



Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion and Assessment in Social Inclusion

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Making a success of integrating immigrants into the labour market

Short Report



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



The Peer Review on ***Making a success of integrating immigrants into the labour market*** took place in Oslo, Norway, on 18-19 November 2010. It was hosted by the Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi). Taking part as peer countries were Austria, Finland, Greece, Italy, Latvia and Malta, with stakeholder representatives from the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) and the European Women's Lobby (EWL). Oyvind Opland represented the European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, and the Thematic Expert was Manuela Samek Lodovici from the Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale (IRS) in Italy.

1. The policy under review

Despite increasing immigration into Norway, the numbers are still quite small in comparison to the total population (and some EU countries). In January 2010, there were 552,000 people of immigrant background living in the country, including 93,000 born in Norway of immigrant parents. This amounts to 11.4% of the population.

Norwegian integration and inclusion policy aims to enable new arrivals to participate in the labour market and in society as quickly as possible, enjoying equal living standards and opportunities to those of native citizens.

In support of this approach, the government supports three main programmes, implemented at municipality level:

- The right and obligation to participate in Norwegian language and social studies. The great majority of employers demand mastery of the native language, which is also key to wider integration. Foreign nationals (aged 16-55) with residence or work permits must participate in 300 hours of language training.
- The Introductory Programme for refugees, aiming to enable refugees to enter the labour market or training as soon as possible. The programme offers language and social studies and preparation for work or further education. Each participant follows an individual development plan and receives an income of around €18,000 per year, conditional on full-time attendance.
- The Second Chance project (launched in 2005 as a trial programme) is aimed at people with an immigrant background who have no link to the labour market. In 2010, the target groups include stay-at-home mothers, and young people aged 18-25.

Proposals for possible future policy development include the introduction of mandatory Norwegian language testing, increasing compulsory language lessons to 600 hours, and a citizenship test.

2. The key issues

Participants discussed a number of issues arising from the Norwegian experience, including:

- How integration programmes, language courses and tests are designed and carried out in other EU countries, in order to support the labour market integration of immigrants.
- Whether mandatory language courses and tests are a good tool for labour market integration, and examples of good practice in this field.
- How the governance system can support the labour market integration of immigrants.
- Whether naturalisation is a tool for labour market integration or only a certification of successful integration.
- How integration policies can be further developed in the light of current fiscal restrictions.
- How the outcomes and impacts of integration policies are evaluated in different countries.

During the course of the debate, various concerns emerged. One of them was the danger of mixing immigration and integration policies. Most participants felt these needed to be kept separate, and that the threat of losing the right to residence would not generally encourage immigrants to integrate.

The issue of mandatory language courses and compulsory testing is a particularly sensitive one. The main question relating to this policy approach is: what is the aim? If testing is designed to provide more information for society (policy-makers and employers) as in Norway, it may be justified. But when language exams become a condition of citizenship, they are problematic, leading to a confusion of integration and immigration policies. Testing can become a barrier rather than an aid to integration. This is seen in countries that tend to use it as a means to control immigration flow aiming at erecting barriers to immigration.

Women are most at risk of exclusion from the labour market and society, partly due to traditional attitudes in some communities, and so adopting a 'family approach' involving the husband and children may help to tackle this. Several participants pointed to the role of media in exacerbating discriminatory attitudes in society and among employers.

EU citizens enjoy freedom of movement without language requirements. Some felt this puts third country nationals at an unfair disadvantage. Lack of recognition of qualifications is also a significant problem, leading to many immigrants working in menial jobs for which they are overqualified, and a waste of human resources in the EU economy.

While the Norwegian social partners are closely involved in policy making – which was welcomed – some Peer Review participants urged a greater role for NGOs and immigrants' representatives. Further debate touched on the need to balance obligations with rights, and the role of 'hard' and 'soft' indicators for integration, with some calling for intermediate goals for groups furthest from employment, and more emphasis on enabling immigrants – especially women – to take a fuller role in society rather than focusing solely on the labour market.

3. Site visit

Peer review participants visited the Bærum Adult Education Centre outside Oslo to learn about the practical framework for language and social studies training for immigrants. They also met students taking a 36-week pre-nursing assistants' course, and watched a videoed role play designed to help trainees cope with real-life situations in the workplace, and communicate in Norwegian.

4. Lessons, conclusions and recommendations

- Wide differences exist between immigrant groups, which include long-stay, temporary, asylum-seekers and refugees, labour migrants, family reunion arrivals, and ethnic minorities living within countries, sometimes for generations. All have specific integration problems.
- Some countries adopt different approaches to different groups. There are examples that ethnic minorities maintain a degree of segregation, whereas policy towards migrants is aimed at integration.
- Circumstances vary widely from one country to another, ranging from small numbers of migrants to communities of many millions. This demands different approaches.
- Migrants tend to concentrate in urban areas, and this in itself poses challenges.
- Targeted versus mainstreaming approaches: the former can disadvantage groups who are not covered by specifically targeted actions.
- More evidence is needed of what policies work. Are efforts in Norway and Austria to make contact with young people and stay-at-home mothers proving effective, for example?
- A number of specific initiatives are proving successful in some countries and could be transferred elsewhere. These include mentoring schemes, social support networks, as well as diversity and gender consultants. There are also moves towards special training for service providers, to raise awareness of the challenges facing immigrants.
- How can immigrants be motivated to want to integrate and how effective are language courses in this regard? Acquisition of citizenship may be one incentive, but if the procedures become too hard, involving exams and qualifications, this may put more people off.
- Some countries have the problem of large proportions of immigrants in the informal labour market. In order to reduce the number of illegal immigrants, action is needed to regulate the black economy.
- Many participants underlined the need to involve NGOs, immigrant associations, private service providers, and the social partners. European companies are increasingly in need of workers, and so could be encouraged to contribute towards training.
- Mandatory language courses and compulsory testing being part of integration policy is a

sensitive issue. There should not be confusion between integration and immigration policies.

- The current financial crisis is increasing pressure on resources and generating cuts in many support programmes, which is likely to be counterproductive in the long run.
- Generally, there is a lack of research data allowing for the evaluation of different policies.