that adopted a wider and more diagnostic perspective. This extended beyond the scope of good practice to examine the factors in the local *ecology* affecting the potential sustainability of projects.

In this important respect the IMPART network links its focus on the target group with wider questions about the effectiveness of ESF support in the operating environment.

3. The IMPART network model and tools

The structure and overall management of the IMPART network are identified as key strengths. Most partners reported high levels of satisfaction with this aspect of the network and the Technical Secretariat was described as being “hard-working”, “focused” and “enthusiastic.” Although some partners would have preferred a more devolved decision-making structure, the IMPART experience underlines the difficulty of striking the right balance.

¹ In addition to Berlin, the IMPART network includes Andalucía, Aragon, Baden-Württemberg, England, Estonia, Flanders, Germany, Greece, Scotland, Spain and Sweden.

During the initial stages, the network effectively mobilised regional experts in the development of the IMPART tools. This active involvement of ‘peers’ contributed to the production of a robust set of resources, as well as fostering a strong sense of ownership amongst all stakeholders. A small team of consultants, the “Network Moderators”, guided much of this work and have been responsible for many of the network’s key network outputs.

IMPART has produced a suite of products to support its peer review process. This comprises:

- The IMPART benchmarking tool (incorporating the thematic Critical Success Factors)
- The Peer Review Manual (Providing guidance to peers)
- The baseline reports (State of the art reports for each participant region/Member State)
- The project reports (providing details of the projects reviewed by peers)

In addition to this, IMPART has produced *Findings* reports from each of the ten peer review visits, as well as an overall Interim and Final report.

All of these documents have been produced to a very high standard. This was noted by the network’s European Commission representative:

“Out of the networks I manage, IMPART has the best reports. They are well-written, of high quality and extremely clear. This reflects the professional approach we have seen from the consultants”.

4. The IMPART peer review process

IMPART recruited 40 peers from across the entire partnership. After training in the network process, they participated in 10 peer review visits covering 14 projects.

City/Region/Country	IMPART Theme
Berlin, Germany	Assessment and validation
Andalusia, Spain	Integrated Territorial Approaches
Flanders, Belgium	Fostering anti-discrimination skills
Tallinn, Estonia	Fostering anti-discrimination skills
Glasgow, Scotland	Fostering anti-discrimination skills
Baden Wurttemberg, Germany	Integrated Territorial Approaches
Aragon, Spain	Integrated Territorial Approaches
Munich, Germany	Integrated Territorial Approaches
London, England	Assessment and validation
Stockholm, Sweden	Integrated Territorial Approaches

A final peer study visit, scheduled to take place in Athens in October 2011 was cancelled.

Peers’ main motivating factors were a willingness to share their experience; an interest in how others’ tackle shared problems; and a desire to learn about new assessment approaches.

“As I set up, monitor and evaluate projects with migrant entrepreneurship in Flanders, it is interesting to meet organisations and people who have the same goals. Moreover where you do a peer review study it makes you reflect your own activities and enriches your projects.”

A very high proportion of peers felt that their expectations were met.

"We did not have very high expectations after experience of previous transnational activity. But this network is quite different. It has more than met our expectations and we have already learned a lot."

"The project in Stockholm offered us helpful ideas and experience for our development process. Our network on local level have many links to the structure in the Stockholm project. Mainstreaming is also a permanent issue in our work, so after the visit we have some new ideas on this way."

There were also high satisfaction levels relating to the preparation and support given to peers in advance. During the visits the practical resources – particularly the benchmarking tool – were identified as being particularly helpful. And although the review process is intensive and demanding, only 4% of survey respondents thought it had been too long.

Perhaps as a result of this intensity, there is evidence that peers bonded strongly during the review process in a way that is difficult to facilitate in an experience of this type.

76% of responding peers believed that the feedback received by projects would improve their mainstreaming prospects. However, they were mindful of the sensitive nature of the peer review process, which requires tact and diplomacy from the review team. Peers also thought that there should be more time for the provision and discussion of their final observations.

All participating peers viewed participation as a positive experience with a wide range of benefits derived at the individual and organisational level.

"I learned a lot from the other peers and the hosts. I learned a lot about Estonia and the situation there. And of course it was a really good opportunity to network with other experts in my field."

"Great experience of intensive teamwork, chance to look how ESF projects perform, how are policy makers involved, what works, how partnerships are established and effective cooperation..."

"For my organisation the peer review format is an interesting evaluation tool that we might consider using in future evaluation projects. We now have an experience in how and what settings it tends to work better."

A high proportion of peers believe that the IMPART methodology has the potential to improve future ESF investment, not only in relation to migrants and ethnic minorities.

Feedback from the host organisations indicates that the opportunity to share good practice was a key driver in their participation. In some cases there were sensitivities relating to the overall process as well as to some of the findings. However, of the seven organisations that responded, two had already made changes as a result of the experience whilst another three thought they were likely to do so in future.

5. Results, impact and dissemination

The IMPART network has generated a significant volume of high quality outputs. The peer review resources represent a strong legacy that can be utilised in future by others. In addition, IMPART has created a video² illustrating the network approach, as well as producing a series of newsletters.

The network has produced ten Peer Review Findings reports, which are the principal outputs from the study visits. These are quite technical documents, structured around the Critical Success Factors (CSFs), providing a valuable insight into the state of the art in supporting MEM employment across Europe. In a number of cases organisations have used these to evidence the quality of their work. In others, such as Baden-Wurttemberg, the Managing Authority has already identified service improvements adopted by a training organisation as a result of the report's findings.

² www.impart.eu

The network has also produced two reports, drawing together the key messages from IMPART and identifying seven issues likely to influence projects' prospects of sustainability, as follows:

- The need to include migrants' *voices* in ESF-funded projects to improve projects' delivery and strategy
- The importance of monitoring the impact of ESF-funded projects for long-term impact
- The need for sufficient resources to be in place to mainstream good practice
- The importance of engaging employers as well as supporting the beneficiaries
- Working with key stakeholders to improve projects' delivery and legacy
- Ensuring the project is contributing to relevant policy frameworks
- The importance of assessing and validating migrants' skills to help them move into appropriate work

In terms of contractual commitments, the IMPART contract with the Commission agreed eight results which the network would generate. Seven of these have either been fully or partly met. The eighth, which relates to influencing the ESF Operating Programmes, has not fully coincided with the network's lifespan and will have to be taken forward by individual partners.

The short duration of such networks also makes it difficult to fully assess the impact of their activities. Although beyond the scope of IMPART, future work in this area should include consideration of the return on investment, perhaps through the use of Social Return on Investment (SROI) methodology.

Overall, IMPART has generated high quality outputs, a valuable methodology and important messages for all stakeholders. Although there has been a growing focus on dissemination as the network ends, there is a clear view amongst partners that this aspect of the network's activity has not been its strongest.

Initially, partners spent time developing a dissemination strategy, which comprised activity at the Managing Authority and EU levels. However, during the middle part of the network this faded into the background, partly due to capacity issues and the need to focus on developing the peer process and review visits. As the network concludes there has been more focused activity – at both the EU and MA levels – however there are concerns amongst partners that this may be “too little, too late.”

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

Aims and Objectives

IMPART is widely regarded as an ambitious and focused network addressing an important labour market priority; the labour market inequalities facing migrants and ethnic minorities. Through the development and implementation of a distinctive peer review model, the network has sought to go beyond the customary gathering of good practice. In doing so it has complemented the focus on a particular client group with an attempt to analyse the factors underpinning sustainable ESF investment decisions.

Overall, the network is to be commended on scale of its ambition and on the progress that has been made.

Partnership model and operation

The European Commission recognises IMPART as a good network with strong leadership, a clear structure and a focus on achieving results. As the Commission representative notes:

"In the beginning they set themselves their goals and they will achieve them in the exact time they said – this is good."

However, the network has faced a number of challenges – most notably the decision to cancel the peer review visit to Greece – and views on the decision-making process vary within the partnership. IMPART's journey illustrates the difficulty in striking the right balance around partner involvement in the overall management. A number of factors, including turnover of key personnel, have exacerbated these issues, but IMPART has now completed its work with the network largely intact.

The IMPART methodology

IMPART has established a formidable methodology which has provided the engine for the partnership's outputs. The foundations of the approach, the Critical Success Factors, are rooted in the body of evidence already established at a European level by previous programmes such as EQUAL. The active involvement of experts in determining these factors provided a distinctive and genuine transnational opportunity. This unusual level of co-operation, where peers collaborate in genuine cross-border problem solving, has continued through the peer review visits.

The strength of this methodology – and its wider potential – is clear from this evaluation, and amply expressed by the network partners:

"Through this we can create a wonderful transformation team. This transnational peer process allows us – as Europeans – to truly work together, learning from one another in new ways. Until now we have lacked a structure and model to do this."

However, throughout the lifetime of the network the methodology has been continually improved and it remains *work in progress*. In the last months of IMPART key alterations have been made to simplify and consolidate the benchmarking toolkit. It is also evident that issues of language and cultural complexity provide serious challenges to even the strongest methodology.

The peer review is ultimately a people process and as such it is only as good as the people involved. During the evaluation we have seen peers of varying calibre applying the methodology with varying degrees of success. The evaluation has also underlined the key role assumed by the Network Moderators, and the need for expert facilitation with this process.

Looking ahead, it would be helpful to have an understanding of the process costs, which will be a key determinant in its adoption by organisations in future.

Outputs

IMPART has produced a wide range of outputs, including newsletters and videos. The methodology has been considered in detail, and we have also noted the high quality of supporting materials attached to it.

In addition, the Peer Review Findings provide a very useful and interesting insight into the workings of some of the best projects working within this partnership. For anyone interested in how successful organisations working with migrants function, this is a very valuable resource. IMPART has therefore made an important contribution to this area through the production of these reports.

Finally, the two reports produced by the network at the interim and final stage are well-structured, clearly written and compelling. The peer review process has generated a large volume of pertinent points and experiences, which are well marshaled within the reports to support the recommendations. These are set out in a clear tabular format and aimed specifically at the different actors. Consequently, they are consistent with the canon of high quality products generated by the network.

Dissemination and legacy

There is considerable interest amongst the partnership to apply this methodology more widely. The prospects for this appear strong, and partners are actively investigating some of the issues (such as translation), which have been identified in the report. A positive legacy would therefore be to see the network approach replicated in a wide variety of settings beyond IMPART's lifespan.

The network's partners have greater control over the future of this part of the legacy than they do over the part relating to the policy messages. As the network concludes, success in the latter area will rely heavily on the effectiveness of IMPART's dissemination activities. Although we conclude that this has not been one of IMPART's strengths, the network's reputation and profile are high amongst the ESF networks, and the timing in relation to the new Cohesion Fund programmes may offer scope to engage with policy makers.

Recommendations

The final report identifies the key issues arising from this evaluation and sets out 33 recommended actions for actors to consider. The table below summarises the key actions identified.

Key Issues		Actors and summary actions
No	Issue	
1	Supporting future transnational networks	European Commission <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continuity of link personnel• Promote access to EC support teams
2	Network management	Lead Partner & Partners <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure continuity of key personnel• Assign lead responsibilities amongst the network partners• Expect to assume an active role with functional responsibilities
3	Network structure	Lead Partner & Partners <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Simple structures• Separate strategic and operational bodies• Comprehensive workplan & tasks from start
4	Dissemination/ Mainstreaming	Lead Partner, EC, Partners/MAs, Peers <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dissemination plan first six months of the network• Appoint network dissemination champions• Provide network guidelines on dissemination• Commission research to identify best practice in the establishment and management of short life network websites• Broker links with other DGs and relevant EU contact
5	Securing the IMPART legacy	Lead Partner, EC, Partners/MAs, Peers <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue web access to IMPART resources – video, reports etc• Facilitate organisational access to IMPART knowledge and expertise• Explore potential to implement the IMPART model in a regional or national setting with a different client focus• Feed the IMPART lessons into EU discussions on new Operating Programmes• Promote the key lessons via wider networks• Promote the IMPART lessons and models within their organisations and wider networks

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