

Workshop

Inclusion of migrant youth: breaking the inter-generational transmission of poverty and social exclusion

Theme: children from migrant households are twice to five times as likely to experience poverty as children whose parents were born in that country. How can the Europe 2020 Strategy, the Platform against Poverty and a new Agenda for Migrants' Integration reduce combating inter-generational transmission of poverty among migrant youth ?

Kathrine Fangen from the University of Oslo is project coordinator of EUMARGINS, and presented their findings on the situation of adult migrants and the labour market in seven EU countries (Norway, Sweden, UK, Estonia, Spain, Italy and France). The project's researchers each followed 30 people aged 18-25 in one city over three years.

"We have seen a worsening situation," Fangen says. "It is harder to find work, and young people are growing disillusioned and angry."

Visible minorities are the worst off. "It is important to monitor discrimination through surveys and field experience. Anti-discrimination policy needs to be more visible so that young people know their rights."

Each country had its specific problems: Estonia has a Russian-speaking minority that is discriminated against; Italy and Spain have too many illegal migrants; in France, the anti-discrimination in the workforce law means that the country lacks statistical data on racial and ethnic discrimination; in the UK, 50% of immigrants are in temporary jobs.

"We need to think beyond the economic crisis," Fangen says. "Europe is ageing, we need that extra labour in the future."

She points out that Italy takes a particularly hard line towards illegal immigrants. The Dublin Regulation hasn't helped. Immigrants are meant to make their application for asylum in the first country they enter; this is where they get sent back to when they've been refused asylum elsewhere. Greece and Italy can't cope. In Spain, she says, they've simply stopped registering immigrants.

William Ejalu, born in Uganda, is a lawyer for the UN High Commission for Refugee in Budapest where he studied for two BAs, two MAs and one PhD. In his work with the anti-racist network ENAR Hungary, he represents more than 700 NGOs.

Ejalu stresses that in many European countries, anti-discrimination legislation is in place, but implementation lags behind. "We need to ensure that member states prioritise the integration of migrant youth," he says.

Over recent years, Ejalu says, we've seen an increase in NGO involvement. Poverty is increasingly addressed as a cross-sectorial problem, and more thought is being put into discrimination as a social issue. The downside of that, he says, is that civil society is less involved than it should be.

"Maybe it's a lack of resources, maybe it's because people living in poverty are seen as the object and subject of the issue, but not as equal partners. If you yourself are seen as the problem, it's more difficult to come up with initiatives."

After his presentation, Ejalu explained: "I ended up in Budapest because an uncle had studied there and my father thought it was a good place to go. Migrant minorities here are a tiny community. Hungary is my second home.

"I'm lucky. I had a free education thanks to scholarships, it even helped that I am black. I'm not a typical case. When I was a student, Budapest offered special language training for foreigners going to university but those have been scrapped. Now immigrants are all grouped together in the same class – illiterates, people who never finished school and students – and there are no longer any scholarships for people from Africa. Now access to education of minority Hungarians is a major problem.

"This country needs an overall integration policy that looks at all vulnerable groups, with policies targeted at refugees and third country citizens. Refugees are the most vulnerable group because they have to wait two to three years before they know if they can stay.

"My father used to say, 'when you wake up in the morning, first ask yourself what you did for yourself, then for your family, and lastly for your cause. When you go to sleep at night, ask yourself those same questions. If you can't answer them, then you have a problem'."