

Making a success of integrating immigrants into the labour market

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1. Making a success of integration immigrants into the labour market: assessment of Norway Good Practice

The European Women's Lobby and the European Network of Migrant Women welcome the initiative of the European Commission to organise a very timely peer-review on the integration of immigrants into the labour market. First, it builds on the commitments of Member States, both in the EU 2020 strategy within which ministers have agreed as part of the EU 2020 strategy to raise the employment rate of the population aged 20-64 from the current 69% to at least 75% and at the Zaragoza Ministerial Conference on integration where Ministers agreed that the gap between migrant women and men's employment should be monitored and that early assistance to migrants, women in particular, should be provided. It is also timely in the context of the current drafting of the Second European agenda on integration.

Migrant women's employment has been also a key area of concern for our respective networks. The main barriers to employment of migrant women we have identified are: (1) lack of recognition of qualifications, (2) lack of availability, accessibility and affordability of care services, (3) no right to work because of their legal status (as asylum seeker or as family migrant), (4) lack of training courses (language, life-long trainings). One of our key recommendations towards Member States has been therefore to provide all migrant women with affordable trainings and language courses and enabling them to work upon their arrival¹. We view in this regard the Norway's case study as an excellent opportunity to discuss the potential as well as the challenges of compulsory language trainings and civic education programmes for migrants. We aim to bring to this debate the experience of migrant women's and women's organisations on the ground.

Language and civic integration courses as an important integration tool under certain conditions

In general, we are supporting state-funded language courses for migrants and for women in particular, as they are more likely to be at home and lacking social networks that would support their language acquisition. Lack of language skills perpetuates women's isolation and social exclusion, and hampers their chances for speedy integration and realization in the host society. In cases of domestic abuse, the lack of language perpetuates the violence and the inability of the woman to seek safety and help.

Having access to free language and introductory courses enable first and foremost migrant women to improve their daily lives and should be seen as a long-term investment. Given traditional gendered roles, it has proven to be particularly useful for migrant women as they are

¹ EWL-EnoMW contribution to the Second European Agenda on integration, August 2010, available at <http://www.womenlobby.org/spip.php?article400&lang=en>.

more than men in contact with public services such as schools or social services where the use of the national language is crucial. In countries without high-quality language and introductory programmes, migrants tend not to access public services nor know their rights, which put them in a very vulnerable situation: a research in Ireland has shown that few migrants access Irish public services and support systems, tending to rely instead on diplomatic missions from their own countries; it also shows that they tend to have little knowledge of their rights and obligations². It is therefore important that both the design and the evaluation of such programmes have multiple goals that reflect the multidimensionality of the integration process, among which labour market integration is one of them but that encompass other such as better knowledge of their rights and access public services.

Based on our experiences and on the learnings from the Norwegian's case study, we would like to outline the following necessary principles for effective language and civic integration courses:

- **Be supported by public authorities:** it should be free of charge for the most vulnerable groups of migrants with clear criteria defined.
- **Be designed, monitored and evaluated in partnership with migrants associations:** As recalled in the Conclusions of the Zaragoza Ministerial conference on integration in April 2010, 2 of the Common Basic Principles stress the importance of participative mechanisms that should involve both immigrants and citizens of EU Member States. The role of migrant associations as members of civil society has been highlighted at the Zaragoza Ministerial Conference. Particular attention should be paid to giving a role to civil society and migrant women's organisations in the elaboration and the implementation of such courses/modules when they are discussed at the European, national, regional and local level. This is needed to fight against mutual stereotypes, to show diversity as enriching rather than threatening and to contribute to social cohesion.
- **Be of high-quality, tailored and based on a needs-assessment:** They should take into account the different education levels and needs of the different groups of migrants, including occupational intentions. Different groups of migrants might include: illiterate migrants, dyslexics, migrants with university degrees, migrant women; asylum-seekers/refugees. Those attending the course should be consulted as to what they wish to learn and the programme should be provided as catering for their needs.
- **Be accessible:** Accessibility means in this case that the location, the timing of the courses, the building and the content of the courses should be made accessible to all migrant women and men, independent of their legal status, including migrant women and men with disabilities.
- **Should set targets (and "soft" evaluation indicators) that reflect the multidimensionality and the evolution of the integration process** e.g. better access to public services, better knowledge of their rights, participation in community life.
- **Offer professionally oriented courses and life-long learning courses:** it should include an assessment of professional skills, language courses that are professionally oriented, the learnings of the cultural and socio-professional norms of the labour market, development of

² Immigrant Council in Ireland, *On Speaking Terms. Introductory and Language Programmes for Migrants in Ireland*, 2007.

mentoring programmes and provide opportunities for further trainings based on the skills of the migrants. Any measure should aim at facilitating the use by migrants of their skills and find quality jobs, rather than pushing them in jobs for which they are overqualified. Pathways to further education and life-long learning courses should be facilitated.

- **Provide in parallel free or affordable care facilities:** unless such structures are provided, it will be impossible for migrant women who are in great majority mostly responsible of the care work (as it is also the case in Europe) to attend such courses and look for employment.
- **Provide information about their rights as workers and as residents in the European Union, including access to public services and to effective remedies in case of discrimination.**

Good practice example, Denmark:

Relationships provide the strongest foundation for personal and professional success. Women immigrants all over Europe often experience the biggest challenge to be finding the right people and establishing networks to help answer questions and open doors to opportunities both at work and in the wider community. KVINFO has designed a Mentor Network that facilitates the path to employment for immigrant women in Denmark. It has been estimated that more than 50 % of all job openings in Denmark are filled via personal networks. Networks are essential to gain a foothold in Danish society. Since 2002, KVINFO is making the connections between a large network of resourceful, educated, influential Danish women and refugee and immigrant women living in Denmark. Through one-on-one meetings of equals, the Danish women provide access to professional networks and give appropriate advice regarding job applications, job interviews, workplace culture and reassessment of employment potential. We call the two parties mentees and mentors. We match them based on the mentee's educational background, her profession and personal wishes. With thousands of women involved, the Mentor Network is today internationally recognized as an initiative that other countries can learn from.

2. Other necessary policies and measures to implement in parallel

We would like to highlight that language courses and civic integration courses are one element out of many elements that contribute to a better quality of life and integration of migrant women and men living in Europe. Other measures need to be developed in parallel, in particular towards the receiving society and professionals. Any investment in language and civic integration courses will be adversely affected by lack of access to quality jobs, education and services and by hostile attitudes on the part of the society. Migrants will lose as a result their motivation. As raised in the discussion paper, the integration of immigrants is a multidimensional concept that involves for us as well a multidimensional answer involving the society as a whole.

Remove legal obstacles to work in the formal labour market

As rightly pointed out by the discussion paper, "female migrants face particular difficulties on the labour market and are more likely than immigrant males and native women to be employed in

undeclared work in households, with insecure and low wages, no access to social benefits, long working hours and bad working conditions". We would like in this regard to call the attention of the European Commission and Member States that many migrant women and men are denied the right to work in the formal labour market because of their legal status (as asylum-seekers, joining spouse or undocumented): enabling them to work legally would enable them to contribute to European welfare states and lead to their economic independence, which is key to migrant women's integration.

We have seen especially that:

- Long periods of denial of the right to work, as it is the case for asylum-seekers in Ireland, have proven to be a huge obstacle to their future integration into the labour market³.
- Many migrant women, some of whom undocumented, working in the informal care and domestic sector are living and working within the European Union without any kind of protection and with very limited access to rights and services.

Positive political and media discourse

The role of policy-makers is crucial to ensure that integration is a two-way process that involves the society as a whole. A positive discourse on integration is essential in this regard to the success of integration. Policy-makers need to speak out on the positive economic, social and cultural contribution of migrants to our societies to influence public opinion and perception.

Adaptation of public services to a diverse population

Measures need also to be implemented to support and adapt public services to a diverse population. It is interesting to note that British law has a positive duty to tailor their service to a diverse population. Intercultural trainings should be provided, notably towards health care, police and education professionals. As raised by the Immigrant Council in Ireland, "migrants can not be expected to integrate if the receiving society does not have the capacity to facilitate integration"⁴.

Good practice example, Ireland:

AkiDwA, the African and Migrant Women's Network in Ireland, developed a resource booklet for health care professionals as part of a project funded by the Office of the Minister for Integration, examining the health-care needs of women who have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM) in their countries of origin and who now reside in Ireland. As the project developed in 2008, it became apparent that there were few resources for health-care professionals working in Ireland encountering these women, who may have very specific and urgent health-care needs.

See the publication at http://www.akidwa.ie/FGM/FGM_Final.pdf

³ AkiDwA, Am Only Saying it Now. Experiences of Women Seeking Asylum in Ireland, March 2010.

⁴ Immigrant Council in Ireland, *op.cit.*, 2007.

Legal migration channels should be developed

It is essential to develop legal migration channels. We urge also Member States and the EU to evaluate high-skilled migration schemes from a gender equality perspective. Special attention should be paid to increase the numbers of highly qualified migrant women. Studies have shown that the sectoral and earnings based selection practiced in most European countries and proposed in the Blue card system implicitly favours men VS. the Canadian system, under which immigration is based on education and language attainment, has led to an increase in highly qualified female migrants.

Implement efficient systems for recognition of qualifications

High-education migrant women born outside the EU are twice as likely to be employed in low skill jobs as EU-born and native born women with the same level of education.⁵ The lack, in many Member States of efficient systems for recognition of qualifications obtained in third countries and of top-up training opportunities for those lacking certain competencies entails that too many well-qualified migrant women are employed in low paid jobs, especially in cleaning and caring, a situation which, despite the importance of these roles, denies society the benefit of migrant women's skills and qualifications.

Need to remove the barriers to access affordable childcare

We would also like to draw the attention to the need to remove the barriers to access affordable childcare as migrant women might have no access to subsidised childcare, which is often dependent on having long-term residence status and hence not be able to work.

The individualisation of rights and benefits is a core instrument to ensure the equal position of migrant women and men.

It is essential that at every stage of the migration process immigrant women obtain rights and entitlements in their own right. The dependency created by immigration legislation such as family reunion for women is a strong obstacle to their integration process and represent a violation of their human rights and of the right to equality between women and men enshrined in the EU treaties.

Ensure that all migrant women and men workers, independently of their legal status, are granted the same rights than all workers.

As raised by the immigrant Council in Ireland, migrants in Ireland find themselves often in a position of inequality where they are obliged to obey law and pay taxes, and yet often do not

⁵ Migrant Women in the EU Labour force, RAND report, 2008. Prepared for the European Commission.

benefit from the contract in terms of voting rights, education provision, social welfare and so on, depending on their status.

Ensuring strong anti-discrimination legislation and policies that include a gendered perspective.

Monitor the gap between migrant women and men's employment, in terms of their participation rate in the labour market, but also the quality of employment i.e. income, flexibility of hours etc.

Provide appropriate support for migrant women and men who want to set up or develop their businesses; recognise that by contributing to local economies migrants are able to demonstrate true integration.

Developing positive action measures aiming at having more migrant women into decision making positions

Civil society organisations, including migrant organisations, should be consulted in the development, follow-up and evaluation of integration policies at local, regional, national and European level.

Initiatives for and by migrants, including migrant women's organisations, should be supported with specific funding lines and measures should be taken to increase the access to EU funding to migrants' organisations.

The role of migrants' associations has been recognized in the integration process, but our experience has shown that they are increasingly struggling for their existence. The role of the European Integration Fund is crucial in this regard, but the co-financing requirements should be evaluated and reduced both for European and national-level projects, as funding from governments and foundations has been cut in the context of the economic crisis, which paradoxically renders such projects all the more necessary. Furthermore, based on the INTI evaluation⁶ that showed how little migrant organisations were involved in INTI projects, it should become a requirement to have migrants' organisations, including migrant women's organisations, involved as leaders in all the projects supported by the European Integration Fund in cooperation with other stakeholders.

⁶ See final report: http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/funding/integration/docs/report_2009_en.pdf

3. Key concerns/areas for discussion

Integration programmes and tests being used as a migration control mechanism

As outlined in the discussion paper and in other research on the issue⁷, language and civic integration programmes do not tend to contribute to better integration if it has been perceived, notably through the discourse of policy-makers, as a form of internal migration control rather than a service to migrants. The compulsory nature of such courses might create such a tension, but might turn out to be effective if it complies with certain conditions, especially care facilities (see above) and is not seen as a method of forced integration. Negative sanctions are not advisable either. We would yet rather encourage Member States to explore the use of positive incentives such as speeding up the process for renewing temporary residence status, acquisition of long-term resident status or citizenship as raised by the Immigrant Council in Ireland.

However, the use of civic integration and/or language tests as part of immigration law, notably as a condition to access long-term residence and family reunion is not advisable for different reasons:

- it is part of a negative discourse that portray migrants as a problem that we aim to reduce through an additional migration control mechanism;
- the indeterminate nature of the concept of civic integration that leaves too much discretion to the subjective interpretation of national authorities and the lack of access to effective remedies⁸;
- it has potential discriminatory impacts, especially for women, and is in contradiction with fundamental rights as enshrined in the Charter of fundamental rights and the European Convention on Human Rights (see below).

The potential discriminatory impact of conditional language and civic integration tests

More and more countries have been implementing (or made proposals to implement) compulsory tests as a way to limit migrants' access to family-reunion, long-term residence and citizenship. Key concerns arise regarding these additional criteria given the costs they often imply and their potential discriminatory impacts to certain groups of migrants, especially women as it is raised in the discussion paper.

⁷ See notably : Immigrant Council in Ireland, *On Speaking Terms. Introductory and Language Programmes for Migrants in Ireland*, 2007; Kraler, Albert, *Civic stratification, Gender and Family Migration Policies in Europe*, ICMPD, Vienna, May 2010; Carrera, Sergio and Wiesbrock, Anja, *Civic integration of Third Country Nationals. Nationalism versus Europeanisation in the Common EU Immigration Policy*, CEPS, October 2009.

⁸ See: Carrera, Sergio and Wiesbrock, Anja, *Civic integration of Third Country Nationals. Nationalism versus Europeanisation in the Common EU Immigration Policy*, CEPS, October 2009.

We believe especially that family reunification should not be made conditional on language knowledge nor civic integration knowledge. All the other existing conditions for family reunion (that have been increasing over the years), such as income requirements and overcoming bureaucratic obstacles, render already the realization of family reunion difficult for many, and especially for women. In all countries covered by ICMPD research, it was often more difficult for women than men to qualify for family reunion, notably to attain the income requirements given their childcare responsibilities, gender pays gaps, precarious work and the predominance also in Southern countries of informal work.

It is also not realistic to request from a person who has never left their country of origin (in many cases their local place of residence) to command the host country's language prior to arrival. It can also be discriminatory for women from some regions where women have a much lower education and literacy level than men.

If such conditions/tests are nevertheless introduced, we will be insisting on matching the requirements, state-funded courses. In such cases, it is essential that exceptional circumstances are added to the Family Reunification regulations, exempting family members from whom it is unrealistic and unreasonable to demand language knowledge, for example for reasons relating to illiteracy, old age, mental disability, dyslexia and others.