

PREPARATION FOR INTEGRATION



Demographic data indicates that the Finnish population is aging. The number of children under 15 has dropped to 18% of the population, down from 30% in the 1950s, and the proportion of people over 64 has grown from 7% in the 1950s to 15%. This places growing demands on the care of the elderly, on pension schemes and on generating the required level of taxation for the country as a whole. In the basic scenario outlined in the 2020 Working Group Report published by the Finnish Ministry of Labour, around 10,000 more people per year will leave the workforce than join it from the younger age groups and this decrease will be at its highest in the years after 2010. This Working Group believes that *“It is vital to make more use of the potential labour input of immigrants already in Finland. This would also help to make attitudes to immigration among the Finnish population more favourable. Side by side with a humanitarian immigration policy, Finland should also formulate a policy on immigration for employment purposes based on the country’s forecast labour needs.”*

The [Multicultural Recruiting and Learning Development Partnership \(DP\)](#), or MORO for short, has attempted to anticipate some of these developments by combining the needs of the Finnish labour market with immigrants’ knowledge and skills in as meaningful a way as possible. MORO is also a response to a specific recommendation within the Councils Recommendation ([2004/741/EC](#)) on the implementation of Member States’ employment policies that urges Finland to *“take special measures to facilitate the activation and integration of disadvantaged young people, disabled people and immigrants.”*

“As a race, the Finns tend to be hostile to foreigners because they are seen as a threat to the jobs of the native population,” says Heikki Sederlöf Director of the Association of Finnish Vocational Adult Education Centres and he adds that *“MORO faced a real challenge in trying to increase tolerance towards immigrants and refugees by integrating them into Finnish society.”* His [Association](#) co-ordinated the work of the DP through one of its companies - Aike International Ltd, which consists of a network of 46 vocational adult education centres in Finland. The other partners in MORO were South Karelia Adult Education Centre, Tampere Vocational Adult Education Centre in the Pirkanmaa region and North Karelia Vocational Adult Education Centre.

SEPARATE BUT REINFORCING ACTIVITIES

MORO prepared immigrants for the Finnish labour market and a positive role in Finnish society and, at the same time, it prepared workplaces, educational establishments and public services to ensure that the integration of these immigrants was successful. The MORO DP had three local projects in different parts of the country and these projects were complementary with each having a slightly different emphasis.

In South Karelia, a series of seminars were held in co-operation with the local trade unions and employers’ organisations in order to inform and educate people about the real situation that Finnish society was confronting. The seminars were held in workplaces and in trade union premises in order to make it easier for people to attend. The overarching theme for the series was “Immigrants – a resource for South Karelia” and five different seminars were held on the following issues:

- Changes in structure of population, is there a danger of labour shortage?
- Discovering the vocational skills of immigrants;
- Immigrants – the future resource in South Karelia for Entrepreneurship;
- Leadership in multicultural workplaces;
- Immigrant tutors.

In addition to the seminars, short information evenings were held, which on occasions, attracted as many as 300 people. These public events made a large impact in public relations terms, as

local television, radio and the newspapers reported on each of them and interviewed the project personnel. In addition, the activities led to the publication of a brochure on success stories in the recruitment of immigrants by local employers and this was distributed widely to encourage further recruitment.



One of the multicultural training afternoons in action

The second major activity in South Karelia involved training courses for immigrants based on initial and continuous vocational assessment. The courses were tailor made for these unemployed job seekers, who had quite different educational backgrounds. In all courses, Finnish language training was provided, as lack of proficiency in the native language is one of the major obstacles in finding employment. Similarly, IT skills were developed as these are now almost a must on the labour market. In addition, every course participant had a practical training period, which sometimes led to the offer of a job and, in general, if course participants were willing to stay in Finland, they eventually found employment.

Finally, multicultural training for teachers was organised in South Karelia because the relatively small number of immigrants in the area meant that educational institutions had very little experience of teaching foreigners. Teachers took part from construction, information technology, metal engineering, services, language training and immigrants' orientation departments and they were also helped to measure and assess the vocational skills of immigrants.

In North Karelia, the project focussed on the public services with the aim of increasing the skills of officials to operate in diverse working environments and in multicultural customer service situations. A local working group of officials was established and the idea was to use a bottom-up method though the participation and empowerment of these officials in planning and implementing project activities. The participants acted as a pilot group and their experiences and needs provided models to create "MONITULKKI" – Toolbox for Everyday Cross-cultural Interaction", which is a collection of training materials for multicultural customer service. The training materials are available in Finnish at <http://www.pkky.fi/monitulkki> .

The Toolbox includes articles, which describe in general terms multicultural workplaces and intercultural communication and these are followed by a personal story of diversity management that explains the experiences of a Finno-Iranian couple, Johanna and Shahriar. The Toolbox also contains best practices in customer service, questions for self-reflection, background information on immigration and a glossary of terms related to multiculturalism and anti-racism.



Omid discusses the script with Risto, a project worker

In Pirkanmaa, there was a focus on the development of recruitment models. This included collaboration with businesses in seeking better methods of immigrant recruitment and induction training and co-operation with trade unions to increase immigrants' knowledge of employee's rights. An example of the recruitment of an immigrant lorry driver played by Omid was produced as a short drama series and is available in Finnish at www.tak.fi/moro. Different situations in which Omid, as the new worker, is introduced to fellow colleagues are demonstrated and these also indicate the positive or negative reactions that may result.

Based on the practical experiences of project participants, a guidebook on recruitment of immigrants was also developed. The title of the guide is "Yhteyksiä Osaamiseen. Opas monimuotoisen työyhteisön rakentajille" or *Guide to Developing Diversity Management in Working Environments*.



The filming of the drama series begins

Attempts were also made to educate and prepare firms and companies to manage diversity. A

series of four training sessions was organised in different working environments and the project quickly realised the importance of paying attention to the organisational needs, as well as human resource management strategies, in the development of these training programmes. One very significant innovation was the creation of a training course for Work Community Culture Mediators. The role of such a mediator is to understand the host-culture, the local organisational culture and the cultures of the individual immigrant employees and to act as a mediator in the workplace.

A considerable amount of work was also undertaken in developing new models to assess immigrants' vocational skills. This included supported learning and the adaptation of competence-based examinations to enable immigrants to demonstrate their proficiencies more clearly and, eventually, to obtain a certificate of their competence. The readiness of immigrants to participate in competence-based examinations increases over time and so a system of counting points can provide the motivation to start along the road towards certification. While the costs of such interim examinations are rather high, they can measure the real task-related knowledge and skills of the immigrant, and not simply knowledge of the Finnish language. There is also a need to train more examiners to assess the examination situation from the point of view of an immigrant. In addition, the project established supportive actions for immigrants in apprenticeship training which included Finnish language training at work places once a week and the experience of this language learning was very successful.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

At national level, the DP only had four partners. Three of these were local adult education centres and the fourth, the managing organisation, was the Aike International Ltd. All of these partners were already used to cooperating with each other and so this partnership did not offer many new insights but it provided a much wider network for dissemination. Through Aike International Ltd, it was possible to share the results of the DP with the other 43 adult education centres in the country – centres that were best placed to take on and use these outcomes.

However, much of the real benefits of partnership working are to be detected within the three local projects. In these there were steering or working groups that brought together the most important stakeholders such as employers, trade unions, municipalities and NGOs. Perhaps the only interest that was not represented was immigrant groupings but these are not well organised or resourced in regions outside Helsinki. All three projects report that it took time and effort to develop shared aims and objectives and common methods of working but this effort paid huge dividends. As Tero Mikkola, the project coordinator in Pirkanmaa explains, *“one of the most important success factors in our partnership was the ability to gradually turn different traditional approaches amongst instructors, civil servants, immigrant communities, trade unionists and employers into innovativeness and co-operation and, most important, make this a part of our shared working method. Diversity was brought into focus by using diversity as a tool!”*



Arya and Assiabi share their experiences of working as cultural mediators

Having employers on board meant that their attitudes could be influenced and they had the opportunity of seeing how well immigrants can perform in the workplace. It also made it easier to work with people at different levels in the companies' hierarchies and thus, to combine workplace practice with the more formal training which the immigrants were undertaking.

In the past, trade unions have been rather conservative, if not hostile, towards foreign employees, and gaining their co-operation in facilitating the integration of immigrants into the local labour markets was a very positive achievement. In South Karelia, the co-operation with the trade unions meant that the project outcomes could be widely marketed, as the local unions mailed brochures about the project to their members. A high percentage of Finnish labour force belongs to these trade unions and so the main message about the importance of opening working environments to immigrants reached a large regional audience. Also in Pirkanmaa, co-operation with the local trade union led to publication of a common web page on the project.

Partnership approaches were also important in achieving success in other aspects of the DP's operations. For example, the activities and the training of the new Work Community Culture Mediators in Pirkanmaa were underpinned by common platforms that enabled them to discuss culturally sensitive issues with employers, labour market organisations and NGOs. The development of the Toolbox for Everyday Cross-cultural Interaction in North Karelia would not have been possible without the direct involvement of a range of public services. However, the project's approach required their active participation and this was somewhat unfamiliar to the local partners, who again needed time to appreciate and adjust to this approach. In order to reinforce the outcomes of its multicultural training, the project in South Karelia created a network of the participants that offered an on-going source of mutual support and helped to provide solutions to emerging problems in the various departments of the local Adult Education Centre.

Local partners in a workshop with their transnational counterparts



Eini von Becker, who coordinated the MORO DP, believes *"we have learned a lot about working in partnership during our EQUAL activities!"* She also feels that *"this experience will stand AIKE in good stead for MANU, a new EQUAL project which is furthering work on vocational training and competence-based qualifications for immigrants."*

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[Link to EQUAL database description](#)