

VALUING COMPETENCE AND DIVERSITY SECURING EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMMIGRANTS A REGIONAL NETWORK OF LABOUR MARKET ACTORS TACKLING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

Most immigrants have a weaker position on the labour market and face higher barriers to employment than the indigenous work force. A German EQUAL Development Partnership has set out to tackle these barriers by harnessing the potential of intercultural diversity as a resource for economic development in the Unna district, on the eastern edge of the Ruhr Basin.

IMMIGRANTS FACE PERSISTENT INEQUALITIES IN ACCESS TO WORK



The 10 cities and the various local communities of the district of Unna have had to cope with far-reaching structural changes during the last two decades. As in other former coal mining areas in Germany, unemployment still remains above the national average. People with a migrant or ethnic minority background are hit hardest by unemployment, with a rate more than twice as high as that of the indigenous work force. In addition, similar problems are also faced by many German nationals of foreign descent and by ethnic German repatriates from the former Eastern bloc countries. Together, all these groups of immigrants represent up to 12% of the district's total population.

Many of these immigrants were initially recruited to work in industrial sectors that traditionally provided jobs for a low qualified workforce. However, it is precisely these sectors that have been most affected by economic restructuring and some have almost disappeared from the region. The new employment opportunities that have emerged or that are evolving generally require levels of qualification and language competences higher than, or different from, those of many immigrant workers. For a number of years, the district of Unna has been offering vocational qualification programmes for jobless immigrants or those threatened by unemployment, but even so, successful participants in such programmes continue to face barriers that prevent their access to employment.

The [Competence and Diversity](#) Development Partnership (DP) was launched in 2005 to explore new approaches to tackling these problems. *“From our experience of the first round of EQUAL, we know that these barriers to employment can be overcome”,* argues Ingibjörg Pétursdóttir of the DP's managing organisation [Multicultural Forum Lünen](#), one of the two coordinators of the DP, and she continues to explain that *“many employers are not yet aware of the advantages that can be gained by recruiting workers from diverse cultural backgrounds. But we realise that there are also reservations and prejudices about employing immigrants that we must address”*. This view is shared by the 27 organisations, both public and private, that joined the Development Partnership. They agree that obtaining the active cooperation of employers is imperative if the inequalities and discrimination, which persist in the labour market, are to be removed.



Ingibjörg Pétursdóttir (right) presenting one of the DP's projects

Building on the successes of the [AMIKU](#)¹ DP during the first phase of EQUAL, *Competence and Diversity* provides a new framework for continuing and intensifying strategies to combat discrimination against immigrants in the labour market of the district of Unna. “Our approaches to offering new routes to qualification, fostering a better mastery of the German language and facilitating placement into work or vocational training have yielded very encouraging results” said Michael Makiolla, the head of the district authority, in summarising the outcomes of AMIKU, “but we have also identified scope for further necessary innovation, for instance promoting the concept of diversity and supporting diversity management in public administrations and in companies, especially SMEs. However, to consolidate the positive impact of our previous work



Michael Makiolla (left) of the Unna district authority honouring an employer's support for the work of the DP

and make further progress, it is vital that stable cross-linkages and more effective networking should be established between all those actors who are involved in the integration of immigrant citizens”.

The anti-discrimination strategy of the Unna district is very much in line with the European Employment Guidelines which place a strong emphasis on reducing employment gaps between third-country nationals and EU citizens. In its Recommendation ([2004/741/EC](#)) on the implementation of Member States' employment policies, the Council stresses, in one of its specific recommendations to Germany, the need to

“strengthen efforts to integrate immigrants” in order to attract more people to the labour market and to make work a real option for all.

A FINESPUN NET OF CROSS-LINKED ACTIVITIES

The *Competence and Diversity* DP is implemented by a network of labour market actors who cooperate on three main objectives:

- Convincing employers of the potential that a diverse workforce can offer for business development and involving them as active partners in the DP's approaches to improving immigrants' integration into work;
- Enhancing the intercultural competence of local or regional agencies and administrations, in both their roles of providing public services and of potential employers;
- Providing assistance to immigrant job seekers, including individual placement support, coaching and matching services, and also access to entrepreneurship training.

The DP pursues its work through ten separate but closely interrelated sub-projects ([see annexe](#)) that address these aspects from several perspectives which respond to, or focus on, different interests and needs of the target groups and harness the specific strengths and modes of operation of the key actors involved.

The activities in these ten projects can be grouped under four lines of strategic action.

- **Piloting more Effective Placement Processes**

Two issues come to the fore in this line of action. The first relates to enhancing the capacities of placement services to offer personalised support that takes account of the needs and individual circumstances of immigrant **job seekers**. This support includes multi-lingual advice and vocational guidance, identification of possible placement opportunities, help with the preparation of application documents and job interviews, and also special assistance to immigrants with disabilities. Sub-projects [1.](#) and [3.](#) concentrate on such activities.

¹ Arbeit für Migranten-Neue Wege in den Arbeitsmarkt im Kreis Unna (*Work for Migrants - New access to the labour market in the Unna District*)

The second issue concerns the provision of information, advice and recruitment services to **enterprises**, especially SMEs, in order to motivate employers to open possible job vacancies to immigrant candidates (see sub-projects [1.](#), [5.](#), and [7.](#)).

The DP seeks to act on both issues simultaneously and in a coordinated way.

- **Sensitising Employers in the Public and Private sector and Building their Capacity to Harness Ethnic and Cultural Diversity**

Project activities include intercultural training for 500 members of staff working in local and regional administrations (sub-project [2.](#)), awareness raising about the added value or “business case” of intercultural diversity for opening up new markets and customer groups (sub-project [9.](#)), and the promotion of effective methods of diversity management in SMEs (sub-projects [6.](#) and [8.](#)).

- **Fostering Business Creation and Self-Employment by Immigrants**

The activities of sub-project [4.](#) have two main thrusts. The first includes awareness-raising courses for consultants from the regional agency for business development who want to acquire “diversity-competences” that will enable them to provide qualified start-up advice and business support to potential immigrant entrepreneurs. The second involves offering a range of information and training opportunities and practical assistance to immigrants who want to set up their own business.

- **Enhancing the Employability of Immigrants working in Precarious Sectors**

Sub-project [10.](#) offers special qualification programmes to enable immigrant workers to adapt to new skills requirements and changing demands particularly in those sectors of employment that are most affected by structural change. These programmes involve training courses, profiling of existing skills and competences, language support and assistance in job interviews and the preparation of papers for job applications.

These activities provide a strong lever for implementing the [Recommendations for Action](#) that summarise practical conclusions from the outcomes of the *AMIKU* DP (EQUAL round 1) and that were discussed with decision makers from policy, public administration and the business world at the final *AMIKU* conference in June 2005. However, *Competence and Diversity* is not only aimed at consolidating the successes of its predecessor. By focusing more closely on encouraging and assisting employers to actively support strategies for the vocational integration of immigrants, the new DP also seeks to tap the potential of intercultural diversity as a resource for the economic development of the Unna district.

Information and public relations are important flanking measures for the work of the DP. Activities are similar to those of *AMIKU*, as *Competence and Diversity* continues to publish a quarterly newsletter and to broadcast *Radio EQUAL*, a monthly regional programme. In addition to its comprehensive internet websites, it also maintains good press contacts and organises thematic events and publicity campaigns.



An *AMIKU* publicity campaign

A NETWORK OF ACTORS ON INTEGRATION AND ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

Expectations that *Competence and Diversity* will live up to its ambitious objectives are largely founded on the fact that the DP has succeeded in bringing together all relevant actors and stakeholders in a new partnership. Its strength resides in the following factors:

- A clear consensus amongst all partners, that both public and private sector responsibilities must be mobilised to achieve the DP’s objectives;
- The involvement of operational partners with complementary expertise and a clear remit for implementing the ten sub-projects of the DP, and of 17 strategic partners who are responsible for policy development or for decision making in the relevant administrations and agencies, at local or regional level;

- The strong presence and commitment, in both groups of partners, of actors who are close to the business world, including SMEs or SME associations, particularly in the craft sector, providers of business consultancy and the regional branch of a large trade union;
- A spirit of cooperation that was strengthened through the experience of successful cooperation during the first phase of EQUAL, involving most of the current partners.

The interplay of these factors has provided a common basis for all partners to engage in a sustainable network that links together different but complementary responsibilities for action and enables an efficient scale of operation to cover the whole territory. It should also be noted that more than half of the 40 employees of the *Multicultural Forum Lünen*, the DP's Managing Organisation, have had the experience of immigration or come from families with a migration background. They are thus well placed to make and maintain contact with the DP's target groups and to understand, and respond to, their particular problems and needs.

This climate of cooperation also permeates the DP's work with its transnational partners. During the first phase of EQUAL, many of the operational and strategic partners of the *AMIKU* DP were actively involved in the study visits, thematic seminars, conferences and joint productions of the *Diverse Reflections* Transnational Partnership. In presenting the DP's *Recommendations for Action*, Michael Makiolla, the Unna District Administrator, who participated in most of the transnational activities underlined that *"these exchanges with our partners in Great Britain, Denmark and the Netherlands provided important learning opportunities for us"*. Similar experience has also been gained by the other transnational partners, as reflected in the words of one of the operators of the *Common Ground* DP who felt that *"We received a lot of positive interest in our 'Soft Outcomes Measurement Kit' particularly as AMIKU had examined another measurement system that they felt was too complicated and expensive. But the trip was mutually beneficial as we were very impressed with their Multi-Cultural Forum where a single organisation provides a wide range of services to assist ethnic minority groups."*

Throughout the second phase of EQUAL, *Competence and Diversity* cooperates with partner DPs in Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain and Germany which work together in a new Transnational Partnership entitled "*New labour market possibilities*".

Competence and Diversity is also an active member of the *National Cooperation Network on the Vocational Integration of Migrants* that has been launched in Germany within the context of EQUAL.

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Links to EQUAL database description:

[Competence and Diversity](#) Development Partnership

[New labour market possibilities](#) Transnational Partnership

[AMIKU](#) Development Partnership

[Diverse Reflections](#) Transnational Partnership

Annexe:

Projects of the <i>Competence and Diversity</i> Development Partnership	
1). <u>Intercultural Job Placement</u>	This project provides specialised staff for several job centres in the district in order to facilitate the placement of immigrant job seekers. Acting as contact persons for all questions regarding the target group, these members of staff also seek to motivate businesses to consider new recruitments from this group.
2). <u>Intercultural Training in Local Administrations</u>	This project offers intercultural training for workers in local and regional administrations in order to sensitise them to issues relating to the vocational integration of migrants.
3). <u>Job Integration of Immigrant People with Disabilities</u>	This project seeks to advance the labour market integration of immigrant people with more severe handicaps. In addition to providing information and counselling, the goal is to create new jobs in migrant-businesses.
4). <u>Business Start-Up Advice for Immigrants</u>	This project provides support to immigrant founders of new businesses in the district of Unna. New strategies will be developed and tested by the Start-Up consultancy, drawing on services for the promotion of trade and industry that are available in the district of Unna.
5). <u>Developing Trade Associations' Capacities to offer Advice and Services on Issues related to the Employment of Immigrants</u>	By piloting the new role of a specialist adviser in the regional crafts association, this project seeks to promote job opportunities for immigrants in craft businesses in the district.
6). <u>Piloting Diversity Management within SMEs</u>	This project aims to explore and test approaches to Diversity Management in small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the district of Unna, in order to enable businesses to recognise and use the intercultural competences of their employees as an advantage.
7). <u>Employment Sponsorship for Immigrants</u>	This project seeks to identify, and offer support to, businesses that provide new jobs or training opportunities for immigrants. Employers who recruit unemployed people with a migrant background are awarded special recognition through suitable publicity about the fact that they support and practise diversity management.
8). <u>Diversity of Staff as a Chance for SMEs</u>	This project is aimed at demonstrating good practice of Diversity Management in an advanced technology business in Dortmund (LIMO GmbH). The goal is the workplace integration of employees of immigrant origin and also the demonstration of efficient uses of methods of diversity-based personnel management.
9). <u>Migrants in Handicraft Businesses: Benefits of Intercultural Competencies</u>	This project encourages and supports businesses in the craft sector to harness the intercultural background of immigrant workers in addressing new customer groups or opening up new markets.
10). <u>Enhancing Employability of Migrants in Precarious Work Sectors</u>	This project addresses migrant workers who are threatened by unemployment because they work in industrial sectors that are particularly affected by structural change. It offers special opportunities to obtain occupational qualifications that reflect the emerging skills requirements of the regional economy.