

# Integrating Immigrants in the labour market

Charmaine Chetcuti  
Employment and Training Corporation

## Introduction

The Employment and Training Corporation is a public corporation set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990. It is primarily responsible for providing a public employment service, managing state-financed vocational training schemes and maintaining labour market information. The Corporation has been actively involved in the development of employment policy for Malta and in the implementation of active labour market policies.

The Employment and Training Corporation maintains a register of people seeking employment, captures job vacancies from employers and tries to match the two. Its staff provides career and vocational guidance, counseling and placement services to job seekers. Job seekers are advised about their occupational preferences and their suitability to meet their job expectations based on their qualifications, interests and disposition.

The Corporation operates a number of employment and training schemes that enable it to facilitate the integration of job seekers in the labour market. The Employment and Training Corporation is responsible for the running of state financed apprenticeship schemes. During apprenticeships, apprentices undergo both theoretical tuition at an educational establishment and on the job training at an industrial/commercial establishment. The scope is to enable apprentices to acquire both knowledge and practical skills in the trade s/he is learning. This is the most important direct connection between initial vocational education training providers and the labour market.

Furthermore the Employment and Training Corporation offers a wide array of training courses that are open both for the unemployed and the employed who want to upgrade their skills. The courses cover a variety of subjects. They include basic skills courses, office-related courses, hospitality/caring skills courses, management skills courses and trade skills courses. Furthermore the Corporation runs a series of traineeships, which are developed by the ETC in partnership with employers, their associations or other professional bodies.

## Integration programmes, language courses and tests supporting the labour market integration of immigrants

- A number of ad hoc training projects are constantly created for immigrants to improve their integration. These projects are usually a collaboration between different stakeholders, including the ETC, government agencies, trade unions, and non-governmental organizations. These projects usually consist of language skills, job searching skills as well as historical and socio-cultural aspects of the Maltese labour market. Unfortunately there is still the need to create a centralised common programme for all immigrants. There is still a large variety of standards due to different stakeholders organizing different programmes for immigrants.

- The problem of standardization is being tackled by the creation of a new course for long term residents who may not necessarily be looking for employment but who have been granted a visa to reside in the country. By law, this course needs to be attended by all those who wish that their visa is renewed. The course will be administered by ETC only. The course consists of language skills in both Maltese and English, and topics on Malta's history, culture and society in general. Students will be assessed at course completion and if they pass the assessment of all the subjects, their visa will be renewed. The course is still in its planning phase and many aspects of the courses are being discussed with all the stakeholders. Changes are still underway before officially launching the course. However this course will target only those persons who need a visa to reside in Malta. Other immigrants will not be eligible to attend this programme and so will be left out.
- Over the years the ETC has developed various training programmes to help integrate foreigners in the local society and labour market. Two of the most popular programmes developed by the corporation are the language courses. During the last 4 years, the ETC organized more than 40 courses in Maltese language courses aimed for foreigners. In the last 2 years, especially due to the heavy influx of illegal immigrants from African countries, there was a boost in demand for English literacy courses for foreigners. Also, all other courses are open for immigrants. To ease delivery, immigrants are usually grouped per language or country of origin.
- In the case of third country nationals (TCNs), integration programmes are not in place. This is because the local system gives priority to Maltese and EU citizens to fill local vacancies. If an employer needs to apply for the work permit of TCNs, ETC will try to make sure that the local pool of persons looking for employment has been exhausted. If the employer still does not manage to employ a Maltese or EU citizen, s/he needs to prove that the TCN s/he would like to employ is fully qualified in his/her job. Being fully qualified in his/her job, the TCN is not allowed to take part in state-funded training and so TCNs cannot attend integration programmes.

### Governance system in support of the labour market integration of immigrants

- Till this day, integration programmes were usually tackled by NGOs and other stake holders. Due to the different institutions taking part in these programmes, standardization is difficult to achieve. Central government is usually not involved in these programmes. In Malta, it is in fact very common that local councils who have a large concentration of foreigners try to assist the foreigners residing within their locality through the collaboration of ETC. Still the government has not a well defined integration programme but this is usually tackled by NGOs or other agencies.

### Are mandatory language courses and tests a good tool for labour market integration?

- Currently language courses are not mandatory for foreigners who are seeking to get a job in Malta. Luckily, employers and employees are usually very helpful and open to integrate foreigners in their working environment. However for better communication purposes, language courses are recommended to all foreigners who apply for a training programme with

the ETC. Foreigners are asked to sit for an English or Maltese assessment before their training programme. If their language skills are found to be sufficient, they can start attending the course of their choice. If not, they will be obliged to attend a language course and achieve a defined standard before they follow the course of their choice.

- On the other hand, being mandatory will help make sure that immigrants follow the programme. This will also make it easier in terms of qualification recognition since all persons go through the same programme without any variations.

#### **How integration policies can be further developed in the light of the current fiscal consolidation?**

- Due to the recent recession, it is more difficult to allocate funds for integration policies. This is aggravated due to the fact that employment is given first priority by immigrants who are benefiting from integration policies and thus if they receive an employment opportunity, they will drop out of the projects or programmes they are following. This links to the issue above i.e. it is not mandatory for immigrants in Malta to follow integration schemes or programmes.
- It is also important to forecast correctly the demands of the labour market. The demand, most of the time urgent, of the labour market for workers in particular sector, makes it difficult to fill in these demands with immigrants who would have already passed through an integration scheme. Companies and employers strive to be competitive and thus cannot afford to wait for immigrant workers to be assisted with integration programmes.

#### **How the outcomes and impacts of integration policies are evaluated in your country?**

- Since there is still no standard integration programme that foreigners need to follow, keeping statistics is difficult. Since integration courses are still not mandatory, any information collected does not reflect the true impact and effect of migration in Malta.
- With the creation of the obligatory integration course for persons applying or renewing their visa, the collection of information of the impact such migration has in Malta will be collected. However, there will still be a considerable number of migrants whose effect will not be calculated since the integration programme will not be mandatory for them to attend.
- From past experience in the ad hoc programmes created, the impact on the migrants and the labour market of the integration programme was huge. Migrants integrated quickly in the labour market, knew how to communicate with their fellow colleagues and employers and better understood the society they lived in. Employers were more prone to employ migrants since they were more easily adaptable to their working environments and their colleagues.