



Spain 2008

Peer Review: Support Fund for the reception and integration of immigrants and their educational support

Short Report



On behalf of the
European Commission
DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities



Held in San Lorenzo de El Escorial (Spain) on 20-21 October 2008, the Peer Review was hosted by the Spanish Ministry of Labour and Immigration. In addition to the host country, seven peer countries took part: the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia and the Netherlands. Also participating as stakeholders were Caritas Europa as well as representatives from the Spanish Red Cross and CEPAIM, the Spanish Consortium of Entities for Integrated Actions with Migrants, together with representatives of the European Commission's DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

1. The policy under review

Until two decades ago, Spain was mainly a country of emigration. But it is now one of the countries receiving the highest number of new migrants every year. The number of non-EU immigrants rose from 319,327 in 1996 to 2,092,095 in 2006. Family reunifications, and marriages between Spaniards and immigrants, have helped to consolidate this pattern. For historical and cultural reasons, Spanish society has remained relatively open to immigration, so the preconditions for integration are good. Naturalisations increased from 8,411 in 1996 to 42,829 in 2005.

The social integration of immigrants has been a priority aim of Spain's National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (2006-2008) under the Lisbon Objectives and remains a priority in the 2008-2010 plan. It has been followed up with a Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration (2007-2010).

One of the measures adopted by the Spanish government to foster integration was the establishment in 2005 of a Support Fund. This Fund, which was the subject of the Peer Review, is designed to bolster and financially support action in Spain's Autonomous Communities (i.e. regions) and municipalities aimed at the social integration of immigrants as a means of fostering social cohesion. It promotes twelve core activities: reception; education; employment; housing; social services; health; childhood and youth; equal treatment; women; participation; awareness-building; and co-development. Most of the funding has been allocated to reception and integration and to education. For reception and integration, a weighting system ensures that the greatest proportion of the funding goes to those Autonomous Regions with the biggest foreign populations and/or the greatest migratory pressures. Funding levels for education are determined by the number of non-EU students enrolled in compulsory education and the number of students who do not speak Castilian Spanish.

The Fund's financial resources were €120m in 2005, €182.4m in 2006 and €198m in 2007. At least 30% co-financing must be provided by the Autonomous Regions themselves, and the Fund is explicitly *not* intended to finance the total cost of their integration activities. Each year, the Autonomous Regions are required to present an Implementation Record which evaluates each of the quantitative and qualitative indicators for the core activities financed by the Fund. An independent evaluation was carried out in 2007. The Fund is reported to have brought about an increase in integration activities. Financing of these activities by the Autonomous Regions has grown proportionately faster than the Fund's own finances. The Fund has also helped to build systems for the dissemination of good practice in the field of integration.

Among the activities benefiting from the Fund is a network of centres which provide education, training, leisure, job-search and other facilities for immigrants, while promoting cultural and social exchanges with the Spanish population. The Peer Reviewers visited one of these centres, in Madrid.

2. Key lessons and aspects of transferability

Among the main points to emerge from the Peer Review:

- The participants were struck by the **humanity of the Spanish approach** to immigration, and felt this was a good lesson to take home to their respective countries.
- An emphasis on **mutual exchange** between immigrants and the receiving society is an important part of that approach. The receiving society itself must play an active part in integration.
- The **allocation of funding** under the Spanish programme was admired both for its clear distribution criteria and for its multi-annual nature, which provides greater security, predictability and sustainability for recipients. This approach could usefully be adopted in some other EU countries, as regards programmes run both by regional and local authorities and by NGOs.
- **Evaluation** of the impact of programmes for immigrants is important in all the peer countries, and particularly those where such programmes are relatively new. There is a widely felt need for improvements in evaluation, which could for instance be a focus of further Peer Reviews and/or other exchanges of experience at the European level.
- It emerged from the debate that in some EU countries, integration efforts need to be focused not so much on new immigrants as on **second or third generation residents from immigrant backgrounds**. This reflects the different immigration histories of Member States.
- Elements of the Spanish policy could well be transferable to countries that are experiencing marked increases in new immigration. Adopting the Spanish idea of **integration centres** might thus be interesting for some countries.
- Spain's inclusion of **undocumented immigrants** in programmes for integration, healthcare, education etc. was noted. However, such an approach might not be possible in all EU countries. The political sensitivity of this issue in some countries is a limiting factor when it comes to transferability.
- National government policies on immigration tend to aim either at **assimilation** or at **multiculturalism**. Some participants questioned whether this dichotomy is wholly valid. Are there middle ways between complete assimilation and complete cultural segregation? Many immigrants wish to integrate into the receiving society to a certain extent, but without losing their own identity. So "compulsory integration" may prove counterproductive. "Unity in diversity" or "interculturality" (as the Spanish approach was described) may be a more acceptable and realistic aim.
- **Coordination** between different levels of government raises particular issues in countries where integration is a devolved responsibility. The Spanish experience of a regional approach could be of value to other countries in that position.
- Coordination across different departments involved in the integration process is also a challenge, which in many cases is compounded by the fact that different **understanding of the aims of integration** may prevail. In some instances, the integration process tend to be used as a tool for the management of migration whereby integration measures

(such as language courses) are used in a selection process and as conditions to be granted rights (residence or working permits, access to social housing, etc). In other cases, the integration process aims at the full participation of the migrants and their descendants in the host society.

- **Women immigrants**, if they remain in the home and do not go out to work, may have little contact with the receiving country and its language. This may occur particularly in the context of **family reunification**. And yet the mothers of immigrant families are crucial to their integration into the receiving society. So some countries place a particular focus on language training for mothers of immigrant families. Others take the view that their educational system should be equipped to cater for children who have not fully learnt the receiving country's language during their preschool years.
- **Services** should be available to all citizens within a society. Migrants' access to services should be part of that universal entitlement. However, this does not exclude the possibility of specific service provision for immigrants where needed.