

Speaking Notes, Dr. Christian Operschall (Austria)

Tuesday, 2 December 2014 (10:45-12:15)

Parallel Session C. Developing skills: How to promote language skills development and successful integration of immigrants' children into the school system?

Skills development has become a critical component of personal and career development. Recent migrants are under-represented in training and professional orientation programmes for many reasons, including lack of information, limited entitlements, higher opportunity costs and more limited financial resources. Some migrants even lack the most basic skills, notably language skills, to integrate successfully into the host country labour market and society. The challenge here is to create the incentive to make significant investments now even if the return will only occur in the distant future, and only for those who stay. Furthermore, in most OECD countries, children of migrants tend to be less successful in the school system, a fact with serious implications for the expected trends in skills inequalities across generations. The unfavourable outcomes for the children of immigrants entail risks for social cohesion and point to the need for policies to support social inclusion and intergenerational mobility.

Questions:

- Should immigrants be trained (whether pre- or post-arrival) for jobs that exhibit a lack of suitable applicants?
- Should all migrants get access to the full education/training package?
And if not, according to which criteria should access be granted?
- How best to involve non-labour migrant groups such as family migrants and refugees in skills strategies and up-skilling policies?
- What works best in the integration of children in the education system?

- **Thank you**, Chair.
 - First of all, I would like to send my **Minister's greetings**, who is unfortunately not able to attend this interesting meeting himself.
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- Let me share with you some **Austrian views and experiences** – as my background is in the Labour Ministry, this will be with a focus on employment(-oriented) policies.
 - **Developing migrants' skills** is a major topic in Austria, especially since we traditionally used to receive lower skilled migrants through the so-called "Guest Worker" scheme.
 - Currently, we see that migrants are over-represented both among the low-qualified *and* the highly qualified.
 - Hence our focus in Austria, just as the focus of this session, is on **developing and better using professional skills of migrants already settled in Austria**, and their children.
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- The overall **framework for integration** of migrants and their children has been developed significantly during the past years, including the launch of a National Action Plan for Integration and the appointment of a State Secretary – and meanwhile Minister for Integration (and Foreign Affairs).
 - In Autumn 2011, the **OECD review** on "Labour market integration of immigrants and their children" was published in Vienna in the presence of our Minister Rudolf Hundstorfer and OECD Director Stefano Scarpetta.
 - It is a pleasure for me to be able to report on several recommendations, which have been followed up on and implemented since then – for example: promoting immigrants' participation in qualification measures and vocational training, better recognition of foreign qualifications or analysis on discrimination in the hiring process.
- ⇒ The first question posed to speakers in this session is whether migrants should be trained in shortage occupations – our answer is a clear YES!
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- For those, who already possess vocational qualifications and meet certain criteria, Austria introduced a points-based system, the so-called "**Red-White-Red Card**", in 2011. One of the three tiers is intended for **skilled workers in shortage professions** (with a valid job offer by an Austrian employer meeting the required wage & working conditions). Shortage occupations are determined each year according to the labour market situation and currently comprise, for example, milling machinists, roofers, tin smiths or power engineers. Currently, we are carrying out analysis on how to better monitor the development of skills needs and which further shortages indicators might be used.

- Nevertheless, we have to remember that nearly four out of five immigrants to Austria come from EU & EFTA **free mobility** areas, meaning that the biggest part of employment-oriented immigration is non-discretionary!
 - This brings me to the **recognition and validation of foreign qualifications** of persons already resident in Austria:
As we have heard, just like in many other OECD countries, over-qualification of immigrants is also an issue in Austria, **contact points** for the recognition of professional qualifications were established nation-wide in 2013.
 - These have proven very successful, receiving more than 6,000 clients per year – up to twice the number projected – and the project has shown that validation of (formal) qualifications is more often the first choice (except for regulated professions). Very helpful already for tertiary diplomas, this kind of validation procedures and records are going to be extended to secondary diplomas soon.
 - And to put all this in a legal framework, the Austrian Government’s programme also foresees a special **Recognition Act** (as in Germany), for which preparations have started.
- ⇒ Keeping the attention on those who are already resident in Austria: all migrants who have access to the Austrian labour market are entitled to make use of the **full package of labour market policies**, including a broad range of education and training measures. Most programmes are not restricted to or targeted to immigrants only, but they are over-represented in many relevant measures.
- Migrants are even considered an **official target group for active labour market policies** since 2012, with a view to better defining support needs and developing tailor-made support strategies and counselling services. The PES longer-term plan intends to reinforce participation of persons with a migrant background in professional qualification measures and technical language courses.
- ⇒ **Host-country language skills** simply are a prerequisite for participation in the labour market and in society as a whole.
- ⇒ Therefore, our Government’s policies range from enhancing offers of early childhood, pre-school language promotion to expanding offers of language promotion for adults within the initiative for adult education, including low-threshold courses (such as “Mummy learns German” promoted via childcare institutions and schools in Vienna).
- I am convinced that language promotion is key in programmes for newcomers as well as with the Public Employment Service.
I can give you examples from both areas, related to Vienna, since a big part of immigrants in Austria are concentrated in the capital.
 - Newcomers participating in the **Viennese integration programme** receive vouchers for language courses – this has been extended also to non-labour migrants from other EU member states.

- **Language courses** offered via the Public Employment Service are increasingly qualification- and employment-oriented, or even offered as a preparatory measure to professional qualification programmes. The regional PES in Vienna has started offering language courses based on different educational backgrounds and professional aspirations.
- Both German language courses and counselling services for the validation or recognition of foreign qualifications are to be included in a **nation-wide Integration Programme** that the Government intends to introduce, based on the well-tried Viennese model.
- **Young migrants and children of migrants** are also an important target group for labour market policies – improving the career entry for youth with a migration background and enhancing their employment rates is explicitly mentioned in the Austrian Government’s programme. Even if there are no special targeted programmes in place, young migrants and children of migrants are over-represented in several PES measures facilitating the transition from school to work, coaching programmes and preparatory measures for apprenticeship training.
- While we have a lot on offer at that stage, we surely have to catch up when it comes to **children of migrants at an earlier age** and their language (and reading) skills – we are already making an effort in early language promotion and we have introduced a compulsory kindergarten year free of charge – with a second year envisaged in the current Government’s programme.
- As to **low-skilled adults**, the Austrian PES offers several **qualification programmes** for this target group, which all aim at receiving an officially recognized professional certificate or diploma. These include apprenticeships for adults, the “Skilled Workers’ Scholarship”, an up-skilling programme “Aufstieg!” or a modular programme called “Systematic Competences”. All these measures focus on shortage occupations or other professions in demand with good labour market prospects.
- Another Austrian specialty are the so-called “Labour Foundations”, which are longer-term measures in cooperation with social partners, regional governments and/or enterprises. One of the two types focuses on tailor-made qualification near and at the workplace for occupations in demand in a certain region or by specific employers.
- As you can see, all these measures are very much oriented towards labour market integration or even have a direct link to potential future employers.
- Let me finish by once more underlining that integration is one of the big challenges regarding both social cohesion and economic success – and I think that this interesting, topical and rich event has substantially contributed to exchanging information and experiences regarding successful integration policies and making better use of migrants’ skills.

- Finally, let's never forget the social dimension and that migration and integration are not only about economic advantages but about people! As Swiss writer Max Frisch put it: "We asked for labour – and people came."
- Thank you.