

BUILDING ON DIVERSITY - LIVING & WORKING TOGETHER - REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE INTEGRATION OF MINORITIES IN UPPER AUSTRIA

Ahmed is a Moroccan in his thirties and works as a male nurse in an Austrian hospital. He cannot understand why all of the most unpleasant tasks in his department always fall on his shoulders but he doesn't want to make a formal complaint because he fears that he might lose his job, and then as a consequence, his resident's permit.

Bernhard, who runs a small construction company in a border area, worries about the new, and possibly fierce, competition from Czech businesses that may result from EU enlargement. In his view, the government should do more to protect domestic industries.

Irina who is 36 was trained as a physician's assistant in Bosnia. She came to Austria because after the war, she could not find employment in her home country. Irina now works in the stock department of an electrical wholesaler. She is depressed when she compares her situation with that of her Austrian colleagues. Her income is lower, she has little or no opportunity for career advancement and worst of all, she feels that those bodies that are meant to represent the concerns of workers have absolutely no interest in supporting ethnic or other minority groups.

These are three examples that illustrate the kind of issues that are being tackled by "Living&Working Together", one of the few EQUAL Employability DPs throughout Europe in which a Trade Union organisation has taken the lead role.



Living & Working Together has mobilised nine regional partners in a joint effort to combat racism and xenophobia in Upper Austria where about 7% of the population are foreigners. As the DP's area (Mühlviertel) is bordering South Bohemia (Czech Republic), the Living&Working Together Partnership has a particularly complex challenge of counteracting fears of a new wave of immigration following EU-enlargement, whilst at the same time tackling discrimination faced by the "traditional" migrant minorities coming from (ex-) Yugoslavia, Turkey and, to a lesser extent, African countries.

AIMS AND BACKGROUND OF THE DP

Aims

The strategic approach of the DP combines two main objectives:

- reducing the attitudinal, structural and legal barriers that have a negative effect on the integration and equal treatment of migrants and ethnic minorities in the regional labour market, and
- raising awareness of the opportunities emerging from the opening-up of the labour market in the border region and developing/consolidating the district of Mühlviertel, as an economically strong and socially integrative business area.

In its attempts to attain the latter objective, the work of the DP is closely coordinated and partly integrated with the activities of the Regional Management (Mühlviertel district) of the EUREGIO.

Target groups

The target groups addressed through, and/or involved in, the activities of the DP include:

- Austrian and non-Austrian workers/employees who either face direct or indirect discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin or are entrusted with specific tasks in the management and solution of conflict or the representation of the interests of workers;
- Managers and staff of enterprises with a high proportion of workers from a migrant or ethnic minority origin, public institutions and organisations representing the interests of minority groups;
- Multipliers, mediators and consultants

Partners

The DP brings together operational and strategic partners. Each of the operational partners has a distinct responsibility for carrying out the work in one of the four areas of activity (see the four modules below), in direct contact with their respective target groups. The strategic partners contribute to the implementation of the DP's approach by providing advice and policy support in the design, coordination and development of the actions of the DP. They include the Social Department of the Upper Austrian Government, the Chamber of Employers and the Chamber of Workers and Employees in the region and also NGOs that are engaged in the thematic field. The legal constitution of the DP is that of an association under civil law. Its work is supervised by the General Assembly of all Partners and by an Advisory Council involving the organisations that are responsible for finance, general coordination, dissemination and mainstreaming activities, and the operational partners as well as the strategic partners.

ACTIVITIES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The activities of the Living&Working Together DP are organised in four different fields of Action or Modules.

Module 1: Research on the situation of both "traditional" and "new" migrants and ethnic minorities in the labour market of Upper Austria

The Institute of Sociology at the University of Linz has conducted a comprehensive study on the current situation and on expectations related to the EU enlargement and their implications for the regional trans-border labour market. Its outcomes are based on the exploration and analysis of results from recent relevant research in Austria and the Czech Republic on racism and xenophobia, qualitative interviews with regional experts/actors (in Upper Austria as well as in the Czech border region "Südböhmen") in this field and a quantitative survey amongst non-Austrian and Austrian individuals. The study provides a rich source of up to date information on the employment situation and socio-demographic characteristics of ethnic minorities and migrants, perceived discriminations, the potential for cross-border migration and the attitudes of the population in the DP's area

Amongst other findings, the outcomes from the research illustrate that:

- compared to the situation of the indigenous workforce, workers with a migrant/ethnic minority background are far more frequently employed in low skill/low pay jobs, though many of them had worked in skilled occupations in their home country. Related to this issue is the problem of (non) recognition of qualifications acquired in the country of origin;
- higher levels of unemployment persist amongst migrant/ethnic minority groups (especially women);
- discrepancies exist, between Austrians and non-Austrians, in the perception of actual discrimination. The majority of migrants and people from ethnic minority origin report that they either face discrimination often, or very often, in a variety of different situations. It could be in house hunting, in job seeking, in dealings with public authorities, in the workplace, in pubs/restaurants/shops or even simply in the street. In contrast to this, only a minority of Austrians believe that foreigners are discriminated against in the workplace, but about 50% feel that there are problems, for example at work or with regard to delinquency, which relate to the presence of migrant/ethnic minority groups;

- amongst the Austrian population in the DP's area, fears related to the negative effects of EU enlargement and the potential increase in immigration from the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) are in contrast with experts' predictions and don't adequately reflect the new emerging opportunities for economic development.

The study contains detailed recommendations for action and provides both strategic and practical guidelines for the activities that the DP is implementing through the other modules. A summary of the results of the study is available from the DP's website.

Module 2: Strategies to counteract manifest and latent forms of racism and xenophobia towards "traditional" migrants in Upper Austria

The linchpin for activities under this module is [migrare - Zentrum für MigrantInnen OÖ](#) (Centre for Migrants in Upper Austria), a NGO providing multi-lingual advice and practical support to migrants on a wide range of questions that have a particular bearing on their integration. These cover aspects such as employment, education and training, housing, residence and citizenship and social security. The Centre also runs projects aimed at empowering individuals and groups from migrant/ethnic minority origin and at raising awareness, in Austrian society, of their specific concerns and needs. These activities include women's contact groups, courses on health issues, language courses, seminars for people working with migrants and cultural events.

Within the Living&Working Together partnership, migrare has launched, and is developing, three new activities:

- an Anti-Racism Contact Point (Anti-Rassismus- Anlauf Stelle - ARAS) to identify, document, and where appropriate inquire into, racist/xenophobic incidents. Experienced multilingual members of staff also offer advice and support. By the end of 2003, ARAS had already collected evidence of about 200 such incidents. These were reported either directly to its main office in Linz, during the regular hours when staff are available for consultation in five other locations in the area of the DP or through feed back from questionnaires sent to social organisations. To strengthen its capacity for intervention and follow up, ARAS will set up a special Advisory Council later in 2004, involving key actors representing policy, employment services, the social partners and NGOs that are particularly active in addressing issues related to migrants and ethnic minorities. It is planned to publish a Report on Racism and Xenophobia in Upper Austria, in 2005, based on the work of ARAS;
- a series of workshops to raise the public's sensitivity to issues of racism that will also stimulate a sustainable process of reflection upon these issues and empower minority groupings. These workshops are designed and implemented in a very flexible way and different approaches are used to address particular groups (e.g. people who are part of the indigenous population, single minorities or multi-ethnic groups) or multipliers (such as members of works councils or individuals working at the interfaces of the labour market in the fields of guidance, placement or recruitment). Four workshops were organised before the end of 2003, each involving 10 - 15 participants in three half-day sessions, and a further 16 are planned for 2004;
- the provision of access to the internet and training on the use of ICT for people from migrant/ethnic minority groups

Further activities of migrare aim to intensify contact and cooperation with the regional associations of minority groups, including Muslim groups and the Roma community, who are important intermediaries and potential "clients" for the workshops.

Module 3: Preparing for the emerging labour market in the border region

Work under this module is initiated and coordinated by the [EUREGIO Regionalmanagement](#) (Regional Management of the EUREGIO Mühlviertel/Bayrischer Wald/Böhmerwald). One effect of the EU-enlargement will be that the 122 local communities of the Mühlviertel district will face a new situation in which they provide a "bridge" between the Czech Republic and Upper Austria. However, both employers and the existing workforce are very sceptical about the new opportunities that might result from this situation. The Mühlviertel district is still one of the economically weakest areas of Upper Austria and unlike other Austrian regions, it is not yet familiar with strategies for cross-border regional development. Many SMEs feel threatened by possible competition, especially in those sectors that are traditionally strong in the district, such

as construction, woodworking, Horeca and agriculture and that also provide many of the jobs for less qualified native workers and "traditional" migrants. Amongst these groups, the emerging trans-border labour market engenders fears of being "crowded out" by "new" immigrants who are better qualified.

Against this background, the EUREGIO Regionalmanagement has launched an action programme to inform people about the new perspectives that will be generated through the growing together of the regions on both sides of the border and to stimulate debate and discussion about this new situation. It is hoped that through this programme, it will be possible to diffuse those fears and xenophobic attitudes that could act as barriers to the development of a prosperous trans-border labour market. The programme is aimed at decision makers and multipliers in the local communities, key actors in the labour market and enterprises and also at domestic and foreign workers and the general public. Activities include:

- information seminars on the opportunities and implications emerging from the eastern enlargement, and the development of an internet-based regional information platform;
- workshops on issues linked to the opening of the labour market, addressing both workers/employees in the region and those who assume responsibilities for labour market policy;
- information campaigns and the organisation of Sectoral Integration Circles that are discussion/action groups in the different trades/industrial sectors of the region, in order to tackle issues related to the integration of "traditional" migrants/minorities;
- seminars for actors and decision makers in the local communities, and
- the setting up of a mobile exhibition on the shared history of the working world on both sides of the border.

The integration of these activities with the work implemented under the other modules of the Living&Working Together partnership is seen as a strong factor in enhancing the impact of the action programme.

Module 4: Developing a model for equal representation of the interests of workers of non-EU nationality, both within individual enterprises and at a higher level

Current Austrian law prevents non-EU/EEA nationals from being elected as members of works councils or representatives to the Chamber of Workers and Employees (Arbeiterkammer). This is in clear contradiction with the democratic beliefs of the Austrian Trade Union Confederation (ÖGB) and it is also inconsistent with European legislation, in particular the two Council Directives on equal treatment in employment and on equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin. Therefore, within the framework of the Living&Working Together partnership, the ÖGB is piloting new approaches to involving workers of non-EU nationality in the processes of democratic decision making in enterprises and to dismantling existing preconceptions related to this issue.

Preparatory work included the analysis of relevant legislation at national and EU level, the identification of inconsistencies and points that required clarification and the exploration of good practice in other Member States. The outcomes were summarised in a brochure, together with a short presentation of the role and tasks of works councils, trade unions and the Chamber of Workers and Employees. The brochure will be published in several languages.

As a next step, a new type of training course is being developed, involving shop stewards together with fellow workers from migrant/ethnic minority backgrounds. At present, contacts are being made with works councils and trade union representatives in around ten enterprises that employ a high proportion of workers of non-EU nationality. In each of these enterprises, a minority group member who is prepared to engage in the representation of workers' interests will be invited to participate in the course, jointly with that firm's shop steward. The new course will be integrated into, and continued as part of, the regular programme offered by the ÖGB training centre in Upper Austria and in the light of experience of the pilot phase, a larger number of enterprises will be encouraged to participate. It is expected that this approach will lead, step by step, to a new form of works council in which the interests of Austrian and foreign workers are represented on an equal footing and in partnership, and that this will be a model to be disseminated throughout the country.

Transversal

activities

The work in all four modules is supported and complemented by a number of transversal activities:

- a Gender Mainstreaming Agent (GMA) has been nominated and is involved in the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of all actions. She also participates in the network of GMAs, which is concerned with the evaluation of Gender Mainstreaming in all EQUAL DPs in Austria and is currently preparing a set of practical tools for this purpose;
- continuous expert advice on the design and implementation of activities related to the use of ICT;
- a Quality Assurance programme, based on a detailed set of operational criteria that follows the guidelines established by the "Quality Label of the Organisations of Adult and Further Education in Upper Austria";
- continuous evaluation of all activities, using interviews and questionnaires applied to both DP operators and "clients"/beneficiaries, and the monitoring of targets and actual results.

The activities that are piloted under Modules 2 - 4 are designed to continue beyond the lifetime of EQUAL. The partners involved in Living&Working Together strongly advocate the view that the very structure of the DP, with the involvement of strategic and operational partners, its close integration with the process of regional development and the effective and successful cooperation between all partners will ensure sustainability after the end of EQUAL funding.

TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

Within the transnational [Baltic Sea Alps Adriatic Sea-Partnership](#), Living&Working Together cooperates with partners from Italy (PERSONA, [IT-IT-S-MDL-275](#)) and Germany (ProInteCra, [DE-EA-24055](#)). The German DP provides the secretariat for this Transnational Partnership (TP).

All three partners share common concerns about the integration of migrants/ethnic minorities into the labour market and about combating racial and xenophobic discrimination. However, each partner also brings its own particular approach to the TP which is complementary to those of the other two partners: the emphasis placed by the Austrian DP is on involving the Social Partners, the Italian DP focuses on awareness raising in local communities while the German DP works extensively with SMEs.

The partners had met twice before the end of 2003, to share their experience and explore promising practices emerging from the different contexts in their countries. The next stage will be to prepare their common transnational product. This will be a short film called "Der Fremde im Spiegel" ("The foreigner in the mirror") which shows two male workers (one foreigner and one native) who, in the course of a work accident, swap their bodies and find themselves having to live each other's life.

DP information

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Link to [EQUAL database description](#)