

European Regions



Fast-track Integration in European Regions (FIER)



Keyword(s):

Migration and Integration

Empowerment

Labour Market and VET

Introduction

The participating regions in Sweden, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Norway and Turkey face challenges with view to the integration of migrants/refugees into society and the labour market. Integration processes take a long time. All regional partners therefore looked for ways of a faster integration – and managed to develop projects at local and regional level that promoted the fast and sustainable inclusion of refugees/migrants into work and society in general.

Main challenge

The inspiration behind the project were newly established fast-track integration programmes in Sweden. All partners were inspired by the Swedish example and tried to adapt and implement it in their contexts.

The fast and sustainable integration of migrants into the regular labour market poses a challenge for all immigration countries – and in particular for the FIER regions with large numbers of immigrants in their communities and high influxes of



refugees in 2015 and the following years. This challenge was addressed in the framework of the FIER project.

Timing

Context and challenges identified when the application was written, in 2017: The international refugee crisis has created a situation in which today more people are refugees than during World War II. Europe is facing an unprecedented number of asylum seekers and refugees: according to Eurostat¹, in 2015 and 2016, up to more than 2.6 million asylum applications were recorded in Europe. In 2016, a total of 366,000 persons were granted refugee status in the EU-28 at first instance, 258,000 were given subsidiary protection status, and 48,000 were given authorisation to stay for humanitarian reasons.

Most of the refugees granted permit to stay in Europe face a long journey before they can establish themselves in the labour market and become self-sufficient. Effective processes to integrate newly arrived individuals in the labour market is crucial to create an inclusive society and to reduce exclusion. Foreign-born individuals have the knowledge and experience that can bring considerable added value to the society. On a macro-level, unnecessary bureaucratic systems for the validation of training achieved in another country finally results in economic losses in the form of reduced tax revenues.

Objective

The FIER project aimed at developing instruments and strategies for a fast-track labour market integration of disadvantaged groups among refugees and asylum-seekers. The main objective was to develop

- quality competence assessment strategies
- training curricula for fast-track integration classes combining language training, work related training and traineeships parallel to classes (two days a week in the classroom, two days a week at the workplace)
- self-empowerment initiatives,
- and a workplace language learning concept based on language mentoring in companies.

Target group

Target groups were adult immigrants of all ages with some language skills in their host countries' language.

Geographical range

Sweden (Västra Götaland, Mölndals), Germany (Baden-Württemberg, Stuttgart)
Austria (Salzburg), Belgium, Norway (Oslo), Turkey

Stakeholders and partners

The project's success was based on the cooperation of different stakeholders, in general of adult education and language schools, Jobcenters and labour market services, companies, business associations and branch specific training providers and public administrations from the local and regional level. They developed concepts together and partners involved in the implementation of the fast-track programmes cooperated closely on a daily basis linking their services. Stakeholders were contacted and invited to participate by a coordinating partner in each region. Common regular meetings took place to coordinate activities.

Strategy / materials

The project partners adopted the Swedish model of labour market integration and transferred it to European regions. Regional stakeholders developed strategies tailored to their contexts and needs including

- the development of own curricula
- the establishment of regional working structures and processes
- the definition of roles and tasks of different stakeholders involved in carrying out regional fast-track integration projects
- the design of common material to advertise the trainings on a regional level (leaflets, printed curricula, information on websites, communication material for companies)
- the development of an online learning platform and learning material
- trainings for teachers, coaches and language mentors in companies etc.

A common European website was developed:

<https://fierprojecteu28222090.wordpress.com/> as well as a newsletter and small gadgets.

Resources

The project was funded in the framework of the EU's EASI programme. In the project regions, fast-tracks are now funded through labour market services and national funding.

Compliance with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

The project is in line with SDG 4 and others.

Innovation(s)

The approach was and is still innovative as it set an example and maybe a standard for new developments in regional and national integration policies in the participating countries. E.g. in Germany, there is now a tendency and national discussion to establish fast-tracks in different contexts of language training and labour market integration of immigrants – as an alternative way to the strategy “language first” and labour market integration only after a certain level of language has been reached. This issue is now widely discussed – also in context of the Ukraine war and crisis.

Evaluation

In addition to a qualitative evaluation on European level, quantitative evaluations took place on a regional level analysing the share of participants that successfully entered the labour market, partly including control groups.

Surveys among participants and companies were also carried out.

Success parameters

Number of persons that worked in regular jobs after the project ended.

Impact

We measure the progression of the project in an ongoing process. The final quantitative impact will be measured at the end of the project.

Impediments

Challenges were among others to avoid drop-outs and to establish a good relationship between students and companies. Close and very regular contacts between teachers, coaches, mentors at the workplace, companies and the participants were established to address this challenge. In the classroom, regular feedback rounds took place to discuss both, daily obstacles and good practices at the workplace and the progression as regards language and communication. Teachers and coaches regularly visited the workplace and talked to students and mentors.

Replicability

The project has already been replicated in various European regions in many different ways.

The ideas of

- a) fast-track as well as
- b) the combination/dual scheme of classroom learning and training at the workplace in parallel

can be adopted to different regional contexts and challenges.

Concluding remarks

Fast-track initiatives will increase the employability of immigrants and other target groups. They offer a first access to the labour market – building the basis for constant career development and upskilling as well as for lifelong learning.

Website/Social Media profile(s) of the initiative

<https://fierprojecteu28222090.wordpress.com/>

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