

TOWNS TOGETHER - NETWORKING FOR EMPOWERMENT AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Towns Together was launched, in the first round of EQUAL, as a partnership between the deprived areas in the three biggest cities in Sweden, Gothenburg, Malmoe and Stockholm. It is also a partnership between the business sector, the NGOs and the public sector, which has come up with a new approach to promoting the “business case” for action supporting the empowerment of ethnic minority groups.

The immigrant population is a young, international population and an important part of the future in Sweden. If companies want to develop their businesses and reach new customers, they will need to employ staff with a non-Swedish background from various ethnic groups and also to have a good reputation in terms of fulfilling their social responsibilities and practising non-discrimination. The same is also true for public sector services if they wish to improve their provision for the inhabitants of the areas in which they operate. Also, the public sector in Sweden will soon, because of demographic reasons, have to recruit many more members of staff and this is also a reason for this sector to have a good reputation amongst migrant and ethnic minority groups.

These messages are spread by “LinkWorkers” – a new professional role that Towns Together has piloted. These networkers play a key role in marketing, amongst enterprises and in the public sector, the idea of combining business development with empowerment for ethnic minority groups. The LinkWorkers help companies and public bodies to consult focus groups of migrants that test and discuss different kinds of products and services. In return some of the partners in the DP are also involved in helping migrants become more independent. For example, the ForeningsBanken/Swebank working in close cooperation with an NGO that represents migrant groups has established study circles on “how to manage your household finances more effectively.”

In Malmoe, Stockholm and Gothenburg the LinkWorkers arranged over 30 seminars and workshops for various groups working on new ideas for business development. The Confederation of Swedish Enterprises provided a platform for this marketing and ForeningsSparbanken/Swedbank and IKEA, which are active partners in the project, are used as good examples of companies employing people with a non–Swedish background.

As a result of these activities, it has proved possible to open up new employment opportunities for a number of people from non–Swedish backgrounds, many whom have formerly been unemployed for a considerable period of time. All of the DP partners have joint in a working group, led by the ForeningsSparbanken/Swedbank, to explore the future of this new networking concept.

Piloting the new roles of LinkWorkers to support empowerment was only one aspect of the DP’s work. The overall aim of Towns Together was to pioneer new ways of tackling the problems of access to the labour market that are faced by immigrants, in particular by young people many of whom leave school without a proper exam. Some of the project’s activities were also specifically aimed at developing new ways to break the social isolation of immigrant women.

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