
"Integration Policies. Case Study on Roma People and Immigrants"

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Abstract

The paper presents results from piloting an interactive online course designed to support integration of immigrants, Roma and ethnic women, developed in the LLP project ALMA-DC financed by the EC. Project also planned to initiate an intercultural dialogue to trigger awareness of the importance of cultural/linguistic diversity and the need to help socially incorporate the migrant and/or ethnic women so that they attend adult learning, develop skills and find work. In Romania the course addressed Roma women. The pilot testing was achieved in January 2013. The testers were 25 Roma women and 2 experts. The self-assessment tool contained 50 questions.

Keywords: "integration policies; Roma; immigrants; adult education"

1. Paper Rationale

The paper presents the results of piloting an interactive online course designed to support integration of Roma and ethnic groups, which has been developed in the framework of the LLP / Grundtvig multilateral project “Adult Learning for Marginalised and Disadvantaged Citizens”, 510658-LLP-1-2010-1-GR-GRUNDTVIG-GMP (ALMA-DC, 2011-2013), financed by the European Commission.

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DG “Home Affairs” of the European Commission points out the fact that migrants actively contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of European societies. Successful integration of immigrants in the receiving country represents a key factor in getting a full benefit of the legal migration opportunities and in making immigration to bring a positive contribution to EU development. The Tampere Programme adopted in 1999 brought a solid development to EU cooperation regarding the integration of non-EU nationals. Than the Commission’s 2005 Common Agenda for Integration has helped to implement the Common Basic Principles for immigrant integration policy. EU policy here has been further framed by the 2009 Stockholm Programme and the Europe 2020 Strategy, where one of the headline targets is to raise the employment rate of 20 to 64-year olds in the EU to 75 %. One of the means by which to do this is by better integrating legal migrants.

In order to attain these goals, EU has developed specific instruments to support integration†, namely:
- A network of national contact points on integration, which allows exchanges of information and experience between EU States with the purpose of finding successful solutions for integration and keeping national policy coherent with EU initiatives.
- The European Integration Forum, which is a platform for dialogue involving all stakeholders active in the field of integration.
- The European Web Site on Integration that is the main focal point for direct exchanges of information, documentation and on-line data collection, and for community-building activities between the main stakeholders in integration in Europe.
- A Handbook on Integration for policy-makers and practitioners. It has been compiled with a view to structuring the exchanges of information on which EU States can draw when developing policy measures for more successful integration.
- The European Integration Fund, which supports the efforts of EU States to enable non-EU nationals to integrate into European society. The Fund primarily targets action supporting the integration of new arrivals. It also supports measures to build up the capacity of EU States to develop, implement, monitor and generally evaluate integration strategies, policies and measures, and for exchanges of information and best practice, as well as cooperation in and between EU States.

2. Paper theoretical foundation and related literature

Integration of women is at the centre of EU social policies, as the women migration is nowadays an increasing phenomenon: “while women comprise about 48% of all international migrants, considerable differences exist across world regions. The proportion of female migrants is the highest in Europe and accounts 51.9%” (OECD-UNDESA, 2013). The need of continuing the integration policies in EU is acknowledged and recognised in regards to migrant and ethnic groups: “The labour market situation of ethnic minorities in Europe is described as severe and worsening. The Roma and Sub-Saharan Africans are most frequently cited as those facing the largest risk of exclusion.” (Zimmermann et al., 2007).

The ALMA-DC project sought to promote adult learning for female migrants/women from ethnic minorities within the project partner countries (Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Italy, Slovakia, Spain and Romania) by creating a learning course for them. It has also planned to initiate an intercultural dialogue with impact on communities to trigger awareness of the importance of cultural/linguistic diversity in EU and the need to help socially incorporate the migrant and/or ethnic women so that they attend adult learning, develop skills and find work thus responding to the need to add active workforce in Europe (effects of ageing population).

“Immigrant” is defined as in the EU context as “A person undertaking immigration. General term that includes persons with a foreign background (at least one parent born outside the country of residence)” (European

Commission, 2013). Defining “migrant women” is quite challenging, as countries of Europe have different definitions of immigrant status. However, the definition of “migrant women’s group should encompass various criteria regarding the immigration status, i.e.: whether women immigrated with a family member or of their own accord; women's legal status vis-à-vis their state of residence; their marital and family situation; their occupational situation; their position in terms of generation — new migrants or second generation; their national, cultural and linguistic origins. (Council of Europe, 1995).

There is no unique and exhaustive definition of the ethnic group, but generally the ethnicity relates to cultural factors such as nationality, culture, ancestry, language and beliefs. In anthropology, the experts understand the concept of ethnic group to designate a population which is largely biologically self-perpetuating, shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms, makes up a field of communication and interaction, has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order (Narroll, 1964).

Most of migrant women/women from ethnic minorities living in Europe are marginalised with few chances to socially integrate and gain employability due to lack of knowledge of languages, law, civic rights, IT skills and ‘culture bias’ all visible in society and at workplace. This is supported by a recent EC research that found out that “women’s labour market outcomes are usually lower than men’s, especially when they were born in non-EU countries; [...] especially immigrant women in large households are affected by poverty; [...] when they work, foreign-born migrant women are twice as likely to work in low skilled professions as migrant men according to the OECD. This gender gap does not exist for the non-immigrant population in many EU countries (European Commission, 2013). According to findings by the ALMA-DC project consortium, the prevailing ethnic minority in Greece and Italy are Albanians - occupied as domestic help and in cleaning services, despite their qualifications. In Germany the biggest ethnic group are Turks who are still greatly marginalised and most with seasonal jobs. In Spain a prevailing ethnic minority is Latin Americans - mostly occupied in tourism but most in seasonal jobs. In Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania a prominent ethnic minority with challenging problems that hinder social inclusion is Roma people. This group was chose in order to respond to the current efforts “Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015” (Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015). Education and training must play an important role in the inclusion of immigrants and Roma: “the precondition for turning Europe's uneasy side-by-side with immigrants into a successful multicultural society is to build an education system that actively fights rather than perpetuates inequality of opportunity”(Schleicher, 2008). The project addressed this problem by creating a tailor-made course for the ethnic minorities above, as a pathway to social integration and to better opportunities towards their employability. The ethnic minorities as described above have been involved in the project development and in the pilot testing of the ALMA-DC course.

3. Methodology

In Romania the “Interactive ALMA-DC Course” addressed women from ethnic minorities (Roma women) and aimed to help them enhance their competences and make a major step towards active citizenship and social integration. This course, which was compiled by the ALMA-DC consortium, is one of the core products of the ALMA-DC project and is available on the project website www.alma-dc.eu.

The “Interactive ALMA-DC Course” contains: (a) 5 modules (Module 1 - Culture in Romania; Module 2 - The labour market in Romania; Module 3 - Social integration of immigrants / refugees in Romania; Module 4 - Basic IT skills (Word and Internet); Module 5 - Adult education for migrant women / women from ethnic groups) and (b) an online self-assessment tool. The 5 modules have been adjusted to the needs of the target group by using the results of a national survey and feedback from the target groups. The online self-assessment tool is online software that assesses the learning progress of the beneficiaries of the course through exercises in the form of multiple-choice questions. The self-assessment section is different for each module and the users are automatically informed about their scores.

The pilot testing of the Interactive course and online self-assessment tool in Romania was realized in January 2013.
The testers of the course were 25 Roma women and 2 experts in Adult Education.

The purpose of the pilot testing of the Interactive Course was to elicit feedback from the members of the target group, who were Romanian Roma women, regarding the content of the course in terms of: comprehension, user-friendly exercises, function, usefulness, appearance, effectiveness, relevance. The purpose of the pilot testing of the self-assessment tool, which contains 50 comprehension questions to be answered by the beneficiaries, was tested by experts in terms of: clarity, function, usefulness, availability, effectiveness, user-friendliness, appearance. The pilot test was held at the premises of the Group for European Integration (GIE) – the Romanian partner of ALMA-DC project, within a room equipped with 16 computers.

The Group for European Integration has recruited the 25 Roma women (as volunteers to perform the pilot testing of the Interactive Course and the Self-assessment Tool) by the help of Roma Party – Argeș branch which was GIE’s collaborator from the beginning of the project. The testers (the 25 Roma women) were invited to GIE’s premises on 10th and 13th of December 2012 (some of the participants have attended the first meeting, others the second meeting, but this way we succeeded to meet all 25 Roma women). With the occasion of these two meetings the Roma women have received information about the Interactive Course and the Self-Assessment Tool, more precisely how to use them during the pilot testing phase. The testers have been instructed on what to do when they will perform the pilot testing: GIE’s staff explained to them how to access ALMA-DC website and where to find the modules inside of it, how to access the tests (the logging on procedure). We also provided to the testers the information upon the types of items within the tests and the fact that only one answer should be correct/valid. We assured the testers that GIE’s staff will assist them during the pilot testing phase. The testers received as “homework” the task of going through the ALMA-DC modules until the pilot testing and to get familiarised with the tests.

It was commonly decided that the pilot testing will be achieved at GIE’s premises (as not all of the testers had a personal computer at home or access to such a device and Internet connection somewhere else….). The testing was done on 11th of January 2013. The testing has run in 2 shifts (as only 16 PCs exist at GIE’s premises). The testing started by a small instruction (we reminded the testers the basic aspects, the procedure). The testers have been counselled and helped to log on.

At the end of the pilot testing, the testers were kindly asked to fill in an evaluation questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed by ALMA-DC consortium and translated by GIE’s staff in Romanian language. The questionnaire contained 22 questions envisaging the personal data (age, educational and vocational background, current employment status, etc.), quality and content of the Modules and Self-assessment Tool. The questionnaire was translated into Romanian previous to the pilot testing and offered to the testers, on paper.

The Self-Assessment Tool was tested by 25 Roma women from the Argeș County and by 2 experts (adult trainers, with solid experience in the field). Both categories of testers (Roma women and AE experts) have received, previously to the testing, all the necessary information, within face-to-face meetings. The pilot testing of the 2 AE experts was achieved privately, as the experts had their own computers at home. Afterwards, they provided their feedback on the testing.

4. Results and discussions

The 25 Roma women who participated in the testing covered 5 age groups (18-24 years; 25-35 years; 36-45 years; 46-55 years; +55 years). The largest number falls under the category 46-55 years (9 persons out of 25). The other categories cover from 2 to 6 persons.

88% of the respondents were long-termed unemployed, 12% short-time unemployed (while none of the respondents was full-time employed, short-time employed or self-employed).

72% of the interviewees had only a primary education and 28% secondary education. None of the Roman women participating in the testing had university or technical education degree.
All respondent declared that they have attended vocational training seminar (and they mentioned it is about the ALMA-DC seminar).

The respondents have stated in unanimity that the first Module (Culture in Romania) contains useful information for them.

We noticed a partition in the answers to the question on how much information the respondents had before studying “Module 2: The labour market in Romania”: almost equal number of Roma women knew not too much or even nothing (8 + 5 women), while the rest said they knew some information or had different information about employment from other people (3 + 9 women).

All respondents answered they found out about the legal procedures to stay and work in Romania from Module 3, although few answers have emphasized they knew about legal procedures to stay in Romania (36%), about schooling, employment and social security for migrants (16%) or about all legal procedures regarding her and her family (12%).

72% of the respondents declared they could use a PC before accessing Module 4 (Basic IT skills) while only 28% could not use a PC before it.

We could appreciate that Module 4 brought consistent improvements in the IT skills of the participating Roma women, as the answers regarding the usefulness of it displayed a very satisfactory situation, namely:

- 44% can use a PC without watching the demo again;
- 16% can use a PC by following the instructions online;
- 36% still need some help from other people;
- while only 4% (1 person!) cannot use a PC at all.

We got impressive answers regarding Module 5 about Adult Education: all respondents have stated they would like to participate in vocational training programmes to find a job, to learn the language and to find out more about vocational training opportunities. None of them has declared that she would not like to participate in any vocational training programmes! This could be a sign on the fact that ALMA-DC project made them understanding the importance and necessity of vocational training, also meaning that they liked the activities in which they participated in the project.

Another proof of the fact that the effects and impact of the training in ALMA-DC were at the highest possible rate was given by the respondents’ answers to the question “Which module did you find most useful?”: all Roma women have marked all modules as being the most useful, they did not negatively discriminate any of the taught modules:
Fig. 1. Perception on the usefulness of the ALMA-DC modules

There was no respondent whom to appreciate the exercises provided by the Modules as confusing and not useful but even so, 2 of the 25 respondents found the exercises interesting but not useful to learn. A large majority (72%) estimated that the exercises were useful because they have to read the Modules again to understand the Modules better and 20% appreciated the exercises as easy to do and helpful for understanding the Modules better.

The same percents (48%) and same number of women (12 of 25) appreciated the overall content of the Interactive Course as very useful for the situation of all or of most of the migrant women/Roma women! Only one woman found the Interactive Course as being useful but not very relevant for her situation. These answers emphasizes on the relevance of the Course at a larger scale: the course seemed important not only for the direct beneficiaries but for other migrant or ethnic women from Romania:

Fig. 2. Overall relevance of the Interactive ALMA-DC Course

In unanimity the women have responded that the links to various sites were useful for them and their family, and this could indicate a lack of information or lack of orientation towards information among the members of the target groups. This provided, as a general recommendation for stakeholders and decision makers, the necessity to introduce
more counselling and guidance within the communities composed of migrant women and/or women from the ethnic groups:

![Graph showing importance of links to special websites](image)

**Fig. 3. Importance of the links to special websites provided by the ALMA-DC course**

Except one woman who could not understand some terms, the rest of the respondents declared they could easy read and understand most of the points (20%), the language of the modules was clear enough (28%) or that it was very clear and comprehensible for all (48%). These scores represented a highly positive feature regarding the quality of the modules.

The graphics of the modules got also very high positive scores: 36% for very clear and useful, 60% for clear enough and 44% for clear, useful and helpful for step by step learning.

The same positive appreciation was shown on behalf of the respondents regarding the structure of the modules: 72% have found the modules are very well structured and other 28% consider that the modules are structured in a way allowing a gradually learning of what they need or that the structure is in accordance the presented issues priority.

A large majority of the Roma women participating in the piloting (76%) emphasized that the exercises of the self-assessment tool are very well structured, contain very important points and are very useful. 16% of the respondents also appreciated positively the exercises, by showing that they are well structured, contain important points and are useful. Only 8% believed that the exercises contain important points but they are confusing.

The online self-assessment tool was perceived as a useful instrument through several positive features, as illustrated by the chart below:
Most of the respondents made recommendations and suggestions to us regarding key topics they would like to find within an updated version of the course and all of them declared that definitely they would recommend the ALMA-DC website to other migrant women/women from ethnic groups.

5. Conclusions

The piloting emphasized that generally the migrant women and/or women from ethnic groups lack appropriate information that could help them find a job and integrate within the society and on the labor market. More guiding and counseling is needed for this category of disadvantaged persons and stakeholders and decision makers should take active measures in this regard.

These women realize the disadvantaged situation in which they are and the fact they need support. Therefore they cooperate well with trainers; they engage actively and make efforts to integrate.

A beneficial aspect is that these women are ready to accept special training and counseling to increase their integration chances, they seem willing to get involved in any kind of support provided to them.

Although most of the migrant women and/or women from ethnic groups have no ICT skills, they are not afraid of this new field and accept to take training in this area: they are motivated in learning and show readiness in acquiring new skills.

The Roma women who tested the Intensive Course ALMA-DC and the online self-assessment tool also made suggestions for further improvements of the course. They recommended the course to include more information and details on:

- Information about jobs.
- More information about culture.
- Information about where can we employ ourselves.
- Information about traditions.
- More about computers.
- Relations about employment.
- More information about Adult Education and new opportunities.
- More information on the social life.
The list of enterprises that make employments.

To resume, guiding and counseling provided to migrant women and/or women from ethnic groups accompanied by special training courses, customized to meet their needs and own paces of learning, represent nowadays an easy and accessible solution that could support society in achieving an efficient and actual integration of these groups.

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