

City Policies for Migrants in Europe: Equality and Diversity in Jobs and Services

COMPAS has been a member of the European Cities for Local Integration Policy initiative (CLIP), funded by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, and Sarah Spencer wrote its second overview report published in October 2008. The report explores the contribution which 25 European local authorities are making in relation to their own employment of migrants and in relation to services provision. The authorities, all actively engaged in the project, range from capital cities to provincial towns. All are major employers in their area and provide many services central to integration: from education, housing and health through to a service which can be a particular source of tension – rubbish disposal.

The authorities thus had the potential to make an impact on the labour market and social integration of migrants and the evidence collected by the five research centres engaged in the project showed that those authorities that had been proactive in changing their policies and practices could demonstrate results. Malmö, for instance, had raised the proportion of its staff from a migrant background from 13% in 1997 to 25% in 2006; Frankfurt had raised the proportion among its new apprentices to 18% and, in Wolverhampton ethnic minorities comprised 7% of the staff in the highest salary bands.

In relation to employment, there were among the 25 authorities some that had taken little action. Awareness of the importance of labour market integration had not led them to consider their own potential contribution as major employers. Some had no data which identified whether there were people of a migrant background on their staff; lacked awareness of the benefits which a diverse staff can bring to the organisation; or were confident that a policy of treating all job applicants in the same way would be sufficient to ensure a representative workforce, unaware of the particular barriers migrants can face such as lack of awareness of job opportunities in the authority or that they are eligible to apply.

Local authorities keen to ensure equal access to their jobs and apprenticeships had done more than have procedures in place to avoid discrimination: procedures that are necessary to ensure fairness but not sufficient to deliver equality or manage a diverse

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workforce effectively. Successful authorities had been proactive in encouraging applications: through advertising in different languages on their websites and in papers that migrants read; and visiting schools and places of worship to provide information on job opportunities - raising awareness and sending a signal that applications would be welcome. They trained their staff to make appointments on merit without regard to the individual's background and to recognise and respect the differing cultural and religious traditions of staff so that, having accepted a job, migrants prosper as a member of the team. Some authorities provided advanced language tuition and ensured fair access to training opportunities to facilitate equality of access to senior posts, not only to those at a junior level. The migrants still had to compete equally with other staff for jobs and promotion: there was no 'positive discrimination'. Only in Amsterdam was preference given to migrants over other applicants, the city concerned that it could not achieve a representative workforce in any other way.

All of the authorities reported that they faced a series of challenges in promoting equal access to jobs. Barriers included the legal restriction in many countries that only EU and EEA nationals can work in some local authority jobs; the requirement that job applicants speak two official languages (Swedish and Finnish for instance); slow procedures for recognition of qualifications and lack of resources for targeted advertising, translation and outreach visits. A significant problem was lack of data, a sensitive issue in some countries. Authorities that have no data on the migrant background of their staff and job applicants – whether country of birth, nationality or ethnicity – were unable to identify whether they were failing to provide equality of access to jobs, or to monitor progress.

Pressure on local authorities to ensure equal access to services for migrants, and that their services meet their diverse needs, had come from two sources: the need to address the disadvantage migrants can experience, for instance in education and health; and from the day to day pressures on individual services that find themselves unable to meet the particular needs that migrants may have.

The report has many examples of innovative ways in which services had adapted to meet this challenge. Most focus on addressing the needs of migrants but a minority direct some of their attention towards the non migrant population – providing information about migrants, challenging misconceptions, and offering mediation where tensions arise at the neighbourhood level.

The study found that innovation in one service had often not yet transferred to other parts of the authority, highlighting the importance of leadership and accountability. Some authorities faced low awareness among their staff of migrants' differing needs and the barriers they can face; and some feared there would be a negative public reaction if migrants were perceived to get 'special treatment' – highlighting the need for authorities to have an effective communications strategy, explaining the rationale for the measures adopted. A lack of data meant that many were unable to say whether migrants were able to access their services or whether their solutions were delivering results.

The report concludes with a series of recommendations for authorities at European, national and local level on action that can be taken to facilitate access for migrants to jobs and services, recommendations now being considered by the cities engaged in the project and by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, a sponsor of the CLIP project.

Equality and Diversity in Jobs and Services: City policies for migrants in Europe, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2008. Written by Sarah Spencer on basis of city reports compiled by CLIP research teams.

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