

Principles of Good Practice in Integrating Immigrants into the Labour Market

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Rachel Marangozov is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Employment Studies, where she specializes in the labour market disadvantage of ethnic minority groups and migrant workers. Previous to this, she worked at the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) on a range of equality and diversity issues. She is a Director of MigrationWork CIC, which helps communities, policymakers, and practitioners respond to migration. Her work there has involved projects for the European Commission in both the United Kingdom and in several European Member States on a range of integration issues. She is the Thematic Expert for the ESF Network on Migrants (2017 – 2019). The key role of these networks is for (mainly) ESF managing authorities to come together to share good practice and arrange study visits to see good practice in action. The network is focusing on recognition of skills and integration of migrants.

On the 20th September 2017, Rachel Marangozov presented Principles of Good Practice at a workshop at the Metropolis Conference in The Hague. Her presentation drew from her experience at both the UK and EU level in evaluating employment programmes and projects targeting immigrants and refugees.

The text below elaborates on the six principles which were identified in her presentation as being key to successfully integrating immigrants into the labour market.

In a Nutshell: Six Principles of Good Practice

- 1) Mainstreaming should not rule out targeted initiatives
- 2) Interventions need to be tailored and individualised to meet specific needs/ contexts
- 3) Not just work, but sustainable work and progression
- 4) Joined-up, coordinated and sequenced support/ service provision
- 5) Early and proactive intervention
- 6) Funding needs to get smarter at addressing the 'implementation gap'

1. Mainstreaming should not rule out targeted initiatives

The UK approach to integrating immigrants has always been subsumed within broader social policies around anti-discrimination, social inclusion/ mobility and community cohesion. This 'mainstreaming' of integration is all good and well, and may indeed be an approach that other Member States (MSs) increasingly turn to in the light of fewer resources, particularly given that many disadvantaged groups may share the same barriers to entering into work as immigrants. However, mainstreaming cannot become a policy goal in and of itself. Where mainstreaming of integration policies is found wanting and unable to meet the specific needs of immigrants, then mainstream social policies should accommodate targeted interventions to address this.

A key risk with mainstreaming is that in times of economic hardship, integration policy is marginalised and subject to cuts in support services. For example, as a result of post-recession austerity policies in the UK, English language provision has been cut by almost half since 2009 and the Government scrapped the Refugee Integration and Employment Strategy in 2011.¹

2. Interventions need to be tailored and individualised to meet specific needs/ contexts

A common element of successful projects and initiatives is their ability to tailor interventions to individual needs and/ or local contexts. For example, in the UK, the move towards ‘localism’ and the growing recognition that integration happens at the local level, shows the most promise in tailoring interventions to deliver positive change at the local level and there have been some good examples in London and elsewhere.² In terms of tailoring interventions to meet individual needs, the UK also has a history of bridging programmes for refugee teachers and doctors to help support them to re-train in the UK and eventually find related work.³

Again, however, a key risk to ‘local’ approaches to integration is that they can be subject to fiscal constraints. In the UK, for example, many local authorities have faced considerable funding cuts from Central Government since the 2008 recession and so do not often prioritise integration over other services demands, such as social services, education and healthcare – all of which are also services which are under severe pressure.

3. Not just work, but sustainable work and progression

The UK is often criticised for a ‘work first’ approach to many of its employment support programmes – that is, the ‘push’ to get people into work first with little thought as to whether that work is sustainable (ie: for the long term) or whether it is good-quality, offering opportunities to develop and progress. This issue is a growing concern in the UK context given the recent growth of the ‘gig’ economy and associated work which is often more insecure and precarious.

The position of many Eastern European workers in the UK illustrates this problem well. Many who arrived since 2004⁴ have taken low-skilled, low-paid jobs in the UK, despite being highly qualified and skilled in their countries of origin. Often, this is because they lack English language proficiency. As such, many become trapped in low-quality work which offers few opportunities for progression and career development.⁵

¹ This was the only strategy in the UK which directly related to immigrant integration. All other policies were subsumed into broader social policies.

² See Ali, S and Gidley, B (2014), ‘Advancing Outcomes for All Minorities. Experiences of mainstreaming immigrants integration policy in the United Kingdom.’ Migration Policy Institute (MPI).

³ A current bridging scheme is in operation in Glasgow, Scotland:
<http://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/newsroom/media-releases/refugee-doctors-programme.aspx>

⁴ And the enlargement of the European Union.

⁵ See Marangozov, R (2014), ‘Benign Neglect? Policies to support the upward mobility for immigrants in the United Kingdom.’ MPI.

4. Joined-up, coordinated and sequenced support/ service provision

Another common element to any successful integration project is the ability to address immigrants' needs in a holistic manner. This requires a joined-up approach to service delivery and support, and one which is well coordinated and sequenced. For example, a refugee's immediate needs upon arrival in a new country will not always be employment; they are more likely to have immediate housing needs, be in need of legal advice or be preoccupied with concerns about prospects for family reunification. Therefore, employment support services need to factor this in and provide timely support that is part of, and not separate to, a broader package of support capable of addressing these multiple and complex needs in a holistic manner. The key advantage of such an approach is that it is likely to meet the needs of other disadvantaged groups in society, such as disabled people or those with health conditions, who also required joined-up support services to meet their needs.

The prospects for this type of intervention are low in the UK, where responsibility for integration is spread across several government departments, a number of agencies and at different levels of governance. However, this is also a challenge in other MSs where support services have historically developed in silo to one another.

5. Early and proactive intervention

There is much to be said for intervening early to support those immigrants who have the least 'human capital.'⁶ Broadly speaking, those immigrant groups who arrived in the UK after the First World War, and who possessed the least amount of human capital (for example, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis), have fared far worse on a number of socio-economic indicators than those that possessed far higher levels (for example, Nigerians and Indians). Even though their children tend to do better, Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities still lag behind other ethnic minority groups and White British groups on a number of indicators and also face much higher levels of discrimination in the labour market. With the benefit of hindsight, early intervention to support these communities could have set them off to a better start in the UK.⁷

Examples of early and proactive intervention today include those 'early intervention' efforts in Germany to assist refugees' integration into employment.⁸

⁶ I am referring here primarily to skills, qualifications, social networks and financial resources.

⁷ Although the UK was very quick to transfer social, political and economic rights onto immigrants during this period, it was not enough to prevent the economic disadvantage which continues to blight some ethnic minority groups.

⁸ Staff from Public Employment Services (PES) go out to reception facilities where they assess competencies through a small work package that they build from asylum seekers' self-declarations about their professions, qualifications and previous work experience. The individual then attends a federal employment office where tailored employment strategies are developed to match their skills with the needs of employers in the area. Asylum seekers who have little or no documentary proof of their foreign qualifications are also given the opportunity to have their professional competencies appraised under the

6. Funding needs to get smarter at addressing the ‘implementation gap’

We know quite a lot about what ‘works well’ in integrating immigrants into the labour market. We also know quite a bit about barriers that they face in finding work. What we know less about is why this good practice is not implemented and why barriers are not removed – what I term here as the ‘implementation gap.’

Funding of integration projects need to target infrastructural change, and not just stand-alone initiatives and projects. Often, it is structures, processes and infrastructures that prevent immigrants progressing all the way into employment – whether they be legal, fiscal or educational structures, or factors to do with the political environment – and funding needs to address these. Again, allocating funding on this basis is likely to benefit other disadvantaged groups, and not just immigrants, by removing common barriers to employment.

terms of the Professional Qualifications Assessment Act through “qualification analysis” which assesses skills, knowledge and capabilities on the basis of samples of their work. Following an evaluation of this pilot, PES now provides nationwide skills assessment and counselling services for asylum seekers with good prospects of being allowed to stay although the longer-term impact of early intervention is not yet known.