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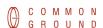Katrin Wladasch, Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights (BIM), Austria
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Abstract: Around the world, inequalities exist around boundaries of race, social class, gender, disability, religious beliefs and sexual orientation, often resulting from past and current discriminatory practices. Governments have taken certain measures, including enacting policies such as positive action, to remedy such discrimination. This paper provides a comparative analysis of perceptions of the impact of positive action in seven EU and three non-EU countries. The study adopted participatory methods including consensus workshops, interviews and policy analysis to obtain data from designers of positive action. Findings are discussed, conclusions drawn and wide-ranging recommendations are made at the EC, individual countries and organisational levels.

Background

THE INTENTION OF equal opportunities policies has been to address the problems of discrimination and inequity. There is however, a need to change institutional practice. Women, disabled workers and other minority groups continue to face discriminatory barriers in the workplace, which prevent them from enjoying equal opportunity (Povall, 1990; Crompton and Le Feuvre, 2000). There remains a vibrant debate about the most appropriate way to tackle inequality and promote diversity at work and in

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the delivery of services (Edwards and McAllister, 2002; Bagshaw, 2004; Stratigaki, 2005; Bajawa and Woodhall, 2006; Young, Mountford and Skrla, 2006). Woodhams and Danieli (2004) explain how the current UK approach to equality, at least in terms of legislation, attempts to ensure that people are treated equally or 'the same' (or no less equally) in spite of their differences. This may take no account of existing inequalities or inbuilt structural and psychological disadvantages.

There is widespread recognition that the problems of discrimination and inequality in employment and service provision will not disappear on their own. Appropriate strategies are required in order to nurture a workforce that comprises a variety of talents and reflects the diverse communities being served (Archibong, 2006; Archibong *et al.,* 2006; Dhami *et al.,* 2006). In some instances, deficiencies in relation to equal opportunities policies within organisations have been cited (Bagilhole and Stephens, 1999), and a reluctance to implement them where they are in place (Carter, 2000).

The literature shows considerable differences in the types of positive action initiatives implemented, although this is perhaps not surprising, as they are normally developed with local issues in mind (Iganski *et al*., 1998; Alexander, 2000). Consequently, there is limited evidence of what outcome criteria characterise 'successful' interventions and there is a more general shortage of evaluative literature for positive action initiatives (Band and Parker, 2002; Dhami *et al*., 2006). Whilst Stephanopolous and Edley's (1995) review of the effectiveness of affirmative action in the USA found that overall, the extent to which affirmative action had expanded minority employment in skilled positions was unclear, the programmes considered were effective, but could possibly be implemented in a fairer manner. Evaluation of the effectiveness of affirmative action statutory laws and policy instruments in the Netherlands has been seen largely as a 'bureaucratic monstrosity' (Glastra *et al*., 1998) due to the added burden it places on employers.

Agocs' (2002) study in Canada argued that formalised employment equity programmes, with mandatory goal-setting and vigorous enforcement by government authorities, has a significant impact on results. The study admonished organisations to adopt 'mandatory equality policy rather than voluntary for employers…' (Agocs, 2002: 22). Whilst the author noted that relative to other countries, Canadian employment equity legislation was advanced and broad in scope and coverage, the gap between the promise of the policy and the limited results was attributable to a lack of support for implementation and enforcement by political leaders and employers and a lack of commitment and resources. Thomas and Jain (2004) attempted to look at the potential lessons for South Africa based upon the Canadian experience and concluded that 'employment equity must be viewed from both macro- and micro-perspectives… the real challenge existed to go beyond compliance in the ensuring of top management commitment to the sentiments that underlie the legislation to the holistic development of people and organisational cultures that are free of historical discrimination' (p. 51).

All of the 'success' factors discussed have been associated with changes in the individuals themselves. However, several authors have noted that individuals do not operate within a vacuum at work, but within the broader context of an organisation in which factors such as perceptions of fairness, threat, and utility can individually or collectively impact on the success of positive action programmes (e.g. Brew and Garavan, 1995; Kottke and Agars, 2005). Anderson (2004) claims that positive action training can help raise awareness and understanding of organisational attitudes but warns that such initiatives will have a limited

impact unless they are implemented as part of a wider portfolio of measures designed to induce change at an organisational level.

The Present Study

The research sought to help the European Commission develop a framework for better understanding the role of positive action measures in preventing or remedying discrimination, building on the knowledge of the existing legal framework set out in other studies. It also sought to help the Commission gain a better insight into the kind of practical positive action measures already being taken in the European Union (and in the EFTA-EEA countries), as well as the possible costs and benefits of the positive action measures. The study also examined how legal frameworks, policies and practices of positive action in the European Union compare with Canada, United States and South Africa.[1]

The study involved those responsible for designing and implementing positive action measures. These include Human Resources personnel, Equality and Diversity Leads, Cohesion and Service Development Managers, Chief Executives and other Senior Managers with responsibility for equality. Specific objectives included exploring the:

- historical, social and political context within which positive action measures have been developed across both employment and service provision.
- perceptions, understanding and the rationale for developing and implementing strategies for positive action, covering the equality grounds of age, disability, race, religion and belief and sexual orientation. Aspects of gender which intersect with other grounds were also considered.
- outcomes and impact of positive action measures in participating organisations.
- perceived effectiveness of the actions undertaken and how this could be improved.

Methods

A comparative case study approach was adopted, exploring practical applications of positive action measures in selected non-European (South Africa, Canada and the United States) and European Union countries (Austria, France, Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Sweden and the UK). The non-European countries were selected because of their history regarding anti-discrimination laws and affirmative action measures. For Canada and the United States, the measures are well established, but in South Africa the measures and legal framework were more recent.

The European countries were selected on the basis of geographical importance, covering different regions in Europe, size and experience of positive action measures on the different grounds of equality. In addition, we also considered the need to work with countries represented by members of the project team to ensure ease of access to the required participating organisations.

The comparative case study data were collected by means of participatory methods, including: a consensus workshop which encouraged maximum participation of all stakeholders

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[1] The study "International perspectives on positive action measures. A comparative analysis in the European Union, Canada, the United States and South Africa" has been financed under the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity - PROGRESS (2007-2013).

(Spencer 1989; Stanfield 2002), interviews conducted with key actors in order to generate more feedback and guide ongoing research; and the analysis of policy documents of participating organisations.

Consensus workshops were undertaken in nine of the eleven case study countries. It was not possible to conduct workshops in France and Sweden for logistical and political reasons, respectively. In France, conflicting interpretations of positive action held by different stakeholders made it difficult to organise a workshop, whilst in Sweden the changes in working arrangements with our contacts proved untenable.

Excepting France and Sweden, half-day consensus workshops were held in each country. During each workshop, two discussion groups were held with representatives from all stakeholders including employers covering private, public and third sector organisations, campaigning bodies representing disadvantaged groups, employer associations and trades unions. A total of 272 people took part in 18 heterogeneous small group discussions.

Themes elicited from workshops were further validated by conducting targeted follow-on face-to-face or telephone interviews with 141 individuals identified from consensus workshops who were willing to discuss their views in more detail. The interviews lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes and were semi-structured in nature.

Findings

Understanding of Positive Action

The study highlights confusion and inconsistency in the terminologies used to describe positive action measures across the study countries. Whilst European countries were more likely to talk about 'positive action', the term 'affirmative action' was more commonly used in the non-European countries. In comparison with target setting, there was very limited use of quotas and their strong association with preferential treatment attracted a negative response amongst study participants.

There was no consistent understanding of positive action amongst members of the European countries taking part in the study. Participants representing countries in Europe displayed differing levels of familiarity with the term and varying levels of reluctance to use it to describe their activities. For some countries such as UK, Ireland and Hungary, positive action was understood as constituting *specific measures to redress past discrimination directed towards a particular group and with the aim of equalising the position of that group with that of the majority societ*y. There was a general consensus that positive action measures should *equalise social inequalities, eliminate disadvantage and even compensate for disadvantage*. Participants made associations between positive action and *the removal of barriers, social justice, global justice, advocacy and empowerment*. Nevertheless, despite providing us with a clear definition for this term, not all participants considered 'positive action' to adequately capture or reflect their understanding. For example, in the UK, positive action was described as a 'conceptual mess' and suggestions were forwarded to replace it with the term 'balancing measures' as a terminology that would make it more easily understood and acceptable to the general public.

In other European countries, the term 'positive action' was seen in a different light. For example in the Netherlands, participants considered positive action measures to be an old-fashioned strategy and struggled with the concept. They preferred to see positive action as

an important tool within a wider diversity management strategy which included all methods designed to counteract the effects of exclusion, discrimination and stereotyping of specific groups, with the aim of creating a more equitable society. There was common agreement that positive action measures had to be implemented as part of a multi-angled, coherent strategy in order to be successful and effective in the long run. If not supported by the whole society, any measures aiming at increasing equality were considered useless.

In Sweden, 'positive action' was not a commonly used term nor was it found in the relevant legislation, which speaks about 'active measures' and 'positive discrimination'. Confusion arose as Swedish legislation and policy stress the need to take active measures, yet on the other hand impose a number of bans and restrictions, including a restrictive case-law. Most of the people interviewed in Sweden were unable to provide a definition of positive action because of its perceived complexity. In Austria, participants placed greater emphasis upon the benefits of positive action measures and stressed that positive action measures were a gain for everybody and should therefore be taken into account in all sectors of society and for all groups needing it. There was opposition expressed to the prospect of positive action simply providing opportunities for preferential treatment for one or two groups. Rather the approach preferred was to adopt an attitude of openness to who needs which kind of empowerment and at what time. For this process to be effective, creating awareness about difference and discrimination in its structural dimension was considered essential.

While the conceptualisation of positive action varies widely across non European countries involved in the study, some broad generalisations can be made. Most participants generally agreed that affirmative action constitutes a set of specific measures to redress past or present discrimination targeted at particular groups that have been marginalised within society. There were differences, however, in terms of the perception and implementation of affirmative action measures, and the legislative and policy basis for these measures across countries. Unlike Canada and the USA, that have a long history of affirmative action, in South Africa it has a very nascent history; hence it presents an interesting contrast with the North American countries. Participants in South Africa described their experiences with intense emotion, which was reflected in the language used to explain their understanding and engagement with affirmative action. Owing to the legacy of apartheid and segregation among different racial groups, affirmative action in South Africa is well received as a policy, though there were misgivings about its implementation.

In the USA, there was a perception of close association of affirmative action with quotas and other forms of preferential treatment within the consciousness of the population. As such, preferential treatment aimed at increasing the representation of specific groups has often attracted a negative response. This was not helped by the negative media portrayal of affirmative action as a means of giving opportunities to undeserving and unqualified people, which serves to undermine its value. However the majority of the participants in the USA expressed their understanding of affirmative action as a set of strategies used, mostly by employers and educational institutions, to provide equal opportunities and fairness related to obtaining employment or admission to universities and colleges.

Although the understanding of affirmative action in Canada is based on experience within work or in an organisational context, there was a general consensus that *Positive action is ensuring equal access, full participation and advancement in all aspects of Canadian society: social, political, economic and cultural.* In addition, there were other sentiments, involving the need for a strategic, thoughtful approach to overcome historical barriers and to address

systemic change. There was also some discussion about the fact that in Canada there are no quotas, but there are goals set for specific minority groups and in relation to the difference between the terms 'equal' (treating people the same) and 'equity' (treating people fairly). Whilst participants in the Canadian workshop frowned at any reference to reverse discrimination, workshop participants in South Africa and the USA described affirmative action as measures to reverse discrimination.

Drivers for Positive Action

The study identified legislation as the main driver for positive action. Other key drivers include altruism, moral/ethical considerations, business reasons, demographic changes, corporate social responsibility, organisational policy and grassroots efforts. Negative factors were seen to drive positive action in some instances where organisations set up programmes for political and financial gains with little genuine interest in the essence of positive action.

The legislative framework in most EC countries placed specific duties on employers and service providers to be proactive in ensuring equal treatment to everyone, regardless of difference. In Ireland nine grounds (gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community) are covered by this legislation, whilst six are covered in the UK (age, disability, gender, race, religion and sexual orientation). In Austria, equality legislation was classed as a positive measure *per se*, owing to its underlying aim of achieving equality of opportunities, remedying deficits and recognising everyone's rights. In contrast to these countries, legislation was not considered to have played an important role in promoting positive action in countries such as the Netherlands, where organisations did not agree with moves towards introducing positive measures and openly disobeyed laws to collect data on the ethnic background of their employees with no sanctions imposed by the government.

In addition to legislative requirements, the prospect of improving organisational business performance was seen as a major driving force for the implementation of positive action measures. In response to changes in the population, organisations were increasingly using such measures to create workplaces that represented local communities through targeted recruitment and retention practices. In countries such as the Netherlands, Austria, Sweden and Ireland, participants talked about positive action in the context of good business practice and saw promoting equality through positive action as giving businesses a competitive advantage. The relevance of public image and the public relations aspect of positive action measures were also mentioned. For Sweden and the Netherlands there was greater emphasis upon the business case in relation to the private sector organisations, where it was felt to be no longer acceptable to present a 'white male team' or to perpetuate a workforce made up of 'blue eyed, blond haired Swedes.' Employing a multi ethnic workforce was also seen as a way of capturing new markets by attracting a diverse clientele. In contrast, countries such as the UK discussed the need for public sector organisations to become more representative in order to better meet the needs of existing service users, particularly in the health sector. In addition, businesses were driven to comply by the fear of litigation and compensation claims.

In Hungary and Slovakia positive action measures for Roma were less clear in terms of their incentives and tended to be characterised by mixed motivations. Most positive action measures by private and civil organisations addressed Roma in general, while some addressed

specific concerns of Roma women and many educational and employment training programmes targeted young Roma.

The nature of the impetus for affirmative action that emerged from the USA workshop included the demographic imperative, grassroots efforts, and civil rights law aimed at combating segregation, and business case. While legislation played a role, it was not significant compared to Canada and South Africa and to a large extent this may be due to the flexibility in the way affirmative action programmes are implemented across institutions and sectors. Many described changing contexts, such as the 'changing complexion' of the nation, in other words that the USA was becoming more diverse and the 'old ways' were not working as well as in the past. They stated that 'grassroots' efforts from the surrounding communities could be driving affirmative action, so that organisations represented the surrounding communities that they served. Organisations that appeared more diverse or hiring diverse people would also attract more customers from the local community. Others discussed the historical context as a driver of affirmative action or positive action.

Leadership also emerged in Canada as a key driver, as evident in the quote from a workshop participant: *People will say that it's one of the most diverse teams they've ever worked on. The two top leaders [interviewee and her supervisor] both come from a place of advocacy and a professional knowledge and experience, background in this work, so a very different, deliberate and conscious effort to enhance diversity. There is a difference between having mandates and goals. The only thing that works is if the leadership is walking the talk.* Besides legislation as the key driver in South Africa, a number of moral-ethical considerations were identified as essential drivers. These included justice, fairness, inclusiveness, emancipation and grassroots agitations as the impetus for affirmative action.

Support for Positive Action

It was felt that positive action would only be effective in certain conditions and there appeared to be a considerable amount of consensus between countries as to the nature of these success factors. For participants from most countries, the availability of resources, including financial resources, were considered to be very important in putting positive action measures into operation. Participants from Austria and the Netherlands were most vocal in identifying a range of success factors and the circumstances in which positive action measures would work most effectively. For them, success would require a positive attitude from those leading the initiative, as well as the development of tailor-made strategies that would vary depending on the target group, the sector and the organisational culture. Reviewing changes of the initial situation in relation to the formulated goal was essential. Empowerment of staff members and a strong commitment of senior managers and other leaders within the organisation were key in driving initiatives. Alongside this, there would need to be awareness of the relevance of discrimination and structural barriers for certain groups in society incorporated within the organisation, which would have to include a clear commitment and awareness at all hierarchy levels, and explicitly at the level of top management, an involvement of all departments of an organisation in the development and implementation of these measurements and constant discussion about the benefits of diversity.

Outcomes and Impacts

Despite strong rhetoric about the importance of having evidence based strategies, it was quite clear that most of the positive action projects based in study countries did not have systematic monitoring systems and output measures in place. Despite this, participants were able to provide some sort of evaluation of the success of projects that had been implemented and the kind of improvements they had witnessed.

In Austria, it was felt that positive action had heralded a modified approach to women and disabled people, with specific reference made to a growth of equality policies for these groups. More generally, societal awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences appeared to have heightened in a positive sense. Furthermore, a change of attitudes within organisations was observed, concrete actions had led to a greater understanding of the needs of employees and improvement in the interaction between employees and in the channels of communication within the organisations.

In the Netherlands, reflections on the period of ethnic monitoring suggested that this did not seem to have been effective in improving the representation of minority ethnic people in the workplace. However, it was admitted that some benefits had arisen in that the obligation to collect data on the ethnic background of employees had contributed to awareness raising on diverse backgrounds and on the reality of unequal representation of people with different ethnic backgrounds in companies, in the labour market and in society. Furthermore, it was argued that implementing strategies to change the recruitment rates within a company would have been and is a time-consuming procedure, so success could have been assessed only after a longer period.

On the whole, individuals were not able to provide a lot of information about the monitoring systems they used in relation to positive action. It was apparent that not all organisations felt confident about discussing the impact of their initiatives, owing to a lack of clarity about what their expectations had been from the outset in relation to their respective project outcomes. Within the public sector, there was greater appreciation of the need to provide evidence for the effectiveness of positive action initiatives; without this evidence, there was a danger that organisations would lose momentum to continue using this approach. Hence, positive action initiatives related to employment were generally perceived to have had a beneficial impact in terms of improving peoples' chances of finding a job (albeit at lower levels) and within organisations, helping to increase their promotion prospects, establishing staff networks and creating opportunities for mentoring.

Many participants believed affirmative action to be effective in providing opportunities for groups who have previously been discriminated against or treated unfairly. However, there were problems associated with implementation of affirmative action. In the USA, the problems ranged from unintended consequences of the affirmative measures, negative attitudes towards affirmative action, hostile political climate and misinformation to media manipulation. Whilst in South Africa, implementation had been fraught with negative stereotypes, stigmatisation, lack of proper oversight and malpractice. A poignant reminder of the problems associated with affirmative action was captured by a participant who compared the consequences of affirmative action with the apartheid system. In both cases casualties were left behind as a consequence.

In Canada, some participants recommended that in order for affirmative action to be effective it needed to be done alongside broader normative change and supported by institutions;

affirmative action required buy-in from leaders (senior management) within organisations and in some cases compensatory incentives for it to be successful. Affirmative action also needed to be part of the organisation's larger corporate strategy in order to work. In cases where positive action had been a success, one participant said, *It means commitment from the top. Unless the CEO and top executives get it as their project it won't happen. If you don't have that, it's very difficult to go further.*

Barriers to Positive Action

A number of barriers were identified as inhibiting the impact of positive action, some of which were common to several countries, whilst others were more specific to a particular situation. Disclosure of potentially sensitive information was one such issue that arose in relation to different grounds, for example, in Ireland in relation to disability and in the UK concerning sexual orientation. Negative attitudes held by mainstream society as well as stereotypes and prejudices perpetuated by the media were thought to problematise positive action and render any positive action outcomes as tokenistic. In this respect whilst Swedish society appeared to be relatively enlightened when it came to gender equality and measures promoting it, Africans and Middle Eastern Muslims, as well as persons with disabilities, were often relegated to the bottom of this 'hierarchy' among disadvantaged groups. Additionally, in Sweden positive action was not understood as bringing any benefits, and an awareness of its worth was lacking. Sometimes the interviewees had no support from colleagues, or met opposition from the management, who regarded their equality obligations as mere formalities and preferred efforts only to the level of satisfying the legislation. Some employees are reported to believe that they only need to fill up diversity quotas to have the 'immigrant alibi'; there is also a problem of closed structures such as the police force, where there is no external recruitment and which makes little or no allowance for change. On the other hand, there was also little trust in Swedish institutions by some communities, such as Roma or immigrants, whose past experiences made them mistrust the police and the judiciary, or who had negative experiences with the police in their own countries.

In the Netherlands, barriers were identified that related more closely to behaviours of the target group rather than those involved with targeting. It was felt that adverts addressing preferential treatment were not effective, since people did not want to be defined as 'quota people'. Participants felt that actively approaching specific target groups discouraged people from applying for jobs to avoid the stigma of being labelled the 'affirmative action candidate'. To counteract these responses, it was deemed necessary to create a climate of approval within an organisation where people felt welcome and acknowledged regardless of their background and indeed because of their various backgrounds.

In relation to positive action schemes targeting Roma in Slovakia, a number of problems were identified that limited their effectiveness in improving training and employment opportunities and in some instances possibly even reinforced segregation. The spontaneous and short term nature of projects has done little to promote the progress of initiatives and advance the position of Roma at the national, regional and local level. The dearth of monitoring and evaluation prevents efficient public policy cycles, in which lessons learned influence future policies. From the perspective of NGO participants, discontinuity was grounded in the system of fundraising. It was made almost impossible to develop programmes and activities with longer term goals because of the requirement of funders for more innovative programmes,

and at the same time they were rather reluctant to support existing services (for example, Roma health assistants or Roma teaching assistants).

As was seen in Hungary, attitudes of the majority population towards the Roma population have not helped to foster positive relations between them. Roma clients have often been blamed for not wanting to collaborate with service providers who have been quick to label Roma as unreliable. A number of well intended programmes were blocked by a very high level of rejection of the majority population in Slovakia. This was notably most visible at a local level, where the actions of a mayor or an NGO have been opposed by the local non-Roma population. However, even at the national level, there is evidence of low levels of political will to engage effectively in Roma issues.

In general it was felt that lack of proper education on the wider benefit of affirmative action in society and misinformation from the media led to negative attitudes about affirmative action as is the case in the USA. A lack of clarity and ambiguity in legislation was also thought to undermine the success of affirmative action programmes. Exploitation of the benefits and rationale of affirmative action for political gains were seen as serious challenges for affirmative action programmes and in some cases resulted in unnecessary litigation.

There was consensus that affirmative action needed to be part of an organisation's larger corporate strategy in order to work. Some argued that if affirmative action was not mainstreamed as part of a broader normative change and supported by institutions with proper mentoring and training, it could even be counter-productive. Lack of buy-in from senior management within organisations and in some cases lack of compensatory incentives also had the potential to affect the success of affirmative action. As illustrated in South Africa, participants felt that some beneficiaries were not well equipped or qualified to assume responsibilities for jobs. This resulted in a 'brain drain' and allegations of reverse discrimination, as former post holders were expected to take on jobs that should have been undertaken by unqualified colleagues.

The role of targeted groups was also thought to play an important role in terms of the success of projects. Self-advocacy and visibility by members within targeted groups was seen as advantageous in furthering the aim of affirmative action programmes. Hence, in Canada we saw examples of the LGBT community taking active ownership of specific schemes.

Conclusion

Whilst the conceptualisation of positive action varies widely across countries, some broad generalisations can be made. Terminology to describe remedial action to address past and present injustices targeted at marginalised groups differs. Among the non-EU countries, the term 'affirmative action' is widely used. In Europe, however, the concept of 'positive action' is more commonly employed. Evidence from the study shows a general agreement that positive action constitutes specific measures to redress discrimination experienced by particular groups within society. There was, however, considerable variation in participants' level of familiarity and understanding of the concept.

Participants from many countries were opposed to the prospect of preferential treatment and the notion had clearly caused resentment and hostility, rightly or wrongly, towards the use of positive action initiatives. In response to these kinds of tensions some countries emphasised the importance of positive action measures as part of a broader equality strategy

rather than as a stand-alone measure. To a large extent, the different meanings were informed by national legislative and policy underpinning. However many participants felt strongly that the legislation needs to be backed up by enforcement mechanisms and less bureaucracy to ensure that organisations fully engage with it.

In terms of outcomes, disabled people, women and minority ethnic groups appear to have benefited the most from positive action. Despite support for positive action measures, there were some instances in some countries where inappropriate behaviour and malpractice seriously undermined the effectiveness of affirmative action programmes. In addition, progress has been hindered by failure amongst organisations to collect information to inform further work. The fact that a majority of organisations are not monitoring their workforce by the different equality grounds means that the evidence base to underpin any strategy will be weak. This is not helped by the fact some individuals might not be willing to disclose information in an environment where they might be subjected to discrimination and made to feel different. Consequently, although organisations were clear about the outcome measures needed for the success of their project, most of them were unable to provide any evidence on any progress made. Instead organisations tended to rely upon 'soft' measures, which indicated a general sense of improvement, greater sensitivity towards the needs of marginalised groups and improved understanding of difference.

In spite of its benefits, implementation was fraught with problems, such as negative attitudes towards affirmative action initiatives, media manipulation, legislative ambiguity, lack of self-advocacy, lack of adequate finance, negative stereotypes/stigma and lack of proper oversight - amongst other factors.

In order to evaluate the need for, and effectiveness of, positive action, more systematic data collection is required. The creation of a European-level framework of understanding of positive action measures and definition of specific indicators of success in the implementation of these measures would also be useful. The European Commission needs best-practice networks at both national and cross-sectoral levels to support member states in dealing with uncertainties and ensure parallel translation and application of the EU approach to positive action.

Governments should undertake to educate the general public through 'social marketing' about positive action, in order to address widespread misunderstandings that appear to exist, and to facilitate the linking up of various stakeholders already engaged in such measures. Widespread awareness raising campaigns of both the need for positive action measures for disadvantaged groups and the benefits of such measures for wider society will promote a wider acceptance and positive attitudes towards positive action.

Positive action needs to be mainstreamed as part of a broader normative change and supported by institutions with proper mentoring and training. It should be addressed as an integral part of a wider organisational corporate mission, workforce planning and service development, working closely with the relevant governmental bodies. It should be integrated within talent management, succession planning frameworks and wider employment and service development practices. This may require cross-departmental working and involvement of members of minority groups in order to ensure a more co-ordinated approach.

Acknowledgement

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