

Workshop Report: Supporting Immigrant Families in Europe - Current Challenges, Stakeholder Networks, and Locally Integrated Solutions

On 2nd July 2008, within the framework of the Annual Conference of the European Social Network (ESN), the Observatory held a workshop on the theme of “supporting immigrant families in Europe”. The workshop was based on the results of an individual project on “Equality of opportunity for families - integrated policy approaches to provide early support for children and young people at the EU level as well as in the Member States.” An external speaker was Sascha Wenzel of the RAA Berlin (Regional Centre for Education, Integration and Democracy). He presented the field project “One square kilometre of education” from Berlin-Neukölln. The project is aimed to give children and young people from immigrant families more equality of opportunity, which is achieved by means of networking between the different stakeholders at the interface between the fields of social welfare and education, even across the boundaries of different departments and spheres of responsibility.

As far as (in)equality of opportunity as well as poverty and social exclusion of children and young people from immigrant families is concerned, Europe is facing common challenges. For this reason, more and more initiatives are developing at EU level to meet those challenges. Up to now, however, they are confined to problem definitions or, at most, reaching agreements on objectives to be achieved. Since this issue is becoming increasingly topical in most Member States of the EU, it is expected that cooperation at EU level will increase in this field. In the EU Member States, a variety of services to support children and young people with a migration background are offered, which are based on the welfare state principles of each individual State. To make those services as successful as possible - which means that they must be consistently oriented towards the principle of equality of opportunity for children and young people with a migration background, as well as reduction of poverty and social exclusion among this section of the population - the following success factors, among others, have to be observed: A central prerequisite is that early support is offered for children and young people with a migration background, or for all children and young people respectively. In this regard, there are different approaches in the EU Member States. In the Scandinavian countries, the social services offered are of universal nature - i.e. they are basically available to all children and young people, without having to meet any specific requirements - whereas in other countries, more or less target group specific concepts prevail. Depending on the structural conditions of the relevant welfare state, the provisions are offered either within the framework of the education system or of the social system. What is essential in any case is the provision of goal-oriented, high quality support at pre-school age. A good example are the Scandinavian countries, which have developed educational programmes to be applied already at pre-school level in order to provide high quality care and education for children. In this way, possible social disadvantages for children from migrant families can be balanced out, enabling them to develop the key competencies at an early stage which are a prerequisite for living a self-determined life as they reach adulthood. Other success factors include accurate verification of demand, the networking of services at local level, as well as the targeting and organisation of those services by means of new, decentralised governance structures.

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