



Best practice helps tackle risk of social exclusion for immigrants



As migration patterns across Europe evolve, host countries must find ways to tackle the resulting challenges. Through the EU's Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process, a transnational exchange project studied the experiences of immigrants from 10 EU countries and looked at best practice as a way to support their integration.

European countries, which have traditionally been 'exporters' of workers, are now facing new challenges in integrating immigrants. This is a phenomenon that interests the whole of Europe including the 12 new Member States that have recently become countries of destination. Even if the experience of immigration varies substantially from one country to another, the problems that immigrants face when they reach their host country have certain similarities. They can therefore be compared.

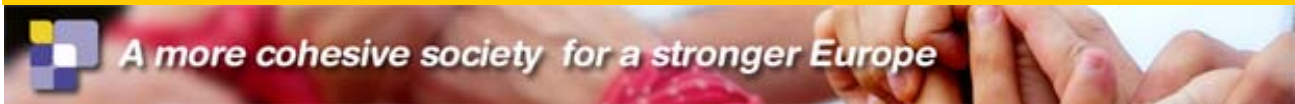
This has been done by an EU-supported project: Reti. It established a transnational network of both public and private institutions such as local governments, migrant women's networks, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and adult educational establishments. Its mission is to examine the social exclusion of immigrants across national boundaries and different circumstances and to identify best practices to be shared. The project was conducted in two phases. The first started in the winter of 2002 and lasted until the end of 2003. The second, developed from the beginning of 2004 to the end of 2005, carried out an in-depth research based on the findings of the first phase.

The project brought together 15 partners from 10 different countries. This allowed participants to examine critical issues influenced by different backgrounds, geographical positions and socio-economic and cultural systems. It also permitted a review of the various methods used to integrate the immigrant populations. Particular attention was given to the analysis of social exclusion with a gender approach and to the study of solutions adopted in marginalised European regions that recently started welcoming migrants.

■ Comparing different models to find common solutions

When immigrants arrive in their country of destination, they have to face a host of challenges: from linguistic obstacles to learning how to use the





social services on offer. They need to get to know the administration of the host country, regularise their legal situation, find work and accommodation, secure access to school, health and social services, and seek social and cultural integration. So how do immigrants deal with this in different Member States?

One of the main lessons learnt from the first phase, which examined the situation of immigrants in Italy, Spain and Sweden, was the emergence of two main models of integration. The first, known as the 'Mediterranean Model', is characterised by the absorption of a precarious immigrant workforce in specific niches of the labour market such as construction, food services (HORECA), domestic and care work, and itinerant sales. In this model, the immigrants are usually categorised according to their ethnic origin and gender and perform activities that are typical of the category in question.

The Swedish experience, on the other hand, is a model of best practice in integrating immigrants by training them through language classes and national law courses with the aim of making them more autonomous. In this way the Swedish integration policy aims at enhancing the skills and qualifications of immigrants in the labour market. The result is that immigrants in Sweden do not necessarily perform low-skilled activities, as in the Mediterranean model, but have better job opportunities which allow them to have higher living standards than in Southern Europe and, consequently, to integrate more easily.

During the public presentation of this first study, the importance of mutual exchange of views with immigrants and their direct involvement was underlined by one of the participants, who said: "It has been a fantastic experience, above all because of the direct contact with the immigrants. In particular, female immigrants are really working hard to change their lives for the better. These are among the few experiences and relationships that

motivate us and change our way of thinking and our emotions".

■ Inside observations reveal successful models for country to country transfer

During the second phase of the project the number of countries involved was extended to 10. They were divided in two geographical areas, the Mediterranean and the Baltics, which, though different, proved to be complementary. This allowed the second phase of the project's results to be compared with the first.

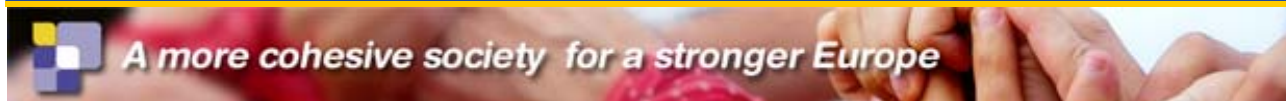
The research in this phase, focused on the following problems:

- family assistance carried out by foreign female immigrants;
- the situation and the possibilities of cultural mediation in Europe;
- immigration and human trafficking.

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Talking about the project, Prof. Francesca Brezzi, project coordinator, said: "It was extremely important to analyse things from within these



realities, in order to overcome all the forms of ethnocentrism. We wanted to go beyond the stereotypes that fill up the communication resources and observe the real world in which the immigrants work and live". The final study also emphasised the wealth of diversity and the importance of integration tools in creating conditions for common understanding of values and cultural differences.



Interesting results from the project emerged when comparing the various national and local schemes to integrate immigrants. For example, the importance of reliable information about job opportunities within the EU needs to be emphasised once more. Together with the opening of the EU labour market, this is likely to create more legal migration channels and decrease the risk of human trafficking. At local levels, the projects financed by regional funds proved to be excellent tools of integration. With such funds, for example, language classes for foreigners have been conducted in the Italian Region of Campania. These followed a similar approach to that undertaken within the framework of the Swedish integration policy.

23 November 2007

Project information

Name of the initiative: RETI – Migranti e nativi: reti di esperienze, reti di accoglienze (Networks – Migrants and Natives: Networks of experience, Networks of welcome)

Website: www.babelonline.net/nmn

Activity: Transnational Exchange Programme

Country: Italy

Scope: Transnational

SPSI Priority theme: Inclusion of most vulnerable groups

Year: 2002-2005

EU funding: €149,539

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