

Addressing overqualification of skilled immigrants in the European Union: Situations and Approaches from the Local Level

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Policy Foreword

As Member and Vice-President of the Employment and Social Affairs Committee, it is my objective to keep the EU's economy competitive.

Yet, two developments are currently threatening our competitiveness: demographic change and the lack of skilled labour.

Without immigration, the ageing population and low birth rates will cause the EU's working-age population to decline by 14 million until 2022. Already today the EU lacks hundreds of thousands of skilled workers in areas such as IT, engineering, natural sciences and health care.

These negative trends can only partially be offset by re-qualifying workers, increasing intra-EU mobility for employees and completing the European internal market. If we want to ensure our global competitiveness in the long run, however, we have to rely on immigration and reinforce our efforts to attract the world's smartest brains.

In order to do so, it is imperative that potential migrants find work in areas that match their level of qualification. The risk of overqualification is a serious impediment to a successful migration and integration policy. It causes a net loss to society and frustrates individuals who cannot exploit their talents to the fullest. I therefore welcome *Realise's* contribution to this debate.

In my report on the integration of migrants (*Report on the integration of migrants, its effects on the labour market and the external dimension of social security coordination* [2012/2131(INI)]), I have underlined the importance of a swift, transparent and inexpensive recognition of foreign diplomas and qualifications. The EU cannot afford keeping skilled workers waiting in an administrative deadlock.

Therefore, so-called pre-departure desks should be made available to potential migrants so that administrative processes can already be launched in their home country. In combination with national labour market assessments, these desks can help match demand with supply, thus reducing overqualification.

Last but not least, the European Parliament advocates an EU-wide, voluntary, criteria-based entry-system to the EU's labour market, which would once again help to align migrants' skills and Member States' needs.

In conclusion, reducing overqualification is an important step towards an attractive and efficient European labour market and sustaining the EU's competitiveness in a globalised world.

– **Nadja Hirsch, Member of the European Parliament**, Vice-President Committee Employment and Social Affairs, Rapporteur for 'on the integration of migrants, its effects on the labour market and the external dimension of social security coordination'



Practitioner Foreword

Local action is what brings government regulations and initiatives to life. The report from the REALISE project is useful and timely in describing the two legs that local action to improve the adequacy of immigrant employment stands on: action directed at immigrants, such as self-presentation training, network creation, skills validation, education recognition etc., and action directed at people dealing with immigrants, be they employers, counsellors, policymakers or others. Such action, in order to gain broader acceptance and to have an impact, needs to be well organised, insistent, and sustained. And it needs to use both legs. One leg is hard to stand on, especially if for longer periods, and it takes two legs to get from here to there in rough terrain such as this. Employers, employment counsellors, policymakers and others have often not caught on to the simple fact that immigrants of the past 15 or 25 years are vastly more skilled and educated than during the post-war period. Educational opportunities were expanded in many places, not just Europe, and thus migrants are much more likely to have degrees than they used to.

REALISE is also noteworthy for devoting attention and encouragement to projects not only in the largest cities but also away from centres. For the high skilled or highly educated, small town and rural areas offer less opportunity for adequate employment. This is well known in the gender debate but less appreciated in the migration debate. Asylum-seekers are often placed in remote areas where, even if they were permitted to seek employment, the chances for adequate employment are nearly nil. Small town populations can also be considerably more close-knit than urban populations. It takes skilful local action to turn this from a disadvantage for newcomers into a resource, but it is being shown to be possible.

– **August Gächter** is a senior researcher at the **Centre for Social Innovation (ZSI)** in Vienna, Austria. He also serves on the board of the Vienna Counselling Centre for Migrants, including *Perspektive*, a service for Recognition and Further Education for Refugees and New Immigrants <http://www.migrant.at/homepage-2006/perspektive/perspektive.html>



Skilled Migrant Foreword

If a sustainable and fair model of economic development is to be achieved, it is essential that we capitalise fully on all available human capital; this means putting people into work that corresponds to their abilities and qualifications – rather than limiting them to low-skill activities, such as agriculture, domestic service or construction.

Immigrant overqualification needs to be overcome, as it equates to a loss of talent and productivity, notably in areas where language and intercultural abilities – often strong points among people with significant international and migratory experience – are an asset.

Overqualification is higher among women migrants, who face a double discrimination – for their gender and for where they come from. Such discrimination is persistent, and without active efforts to combat it, progress will not be made – all the more so in times of economic crisis, accompanied by a rising patriarchal discourse legitimising the priority of employment for men.

Europe needs to draw useful lessons from countries like Canada, Denmark or Australia, which have put in place specific measures to better take advantage of the potential of immigrants, in particular those who are highly qualified. Much might be said about methodological innovations in things like the evaluation of qualifications, adapting foreign diplomas to local labour markets or programmes for professional orientation and targeted employment seeking.

Self-employment is a vital part of achieving goals such as the Europe 2020 objective of a 75% active population; a lot needs to be done to support migrants, young people and women in making it happen.

– **Imane EL RHOMRI, Moroccan resident in Spain, Founder and Director of CoopMed** –
www.coopmed.org – a successful development consultancy with offices in Seville and Casablanca.



Table of Contents

I. Executive Summary

II. Introduction

III. Overqualification of third-country nationals in the European Union: Facts, Figures, Policies and Programmes

- 1. What is overqualification and why is it important?**
- 2. Which groups are most affected by overqualification and why?**
- 3. What are the implications for Europe's labour market and economy?**
- 4. Raise concern for overqualification among third country migrants at a time of economic crisis?**
- 5. Relevant EU policies and programmes**

IV. Overqualification of skilled third-country nationals at local level: Situations and Approaches

- 1. Situations**
- 2. Processes**
- 3. Strategies and tools**

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

I) Executive summary

When people work below the level of their qualifications, they contribute less to our economy than they potentially could. Over-qualification – aside from the personal consequences for the underemployed themselves – is a kind of labour market inefficiency; that is, a waste of human resources that reduces economic competitiveness and is thus bad for **society as a whole**. In terms of the general interest, third-country nationals are increasingly important, as their proportion in the labour force is rising, as is their contribution to GDP growth. Thus it is a matter of general concern that third-country nationals (TCNs) in the EU are **disproportionately** affected by overqualification. According to 2010 data, 46% of them suffer from overqualification – versus 19% for natives – and the problem is only getting worse with the current economic crisis.

Among third-country nationals, **women, newcomers** and those living in **Southern Europe** are broadly most affected.

Aging is shrinking the active population and increasing dependency ratios (less people working to support a growing dependent population). Towards 2020 the European Union is projected to have a growing skills shortage, despite the current economic crisis. Migration will most likely be **part of the solution** to these shortages; this simple fact needs to be faced and managed better than at present.

Existing literature and the research conducted in eight localities across the EU identify a range of **factors** leading to overqualification, principally: characteristics of the local labour market, migration regulations in place, attitudes to migrants, lack of employer knowledge or understanding of what is involved in hiring skilled immigrants or in evaluating their qualifications, diploma validation procedures, lack of social networks, understanding of local labour market dynamics and social codes, and language.

The diagnosis of the situation – regarding the overqualification of skilled immigrants in eight localities across the EU – found the issue to be a **low political priority**. This is reflected in employment support services unsuitable for, or unconcerned with, overqualified third-country nationals. Often these services themselves were found to suffer from some degree of misperception or prejudice regarding the qualifications of migrants. Moreover, the economic **crisis** has made the labour market more competitive and led to an inflation of job requirements, worsening qualified migrants' employment chances.

Networking limited to migrants' own ethnic groups was found to lead to a **ghettoisation of work** – i.e. whereby a given migrant community consistently works in a given field, often becoming identified with it by the local population.

The common pattern is for overqualified immigrants to eventually resign themselves to bad employment and give up hoping for better; the longer they stay in bad jobs, the more their existing skills are **eroded**.

While there are commonalities across Europe (often only varying by degree of severity), it clearly emerged that any effort to tackle effectively the problem, of overqualification among TCNs, required an understanding of **local** specifics – e.g. dynamics and attributes of the local labour market and

economy, background and characteristics of migration locally, prevalence of overqualification among the general population, and so forth.

In terms of approach, some of these 8 localities found effective ways of involving **business** people and of better understanding the needs and thinking of employers. Each locality had to work in **partnership**, and several used this exercise as a means to build ongoing cooperation and alliances that have continued and evolved, facilitating more long-term achievements.

In many quarters throughout Europe, and more so in the context of the crisis, the issue of providing better support to migrants is met with anything from disinterest to actual hostility; as such, many of these localities focused on building greater '**buy in**' – framing the argument in terms of more general interests or the interests of other parties (e.g. business), linking actions to the support of other groups, embedding in larger programmes, and so forth.

Organisations that built upon previous work in a **coherent** way were able to carry out well-executed interventions, and a focus on making actions sustainable by building them only on already existing and available resources led to substantive achievements. **Autonomous thinking** by local agents, who understood the need to digest and adapt ideas and practices to the specificity of their environment allowed for the development of viable and effective initiatives; as did the active **involvement of migrants** in the conception, implementation and evaluation of any strategy pursued, rather than the simple passive objects of it.

A range of strategies and tools were pursued, with some overlap of similar practices being developed in different places; this was logical given the participants were all addressing the same problem and collective and was the fruit of two years of shared practice and exchange. There was some creative application of **mentoring** to local contexts. All localities addressed, in differing ways, the need to better **validate** and communicate migrants' qualifications and skills.

Addressing **governance** issues was key to mainstreaming any new practice and for achieving lasting change. In many cases this was about better organising, coordinating, reworking or improving access to already existing programmes and services. At the same time, it was found that many of the barriers that needed to be addressed existed outside of institutions and documentation, and needed to be tackled through strengthening so called '**soft skills**', such as self-presentation, communication, navigating intercultural dynamics, and so forth.

There is a need for long-term awareness raising, among employers, public service providers and the general public. Such awareness must lead to greater 'buy in' around the issue of overqualified TCNs, aligning with the concerns of other groups, propagating the economic arguments and so on. The relationship between migrants and **entrepreneurship** came out as varied and contradictory and needs to be further studied in its own right to be understood. The value of a local approach to solving employment problems and of developing effective ways of working with stakeholders was heartily confirmed.

The **gender** dimension of overqualification is a major issue and needs to be given appropriate attention. Efficient and affordable procedures for the **recognition** of foreign qualifications are an egregious problem throughout Europe; at present validating such qualifications ranges from difficult to impossible, depending where one is. Clearly, much more needs to be done to improve such procedures.

Finally, Europe needs to consider how it views migrants; sometimes the distinctions made between migrants of different statuses are artificial in practice and lead to wrongheaded implementation of services and actions. More fundamentally, Europe needs to face up to the inevitability of immigration and see immigrants, not as guests, but as **new Europeans**.

II) Introduction

This report seeks to contribute to building knowledge on and awareness of the issue of overqualification among skilled third-country nationals in the European Union, and to share strategies and tools, developed at the local level, to address this issue.

It is aimed primarily at practitioners and policymakers concerned with: immigrants, the labour market and optimising human capital, inclusion, and fulfilling the Europe 2020 goals for growth and economic competitiveness.

The report is a product of the REALISE project, which has been funded by the European Integration Fund of the European Commission, and implemented between 01 September 2011 and 28 February 2013. REALISE's main goal is to address overqualification in skilled third-country nationals at the local level where the REALISE project partners are active: in Ghent (Belgium); Bilbao and Seville (Spain); Botkyrka (Stockholm), Budapest (Hungary); Cesena (Italy); Heraklion (Greece); and London (United Kingdom). The rationale for the project is framed in terms of contributing to economic competitiveness and achieving the Europe 2020 goals.

Drawing on literature from the OECD¹ and the European Commission, chapter III of the report introduces the issue of overqualification in the European Union, how it disproportionately affects third-country nationals, its causes, and the implications for the EU labour market and economic performance, with some consideration of the issue in relation to the current economic crisis. Then comes an overview of the main European Commission policies and programmes relevant to addressing migrant overqualification.

Chapter IV describes the specific local situations and causes of overqualification of third-country nationals in each locality of the REALISE network (the quotes included in this section are all taken from practitioners, highly qualified 3rd country nationals and locals from the different places involved), the processes for addressing it and the strategies and tools developed. The methodology followed by the REALISE network to produce these outputs is inspired by participatory action-research and consisted of:

1. Working in partnership throughout the project, and beyond, by setting up and managing a **Panel of Local Key Stakeholders** (PLS) in each locality. This approach aims to improve the conception of policy and actions, and obtain support (buy in) and advocacy within the community.
2. Carrying out a **local diagnosis of severity and cause** of overqualification in third-country nationals, through desk-based research and interviews with skilled immigrants and key stakeholders working in the field. The objective was to understand the degree of the problem in each place and to determine the multiple factors that are most contributing to the problem of overqualification locally. The research was undertaken with the PLS members and the findings were presented to and discussed with them, with a view to agreeing and designing the actions to be carried out on the basis of those findings. The main points of the findings are summarised in the section *situations*.

¹ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) www.oecd.org

3. Designing, implementing and evaluating **Pilot Local Interventions** (PLI) with skilled immigrants, which – with the tools and options available locally – address the causal issues identified in the diagnosis. The objective is to develop a strategic holistic approach, rather than isolated actions addressing single factors, such as improving language courses.
4. Adapting and scaling-up successful pilot local interventions to **long-term strategies** for addressing overqualification of skilled third-country nationals. The long-term strategies are described in the sections *processes* and *products*.
5. Undertaking peer-based **evaluations** and using **good practice** developed mainly at local and regional levels in the EU and Canada, so as to better inform the design of pilot local interventions and long-term strategies.

Chapter V outlines a set of recommendations, for policy and practice concerning the problem of overqualification among skilled third-country nationals in the EU.

Reference definitions:

- **Third-country nationals** (TCN) are persons who are usually resident in the EU-27 and who do not have the citizenship of an EU-27 Member State (source: *Source: Migrants in Europe: A statistical portrait of the first and second generation. 2011 edition. Eurostat. European Union*)
- **Skilled third-country nationals** are third-country nationals who hold professional or higher education qualifications.

For more information on REALISE visit: <http://realise2020.wordpress.com/>

III) Overqualification of third-country nationals in the European Union: Facts, Figures, Policies and Programmes

1) What is overqualification and why is it important?

- There are different published definitions of overqualification; commonly it is understood as a situation wherein a worker's highest qualification exceeds the one required by his/her job². To this common diploma centric definition can, and should, be added a consideration of a person's qualifications obtained through job experience, informal learning, and so on. The standard definition of the overqualification rate used in this report is that used by Eurostat (in its 2011 report *Migrants in Europe: A statistical portrait of the first and second generation*³) – **the percentage of the population, having a high educational level but employed in low or medium skilled jobs**.
- Overqualification is a significant phenomenon hampering economic performance and labour market efficiency throughout the developed world; the OECD's Employment Outlook 2011 shows that about one in four OECD⁴ workers are over-qualified for their jobs⁵. The European Union labour market is also currently marked by significant mismatches between the qualifications workers already have and the employment they obtain. In 2010, in total there were 21% persons aged 25 to 54 who were overqualified in the European Union and **third-country nationals** presented a much higher level of overqualification at **46%** ⁶.
- Obviously, when people work below the level of their qualifications, they contribute less to the economy than they potentially could. In terms of being a kind of labour market inefficiency, overqualification is thus bad for society as a whole, in addition to having significant personal and psychological consequences for the underemployed people themselves.

² Definition used in "Right for the job: over-qualified or under-skilled?" OECD Social, Employment and Migration working papers No. 120. Glenda Quintini, 2011. Downloaded from <http://www.oecd.org/els/48650012.pdf>

³ *Migrants in Europe. A statistical portrait of the first and second generation*. 2011 edition. Eurostat. European Union. Downloaded from http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-31-10-539/EN/KS-31-10-539-EN.PDF

⁴ The 31 member countries of OECD are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States.

⁵ OECD (2011), OECD Employment Outlook 2011, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/empl-outlook-2011-en>

⁶ Eurostat Labour Force Survey. Downloaded from: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/employment_social_policy_equality/migrant_integration/indicators

2) Which groups are most affected by overqualification and why?

Who:

- In Europe, **immigrants, young people and women** are disproportionately over-qualified. According to the OECD⁷ and the European Commission⁸ immigrants are more likely to be overqualified for their jobs than persons born in the country and are “over-represented in low-skilled occupations, despite the fact that the majority of them have medium- or high levels of education”⁹.
- Unsurprisingly, overqualification is found to be more likely to increase when entering the labour market during a **recession**¹⁰ – i.e. the current economic crisis is worsening disparities. Accordingly, the *EU Employment and Social Situation – Quarterly September 2012*¹¹ reports the unemployment rate of immigrants, reached 22.1% in the first quarter of 2012 – more than double the rate for nationals. Moreover, the size of the gap (between unemployment rates of non-EU nationals and nationals) had also increased; pre-crisis the difference fluctuated around 7-8%, and in the 2012 figures it said difference was over 12% (i.e. an increase of around 50%).
- The overqualification gap, between nationals and third-country nationals, is especially marked in **Southern Europe**: In Cyprus 74% of third-country nationals are overqualified, versus 27% for the native population; in Italy it's 73% versus 13%; in Spain 73% versus 31%; in Portugal 63% versus 14%; in Greece 68% versus 19%. To be clear, the problem is far from exclusive to the geographical south; in Estonia, for instance, the figure is 56% versus 22%¹².
- Overqualification is more frequent for **women** third-country nationals; 49% of them are overqualified versus 44% for men (*see table 1*). For nationals the figure is 20% for women versus 19% for men. Spain, Italy and Greece have the highest rates of overqualification of female third-country nationals women: in Spain 75% versus 31% of national women; in Italy 73% versus 13%, and 71% versus 18% for native Greek women*)¹³.
- Overqualification rates are higher among **newcomers** – though in all countries, except Ireland and Portugal, immigrants remain over-qualified even 10 years after having resided in the

⁷ *Matching Educational Background And Employment: A Challenge For Immigrants In Host countries*, 2007. International migration outlook, 2007. OECD. Downloaded from <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/19/5/41561786.pdf> ; *A Profile of Immigrant Populations in the 21st Century*, 2008. OECD. Downloaded from http://www.oecd.org/document/14/0,3343,en_2649_201185_40125838_1_1_1_1,00.html ; and “*Right for the job: over-qualified or under-skilled?*” OECD Social, Employment and Migration working papers No. 120. Glenda Quintini, 2011. Downloaded from <http://www.oecd.org/els/48650012.pdf>.

⁸ *Idem 3 and Migrants, minorities, mismatch? Skill mismatch among migrants and ethnic minorities in Europe*. RESEARCH PAPER No 16. European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), 2011. Downloaded from <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/18670.aspx>

⁹ *The integration of migrants and its effects on the labour market*, EU Parliament Study, 2011, downloaded from <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/document/activities/cont/201108/20110829ATT25420/20110829ATT25420EN.pdf>

¹⁰ *Idem 2*

¹¹ *The EU Employment and Social Situation – Quarterly September 2012*. European Commission 2012. Downloaded from: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=113&newsId=1668&furtherNews=yes>

¹² *Idem 3*.

* No data was available in Greece on third-country nationals in 2008, so the figure refers to ‘Foreign Born’, i.e. persons whose place of birth (or usual residence of the mother at the time of the birth) is outside the country of his/her usual current residence.

¹³ *Idem 11*.

country¹⁴. Where data is available specifically on third-country nationals, the length of residence does not seem to have a powerful effect on overqualification. The improvement between newcomers and settled third-country nationals after 8 years of residence is only two percentage points (*see table 1*).

Table 1: Overqualification rate of employed persons aged 25–54 by category of country of citizenship, gender and duration of residence in the receiving country, EU-27, 2008 (%)

	Nationals %	EU-27 citizens %	Third-country nationals %
EU 27	19	31	46
Men	19	29	44
Women	20	33	49
Recent migrants (< 8 years residence)	-	37	48
Settled migrants (≥8 years residence)	-	25	46
Born in the host country	-	33	28

Source: *Migrants in Europe: A statistical portrait of the first and second generation. 2011 edition.* Eurostat. European Union

Why:

- The **lack of recognition or equivalency of qualifications and skills obtained abroad**, particularly handicapping higher skilled immigrants¹⁵.
- Perceived and real difference in **value of qualifications obtained in the country of origin**. Employers often have little or no information or knowledge about the validity of academic or occupational qualifications acquired in the country of origin¹⁶.
- Insufficient proficiency in the **language** of the host country.
- Lack of **social networks**, and knowledge of and **information** about the labour market in the host country¹⁷.
- **Regulatory aspects** (e.g. requirements for work permits, location of settlement, and access to citizenship) can also limit the choice of jobs for third-country nationals who settled recently in the country.
- Overqualification is higher where migrants perceive a **high degree of discrimination** against them and where there are **negative views** on migration¹⁸.

¹⁴ *Matching Educational Background And Employment: A Challenge For Immigrants In Host countries*, 2007. International migration outlook, 2007. OECD. Downloaded from <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/19/5/41561786.pdf>

¹⁵ Idem 2, 3 and 14

¹⁶ Idem 14

¹⁷ Idem 11

¹⁸ *Migrants, minorities, mismatch? Skill mismatch among migrants and ethnic minorities in Europe*. Research paper No 16. European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), 2011. Downloaded from <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/18670.aspx>

- Local **labour market characteristics** are a key factor leading to overqualification. Migrants tend to have more education than their current jobs require in countries with **low levels of skills and training** and **less economic activity based on skilled work**. This incidence is higher for migrants educated abroad¹⁹.

3) What are the implications for Europe's labour market and economy?

Europe 2020²⁰ – replacing the failed 'Lisbon Agenda' – is the European Union's strategy for growth and economic revival over the next seven years. The stated objective is for Europe to become a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy, enjoying high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion.

Broadly, the strategy is one of more skilled work and workers in a more value added economy, pursuing new growth technologies and economic activities. The talk is of smart jobs, a smart economy, innovation and so forth.

If such a strategy is to succeed, Europe – where aging is shrinking the active population – will need as much active population as possible, and need that as much of said active population as possible performs to its best potential on the labour market. Logically, if people on the labour market are **underperforming** – e.g. over-qualified immigrants – Europe is not moving towards, but rather sliding **away from such goals**, for competitiveness and collective economic and social wellbeing (either expressed in terms of 'Europe 2020' or some other construct).

The economic argument:

- The contribution of migrants to EU economies has been substantial. In the period 2000-2005, third-country nationals at EU level accounted for more than a quarter of the overall rise in employment and for 21% of the average GDP growth in the EU-15. This growing share of migrant labour consisted of both **highly qualified jobs** in expanding sectors of the economy and jobs requiring a mix of lower skills²¹.
- By 2020 there will be **increasing skills requirements** at all levels of the labour market in the EU, as predicted by the first assessment of future skills and jobs requirements up to 2020, undertaken by the European Commission in the framework of the new scheme 'New Skills for New Jobs'²².

¹⁹ Idem 18

²⁰ *EUROPE 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, European Commission. Downloaded from:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=724&furtherNews=yes>

²¹ *Employment in Europe Report 2008*, European Commission. Downloaded from:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&langId=en&newsId=415&furtherNews=yes>

²² *New Skills for New Jobs: Anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs*, Communication from the European Commission, 2008. COM/2008/0868 final. Downloaded from:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0868:FIN:ET:PDF>

- Underutilising the skills of qualified migrants means reduced **competitive advantage** and thus poorer economic performance. Diversity drives internationalisation and innovation²³. Economic success pays for the public services people want to maintain. Politics, that better understand such arguments are more likely to pursue actions towards maximizing the human capital of third-country nationals – the potential of which is not universally appreciated.
- The lower level of self-realisation felt by a person who is over-qualified for his/her work is obviously a **significant personal** problem for the individual immediately concerned; for instance, a Canadian study links increased rates of mental health problems in immigrants to situations of over-qualification²⁴. While the human toll of this immigrants' dilemma is clearly a legitimate matter of concern on compassionate grounds, over-qualification is also a rather more hard-nosed concern. For, in terms of our own collective self-interest overqualification means members of our work force are **not realising their full potential in contributing to our economy and the quality of our labour market**.
- The problem of over-qualification of third-country nationals is **structural**, and thus requires a long-term approach to treating it. It is a general problem found throughout Europe – albeit with some important variations of degree. In the current conjuncture the need for economic recovery is undisputed; and recovery requires structural reform, growth and dynamism. The identifiable scenarios of any future European economic development all feature an increasing demand **for skilled labour. As such, it is crucial to maximise the value of Europe's human capital and to encourage** economic dynamism. As part of this general strategic direction and structural reform, Europe needs, and will need, to find ways to make the most of the human resources of skilled third-country nationals – particularly youths and women, these being most affected by overqualification.
- Labour integration measures should not just focus on getting migrants into employment, but on getting them into work **appropriate** to their qualifications and abilities. It is important for immigrants to realise their full potential, because it is empowering for them as individuals *and* because it benefits the collective self-interest. As Angel Gurría, the OECD Secretary-General, puts it “it is an act of sheer economic rationality”²⁵.

4) Raise concern for overqualification among third-country nationals at a time of economic crisis?

It is no great secret that immigration and immigrants can be a very **sensitive** issue politically and socially, even at the best of times, and that at present Europe is going through some quite **bad times**. During the worst economic crisis since the 1930s, with unemployment and poverty ever rising, a concern for overqualification might understandably seem a luxury.

²³ *Towards Open Cities*. Clark, G. (2008). British Council.

²⁴ *At Work*, Issue 64, Spring 2011: Institute for Work & Health, Toronto, <http://www.iwh.on.ca/at-work/64/over-qualified-immigrants-at-risk-of-poorer-mental-health>

²⁵ 20 February 2008 speech of OECD Secretary-General, http://www.oecd.org/document/14/0,3343,en_2649_201185_40125838_1_1_1_1,00.html

People may wonder, at a time when many natives are unemployed or badly off, ‘why focus on helping foreigners to get better jobs in our countries?’ ‘Shouldn’t that be at most an extra, for when times are good?’ Others, pragmatically, may simply wonder ‘where are the votes in this?’

The answer is two-fold; tackling the causes of migrant overqualification is part of **tackling the causes of ‘the crisis’** – and thus overcoming it – and in the **long-term** it is necessary.

Overcoming overqualification – for natives and migrants – is part of the larger framework of structural reform and improvement needed to get out of the crisis and improve economic competitiveness across Europe. The things we would have to do, to reach a situation wherein qualified migrants are able to contribute fully in the labour market, are – or at least compatible with – the kinds of things we should be doing anyway, for our own general benefit.

In the long-term, Europe needs to plug expertise and skills gaps, overcome the demographic challenge and succeed against globalised competition.

“We’ll need people to counterweight an ageing population, individuals to fill shortages in labour markets, and bright minds to secure continued innovation and progress in our universities and research centres”

– **Cecilia Malmström**

EU Commissioner for Home Affairs

Labour Migration: What’s in it for Us?

Wadensjö et al, 2012

Broader context, figures and projections:

- **Skills demand:** Skills requirements will continue to increase at all levels of the EU labour market²⁶.
- **Projections of labour shortages:** CEDEFOP²⁷ projections for future skill requirements show that increase in demand will be predominately for workers with **high educational qualifications** (12.5 million jobs, or a growth of 2.4%) and medium educational qualifications (9.5 million jobs, or a growth of 1.0%). They also estimate the demand for low-skilled workers will decrease by about 8.5 million jobs (a decline of 1.9%). (Proviso: the projections date from 2007 and the effects of the economic crisis could be found to have thrown off the exact timeframe and numbers of the projection, however the direction of the prediction would seem highly unlikely to be reversed.) This CEDEFOP projection does not explicitly factor in the flow of immigrant workforce, though CEDEFOP argues that migration could be part of the solution to such labour market shortages, and that there should thus be a focus on immigration policies favouring high-skilled migrants, and the coordination of such policies among Member States²⁸.
- In 2009, the **Institute for the Study of Labour in Germany** (IZA²⁹) conducted the Expert Survey on High-Skilled Labour Immigration (ESHSLI) for the EU, gathering expert opinions on the need for immigrants and the size of future immigrant inflows – with a particular focus on high-skilled immigration. 96% of respondents believed the EU needed at least to **maintain** the level of high-skilled immigration, and 81% believed the EU needed to **increase** it. Figures from

²⁶ Idem 22

²⁷ CEDEFOP is the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/>

²⁸ Idem 9

²⁹ IZA= the Institute for the Study of Labour in Germany (Institut zur Zukunft der Arbeit) <http://www.iza.org/>

the survey complement the CEDEFOP findings above – i.e. in asserting that more immigrants, especially high-skilled ones, will be needed in the labour market³⁰.

- **Economic crisis and skills demand:** In spite of the current economic crisis and unemployment rates, many Member States are experiencing labour shortages in specific sectors. The Commission's Agenda for new skills and jobs estimates the following shortages (unfilled jobs): 384,000 to 700,000 ICT practitioners by 2015 and about 1 million professionals in the health sector by 2020, up to 2 million if ancillary healthcare professions are taken into account³¹.
- **Demographics/Ageing and shrinking labour force:** Europe's population is aging, leading to less people working and supporting the growing numbers of pensioners and other dependent non-working people. From 2008 to 2060, the EU workforce is projected to shrink by some **50 million people**. In 2010 there were 3.5 persons of working age (20-64) for every person aged 65 or over; on the basis of current trends, by 2060 the ratio will be 1.7 to 1³².
- A survey by **Eurocities** paints a similar trend picture: in 2008, the number of deaths in the EU began to outnumber births, however the total EU population should not shrink significantly by 2050, due to **immigration**. Europe's population will grow older in the next 40 decades; by 2050 the median age in the EU will go from 39 to 49 and the size of the working-age population will decrease by 48 million. The number of working persons for each citizen aged 65 and over will **halve**, going from four to two – i.e. more elderly people requiring healthcare and pensions and fewer people working to pay for them, with obvious negative implications for economic growth and productivity. (Commission figures go roughly in the same line³³) If this is countered by bringing in more third country immigrants, there will be an ever-greater need for effective policies on integration, to combat social divisions and prejudice.³⁴

→ *In an environment such as that painted by Eurocities' survey or European Commission data, there will be an imperative need – for economic and social reasons – to reduce the overqualification of third country migrants; **this issue will not be going away.***

- **Eurobarometer** surveys show that **70% of European citizens understand** qualified migration can help overcome the decline in working-age population and shortage of skilled workers, and consider immigrants necessary for the European economy³⁵.

→ *So, going back to the beginning of this chapter, the argument – for getting highly qualified migrants into jobs corresponding to their capacities and qualifications – is one that can be made successfully and that can, potentially, find broad acceptance.*

³⁰ In *The integration of migrants and its effects on the labour market*, EU Parliament Study, 2011, downloaded from <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/document/activities/cont/201108/20110829ATT25420/20110829ATT25420EN.pdf>

³¹ *European Agenda for the integration of migrants - frequently asked questions*. MEMO/11/530. COM 2011. Downloaded from http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-11-530_en.htm

³² Idem 31

³³ Projecting EU population to go from near 501 million in 2010, to 520.7 million in 2035 and down to 505.7 million in 2060. The EU workforce will decrease by about 50 million people, from 2008 to 2060. 2010 saw 3.5 working age (20-64) persons for each person 65 or over – versus an expected 2060 ratio of 1.7 to 1. – *European Agenda for the integration of migrants - frequently asked questions*. MEMO/11/530. COM 2011

³⁴ *Analysis of EUROCITIES 2007 Demographic Change Survey*

http://www.eurocities.eu/uploads/load.php?file=demographic_changesurvey2007-SMUL.pdf

³⁵ Idem 9.

- **Competitive advantage of places:** In a globalised economy, societies that underutilise the skills of those present in society – e.g. qualified migrants – have less competitive advantage. Human diversity has potential benefits to societies; it can be a driver of entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation³⁶. Clearly, societies that are able to generate the maximum competitive advantage from their human resources will enjoy better economic performance; they will be more innovative, competitive and prosperous, and thus able to provide the social and cultural standards and services European citizens want and expect. This simple realisation can easily be framed in terms of Europe 2020, or set within some other policy structure. The point is, some – countries, regions and cities, private and public bodies – have already grasped this and are thus taking actions now towards maximizing the human capital of their third-country nationals. Others, as yet, understand less well what is being lost.

5) Relevant EU policies and programmes

Europe 2020 is the current macro policy framework underlying EU programmes and actions (see chapter 3 above). Support for better integration of migrants in the labour market and changes in immigration policy are – among other reasons – justified, and will be justified, as contributing to this larger policy thrust.

*“In March 2010 the European Council agreed the main elements of the **Europe 2020** strategy, including the headline employment rate target, emphasising that this target should be met in part through... better integration of legal migrants. This overall EU target is also to be translated into national targets.”*

– **Employment in Europe 2010**, DG Employment, European Commission

*“In the framework of the **EU 2020 Strategy**, the role immigration could play in meeting labour and skills shortages should be taken into account by Member States and the EU”.*

– **Annual Report on Immigration and Asylum (2010)**, European Commission

The common basic principles for the integration of third-country nationals

In 2004 the Council approved ‘The Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy’³⁷, which are the agreed framework for EU cooperation on integration.

Within this framework, the Commission implements a range of measures and vehicles for knowledge exchange and coordination, such as:

- The European **Website** on Integration³⁸
- The **Handbook on Integration** for policy-makers and practitioners³⁹
- The network of **National Contact Points on Integration**, for exchange among national administrations
- The **European Integration Forum**, held bi-annually since 2009. Purpose: ensuring dialogue with civil society⁴⁰

³⁶ *Towards Open Cities*. Clark, G. (2008). British Council.

³⁷ <http://register.consilium.eu.int/pdf/en/04/st14/st14776.en04.pdf>

³⁸ <http://ec.europa.eu/ewsi/en/index.cfm>

³⁹ Now in its 3rd edition, see: http://ec.europa.eu/ewsi/UDRW/images/items/doc1_12892_168517401.pdf

- The **European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals (EIF)**, funding national and trans-national projects – Note, the Fund’s Work Programme for 2013 includes, local actions ‘*to enhance migrants’ economic, social, cultural and political participation*’ and to ‘*promote measures to map, assess and validate migrants’ qualifications and professional experiences*’⁴¹

Note, these tools and structures take a more general focus on integration of migrants, and are less specifically concerned with highly qualified migrants and their integration on the labour market. However, said issues are to varying degrees dealt with, within these more general constructs – in particular it must be pointed out that the **REALISE** network, of which the present report is a product, was itself co-funded by the European Integration Fund.

The 2011 European Agenda for the integration of third-country nationals

In July 2011, the Commission brought out its ‘European agenda for the integration of non-EU migrants’⁴², focusing on action to increase economic, social, cultural and political participation by migrants and putting the emphasis on **local** action.

→ In this emphasis on local action, the Agenda supports one of the main suppositions of the **REALISE rationale** – i.e. that integration happens (or not) primarily at the local level, hence the need to work with policy, actors and actions from the local level.

A Commission Staff Working Paper⁴³ is annexed to the Communication, containing a list of **EU initiatives** (as of 2011) supporting the integration of Third Country Nationals.

Part of this Agenda involves a Commission supplied ‘**tool-box**’, from which national authorities are to select measures according to their needs *vis-à-vis* integration policy. Likewise, the Agenda seeks to establish common **indicators** for monitoring the results of integration policies.

Main recommendations and arguments of the Agenda relevant to addressing overqualification and the importance of developing local approaches and governance to address this issue include: (*these are very much in line with the rational for and the findings of REALISE*):

- Unemployed migrants or migrants employed in positions for which they are overqualified are a **waste of human capital**. Services should be developed/improved so as to enable the **recognition** of qualifications and competences from the country of origin facilitating immigrants’ possibilities to take up employment that matches their skills. A way toward this is to develop/improve **mapping** educational background, work experience, equivalency of diplomas and qualifications, and identifying training needs.
- Integration policies should be formulated and implemented with the active involvement of **local** authorities and actors (including **employers** and **social actors**) and targeted at specific localities.

⁴⁰ <http://ec.europa.eu/ewsi/en/policy/legal.cfm>

⁴¹ For more complete information, see: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/financing/fundings/pdf/awp_2013_eif.pdf

⁴² http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/doc_centre/immigration/docs/agenda/1_en_act_part1_v10.pdf#zoom=100

⁴³ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/doc_centre/immigration/docs/2011_commission_staff_working_paper_on_integration.pdf

- Improve **multi-level cooperation** and coordination between levels of public administration, stakeholders, member-states, EU programmes, civil society actors, and so on.
- It is important to support **newly arrived** migrants.
- **Language** courses should correspond to differing needs.
- In terms of **funding**, the agenda says *“the focus of future European Union funding on integration should be on a local, more targeted approach, in support of consistent strategies specifically designed to promote integration at local level. These strategies would be implemented mainly by local or regional authorities and non-state actors taking into account their particular situation”* recommending to the European Commission a higher coordination of the European Fund for the Integration of third-country nationals (**EIF**), the European Refugee Fund (**ERF**), the European Social Fund (**ESF**) and the European Regional Development Fund (**ERDF**) to target local action.

The Blue European Labour Card

The Blue Card⁴⁴, or Blue European Labour Card – a sort of European answer to the US ‘Green Card’ – is an EU-wide work permit and one-track procedure, designed for recruiting high-skilled, third country nationals in professions which are in great demand; it allows them to work and live in any EU country (except Denmark, Ireland and the UK), as well as providing favourable conditions for family reunification. Applications can be made from a country in the EU or outside but member states reserve the right to regulate the national details according to their own guidelines. The card was scheduled to be implemented by Member states in 2011.

EQUAL

The European Social Fund-funded 2000-8 EQUAL initiative, though now over, produced some interesting practices and findings – to be found on the project database⁴⁵:

EQUAL had an entire thematic area dedicated to “Increasing the Participation of Migrants in Employment”⁴⁶, with a range of interesting projects⁴⁷ addressing the labour market integration of migrants (high skilled or otherwise) – such as the Austrian project InterCulturExpress⁴⁸.

Within EQUAL, over 350 Development Partnerships (DPs) piloted new approaches to preventing and overcoming discrimination against immigrants and ethnic minorities and to facilitate their integration into employment. Within this large mass of projects, there is potentially something to offer to interested parties, in terms of ideas and information for developing policy and practices.

⁴⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/immigration/work/index_en.htm

⁴⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/consolidated/index.html

⁴⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/consolidated/activities/etg1-1-2.html#Increasing_the_Participation

⁴⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/consolidated/data/document/etg1_increasing_participation_stratless_EN.pdf

⁴⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/practical-examples/employ-07-ice_en.cfm and <http://www.interculturexpress.at/>

EU Parliament – “The integration of migrants and its effects on the labour market”

On the 24th of January 2013, the **European Parliament's Employment Committee** **unanimously** (i.e. with support from the representatives of each of the major parties in Parliament) adopted a report, drafted by the German MEP Nadja Hirsch, on the integration of migrants, and the effects of such integration on the labour markets and social security coordination.

The (now rather familiar) rationale is that, given Europe's demographic situation and the need to stay competitive in a globalized world, the EU needs to make itself **an attractive place for skilled migrants** and better integrate immigrants into the labour market. Among a range of recommendations, the report calls on the European Commission to advance measures aiming to facilitate and improve non-EU migrants' access to, and participation in, employment, training and entrepreneurship – to the mutual benefit of the migrants directly concerned (i.e. greater social inclusion through more constructive employment experiences, and so forth) and the economies and societies their work contributes to.

Some indicative quotes from the Committee report – “**on the integration of migrants, its effects on the labour market...**” – tabled for EP March plenary (emphasis added):

– “Member States' integration policies and measures must be better differentiated and tailored and of higher quality, and, most importantly... they must distinguish between the needs of, for example, the **well qualified** and the poorly qualified”

– “Migrants must have equal access to the labour market and be able to rely on the quick and inexpensive **recognition** and validation of their diplomas, qualifications and skills.”

– “(The report) calls for migrants to be prepared as **rapidly** as possible for the domestic labour market; points, in this connection, to best practice in the field of integration into the labour market, e.g. **mentoring** for migrants, integration pilots, ‘migrants for migrants’ and **vocationally-based language courses**, as well as the provision of help and encouragement for migrants' school-age **children** and of support for (business) **start-ups** by qualified people from migrant backgrounds.”

The European Parliament's March 2013 plenary voted in favour of the report's proposals – see MEP Nadja Hirsch's foreword for more information.

IV. Overqualification of skilled third-country nationals at local level: Situations and Approaches

1) Situations

While differences in circumstances varied significantly across the network, some major points arose consistently:

1. Skilled migrant overqualification has been a **low political priority** in all localities, reflected by:
 - **Employment advisory and support** typically not suitable for qualified migrants or concerned with the issue of their overqualification. Likewise, job centres and agencies had little awareness of, and usefulness to, qualified migrants.
 - In practice, for third country migrants, **validation** of qualifications and capacities is slow, if not impossible.
 - **Residence permit** restrictions were found to significantly condition employment objectives and strategies – i.e. people look for a job so as to maintain their residence permit, not as part of a career strategy.
2. Employers consistently stated their main barrier to employing migrants was a **lack of information** and misinformation regarding what was involved in hiring migrants. **Employers not understanding** rules affecting the hiring of migrants (restrictions, required bureaucracy, etc.) is a fundamental barrier in practice. Likewise, employer (in)ability to understand and evaluate migrant qualifications and experience is an impediment to hiring migrants. In addition, a key barrier associated with overqualification was found to be that of demand by employers for advanced and specific language skills. However, research identified a general lack of profession specialized language courses – though this varies somewhat, as such courses can be found more easily in some parts of Europe (e.g. such courses were to be found in London and were reported to be quite effective).
3. The economic crisis, as elsewhere, has made the labour market a more competitive place; in particular, this has been reflected in an **inflation of job requirements** (i.e. employers now demand higher qualifications for a given job than they would have pre-crisis).
4. The likelihood of migrants pursuing **entrepreneurial activity** varies greatly across Europe. Business creation is the main employment solution for migrants (at least some groups) in Budapest, often surpassing the likelihood of natives to pursue entrepreneurship. This is directly **opposite the situation** found in Ghent, where migrants were found to be less likely than natives to go into business for themselves. The causes and implications of these divergences need to be properly studied as a subject in its own right.
5. The unemployed and poorly employed typically have **poor social and professional networks**; the issue of isolation and inadequate networking arose consistently across the network. Own ethnic group networking often leads to a **ghettoization of work**, whereby a given migrant community consistently works in a given field, even becoming identified with it by the local population.

6. Barriers to accessing employment corresponding to a person's capacities were consistently leading to migrants **accepting** bad employment as all that they can expect; this leads to an erosion of their human capital and a mental state characterised by resignation and demotivation.
7. **Women** seem to be consistently more overqualified than men.

Looking at and comparing different places, it became quite clear that a proper understanding required the subject of migrants and employment be put in its larger **context**. That is, it is not advisable to simply isolate immigrant labour market issues from general labour market dynamics, e.g.:

- How prevalent is overqualification among the general population?
- How long do job seeking strategies and school/training to work transitions normally take? etc.

And local development issues, e.g.:

- What is the state of the local economy?
- Are jobs being created or lost?
- In what sectors and what types? etc.

In line with this – perhaps obvious but necessary – assertion, one must underline the difficulties posed to addressing overqualification of skilled immigrants by the current **crisis** climate; coping with, and hopefully overcoming, the crisis would seem to be the central issue of our time.

Though the current economic, social and political crisis is clearly a pan-European issue; the hardest hit areas – e.g. Heraklion in Greece or Seville in Spain – are grappling with substantially **different realities**, than those encountered in less 'front-line' situations. Localities trapped in Depression conditions struggle against enervation and inevitably question how much they can really do. The sense of being obliged by emergency response and harm reduction frequently seems to lead to a less ambitious frame of thought among policymakers and local practitioners, wherein strategic and long-term thinking and speculation is greatly diminished. Likewise, skilled migrants themselves, caught up in day-to-day survival, are unreceptive to a discourse of the long-term, given the consuming nature of the immediate.

It seems likely that localities weighed down by such a day-to-day mind-set would benefit from a credible '**roadmap**' – perhaps developed with external support where required – but this goes beyond the remit of the REALISE project.

The experiences of the different REALISE partners also produced insights of a more tactical bent; for instance, for getting support for migrant integration on the labour market – never easy and in the current climate quite hard. One general principle that emerged, for overcoming this resistance, was that of generating more extensive '**buy in**'.

Bilbao, Spain – situation

Essentially, the problems encountered by migrant labour are to a great extent symptomatic of larger problems. Bilbao's job market is conditioned by a set of significant structural problems:

- **Demand** for qualified workers is low, and more so for immigrants (which usually seems to be the case elsewhere too).
- The **cost of living** is high and workers have a low purchasing power.

"You loose your skills, back home I was a very competent psychologist and now I can't even remember how to conduct an interview"

- Typical of most of contemporary Southern Europe, **precarious employment** conditions are prevalent, with a 2-tier labour force of older workers established in more stable and protected jobs and younger workers stuck in unstable poor quality employment circumstances.
- Spain's general **overqualification rate** is reported to be the highest in the EU, at 31% versus a European average of 19% (Eurostat 2008).
- Spain has the highest **unemployment rates** in Europe, and immigrant unemployment is – as throughout Europe – significantly higher (13% higher at the time the Diagnostic Report was carried out) than for nationals.

The environment is also conditioned by certain key **demographic** issues:

- The native population of Bilbao is **declining** and that of immigrants increasing, resulting in a maintaining of overall population numbers.
- A key fact to understand is that the local population **depends** on immigrant population, to compensate demographic trends of aging and growing dependency ratios

Gender and overqualification

In Bilbao, immigrant women from third countries are particularly affected by overqualification. Immigrant women, both with no schooling whatsoever and those who are highly qualified, consistently end up working in the same sectors and the same jobs, such as household services and catering; these jobs tend to be precarious and give the women working in them what they describe as a feeling of being '**invisible**'.

"You devalue your own self and you lose so much heart, your self-esteem is really badly hit to the extent that you no longer believe in your own abilities and talents and it takes a lot to get out of that rut"

Stemming from these circumstances, there is a tendency among such women to end up accepting bad employment as all they can aspire to. Thus, they come to focus their job search on low-skilled jobs; which in turn leads to an erosion of their skills and an interiorised sense of **defeatism**.

Likewise, the need for them to pay social security contributions at least 6 months a year (so as to maintain their residence permit), the lengthy and costly process of diploma recognition, the difficulties and costs of learning the Basque and Spanish languages to high standards, and the preconceptions of employers and employment support services staff (i.e. 'immigrant women are all unqualified' etc.), makes it almost impossible for this group to access high-skilled jobs. Additionally, these highly skilled immigrant women typically have poor social and professional networks.

Aside from shrinking the economy and growing unemployment, the economic crisis, which has affected Spain virulently, has fuelled discrimination and racism, which, far from fading with time, appear to be growing stronger, locally and throughout the country.

"When you tell people (employers) you are Romanian, they change completely and utterly. You know when they say "I'll call you" they are not going to call you ever... it's happened to me loads of times"

The complete local diagnosis report of overqualification in Bilbao can be downloaded from the REALISE blog at: <http://realise2020.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/12-029-realise-diagnc3b3stico-23-01-12-inglc3a9s.pdf>

Seville, Spain – situation

“immigrants... are only good for being unskilled day workers...”

Seville is the capital of Andalucía – a region frequently reported as having the **highest rates of unemployment in Spain**, the country with the highest unemployment in Europe. Immigration has been an **accelerated** experience locally, with most immigrants arriving in large numbers only fairly recently.

Key job market facts:

- Unemployment in Andalucía and Seville is consistently **above the Spanish average**.
- Among the sample population studied to compile the Diagnostic Report, **80%** of immigrants were found to be overqualified.
- Andalucía **business closure** is consistently above the Spanish average.
- There is a growing **black economy**.
- Jobs are most typically of **low quality and precarious**.

Key demographics:

- The foreign population has grown in past decade in Andalucía by **330%**
- In this period, Seville's **native population declined** 4.07%, so overall growth in population was only 0.24% – i.e. overall population is relatively stable, with immigrants a growing portion of it (much as in Bilbao).

Sevilla Acoge reports on an obvious need to revise how the productive economy works in the country, region and city, but sees no signs of such a revision happening in any foreseeable future. No significant public discussion is apparent, about what a new and viable productive model would look like.

In short, the situation is stark. Predictably, the economic crisis has – as elsewhere – pushed migrant issues into **low priority**.

Overqualification issue

Migrants in Seville have a broad **lack of adequate information** and understanding as to their employment strategy options. The local job market **formally requires validated qualifications** to access skilled employment or self-employment; however, the process for getting diplomas and academic qualifications officially recognised is complicated, time consuming (often taking some 4 years to carry out) and expensive. As a result, although there are a significant percentage of non-EU migrants with university degrees only a few have submitted their academic titles to the necessary administrative proceeding for recognition of foreign academic diplomas in Spain, due to lack of information and a lack of motivation.

“The residence and work permit trap the worker into the sector from where the job offer comes”

Moreover, the Andalucía Employment Service **refuses to take into account** any non-approved academic diplomas – from the secondary level up. As a result, anyone with a foreign diploma not yet legally and fully validated, is considered by the authorities to have no education at all (beyond primary level). Among other things, this results in **misleading figures** in government databases, which only show some 5% of migrants as university educated, whereas *Sevilla Acoge* calculates the number to be something like **20%**.

“Many career guidance services are not neutral but, unconsciously, pigeonhole immigrant workers in unskilled services”

Support and information services are **not adapted** to

the needs of skilled migrants. There are often problems with accessibility and/or the information available is not what qualified third country immigrants require. The local situation is worsened by a **poor relationship** (i.e. silos) between 1) public services, 2) companies and 3) training providers – a sort of negative triangle.

Many migrants are potentially suitable to, or capable of, an employment strategy based on **self-employment** or some sort of **entrepreneurship**. Moreover, given the parlous levels of unemployment, even among the native population in Southern Spain, some form of self-employment or business endeavour is likely to be the most viable option for many high skilled migrants seeking work and/or an opportunity to make better use of their abilities. The lack, of complete and reliable knowledge and understanding of what is involved, is a deterrent to migrants considering self-employment or a small business start up.

Added to all this is a generalised **perception** of immigrants as people with a low level of qualification. In such a social environment, immigrants have something of an uphill battle to establish their merit.

“Economic hardship and the lack of family/social support here hinders the ability to wait and the fight for a job consistent with one’s qualifications, one has to accept”

In the face of the difficulty of the local situation and apparent lack of opportunity, high skilled migrants typically respond with **resignation**, frequently interiorising an inferior status; consequently, demoralisation is generalised among the local immigrant population. Immigrants frequently delete their own qualifications from their CVs, because they have lost faith in their value and/or they feel it will be off putting for the kinds of jobs available to them.

The predominance of highly skilled Immigrants in unqualified jobs hinders their chances of building social and professional **networks** with people in qualified jobs.

There is a need to develop credible long-term strategies for obtaining appropriate employment, which can be **combined with** (or are not in conflict with) current short-term ‘sustenance’ job strategies. Moreover, in an environment generally unfavourable to migrants and unconcerned for their needs and problems, politicians are little inclined to publicly support or give such issues any kind of priority at all; this means initiative must, to a large degree, come from **NGOs** – such as *Sevilla Acoge*.

The complete local diagnosis report of overqualification in Seville can be downloaded from the REALISE blog at: <http://realise2020.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/inf-ingles.pdf>

Budapest, Hungary – situation

Overqualification among migrants is a **low priority** in Hungary; what integration measures there are specifically addressing immigrants are tend to be weakly funded and poorly targeted. Generally, integration policies are most concerned with the country’s indigenous Roma minority. Hungary has a small immigrant population, which for the most part is just not on government radar.

Most recently, the impact of the economic crisis and the flourishing of Asia’s economies have led to many Chinese and Vietnamese migrants **returning** to their countries of origin. The number of migrants who report regretting leaving their home country was found to be highest among the

Chinese. Interestingly, it was found that companies owned by foreigners were more likely to accurately **indicate growth** than Hungarian-owned firms.

The Asian migrant population lives in what Menedék describes as an '**ethnic enclave economy**', which exhibits a range of pros and cons. On one hand, the system of mutual support within the community is an effective support system. On the other, the enclave system can be a **barrier to integration** within Hungarian society, leading to isolation from it and from the labour market outside the enclave's activities – i.e. an Asian wanting to work in something other than retail and distribution activities will find it hard to do so. This 'ghettoisation' of ethnic groups into certain sectors was a dynamic found throughout the REALISE network; though in Hungary the Asian community has the peculiarity of being economically well off:

- Vietnamese families have approximately the **same income** per person as the average for educated Hungarian families.
- Chinese family incomes reach levels **twice** that of the average for educated Hungarian family.

As Menedék's Diagnostic report argued, regarding migrants, "**their business success is also beneficial for the receiving country's economy and for the wider European Union context, because they not only pay taxes, but also create jobs and improve Hungary's active working age population ratio.**"

In terms of **gender**, it was found that migrant women are more likely to have lost their professional status (at least temporarily) because of following their partners to Hungary. Employers consistently stated their main barrier to employing migrants was a lack of **information** and misinformation regarding what was involved in hiring migrants.

Overqualification issue

Research shows migrant overqualification is under **10%** in Hungary. The low number stems from significant immigration being a very recent phenomenon, and the characteristics of the migrants coming to Hungary.

Ethnic Hungarians are the largest group; they speak the language and build social networks fairly quickly. The educational systems they come from are similar to Hungary's, thus diploma recognition is not a big hurdle. They do however experience some labour market discrimination, mainly due to employer lack of knowledge about legalities (permit rules, etc.) and anxiety about extra paperwork.

Chinese and Vietnamese migrants form the second biggest group, and their overqualification levels are low; they are typically the owners or employees of successful businesses. Employees frequently intend to set up their own operation, once sufficiently established.

The third group is a catch all for **the rest**, wherein no specific nationality stands out.

Overqualification mostly affects **newcomers**, **women** and those with some **competitive disadvantage** – e.g. the elderly. The time spent in a situation of overqualification seems to be largely in line with what is normal for the native population.

Given how low overqualification is among immigrants, government is unlikely to give it much attention any time soon; as such, Menedék focused on activating the **NGO** sector to address the migrant needs (not unlike in Seville). It will have to be NGOs who provide migrants with support for

building social networks and job seeking, advice on the recognition of degrees and qualifications, and so on.

The complete local diagnosis report of overqualification in Budapest can be downloaded from the REALISE blog at: <http://realise2020.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/menedek-realise-diagnostic-report-of-cause-and-severity1.pdf>

Botkyrka, Sweden – situation

Within its own territory the **municipality of Botkyrka is itself the largest employer**, though – as Botkyrka is, in practice, a satellite to Stockholm – the real job market for its residents is the larger metropolitan area of Stockholm County. Unemployment in Botkyrka is the **highest in the county**.

The Botkyrka Diagnostic Report cites 2006 OECD findings, forecasting an increasing Swedish **reliance on its foreign-born labour** force. Accordingly, the OECD argues that human capital development among foreign-born nationals needs to become more efficient in Sweden.

Swedish employment services forecast growth in the labour force, for the period 2010-2025, will come **exclusively from foreign-born nationals**; in Stockholm County the Swedish-born workforce is estimated to increase by 5.9% during this period, and the foreign-born workforce by 23.6 % – i.e. almost **4 times** the rate for native Swedes.

If Sweden depends on **knowledge-based high value added strategies and a skilled workforce to maintain its economic competitiveness and standard of living**, and the **fastest growing portion of the labour market is disproportionately underperforming** on the labour market, there are some obvious **implications for the general good** when discussing migrant overqualification in Sweden. Such arguments have the potential tactical utility of speaking to the concerns of those who might be less interested in migrant issues *per se*. Moreover, they tended to come as something of a novelty to most people.

Overqualification issue

Migrant overqualification has been a **low political priority** – locally, and at other levels of the Swedish administration. The economic crisis, as elsewhere, has made the labour market a more competitive place; in particular, this has been reflected in an **inflation of job requirements** (i.e. employers now demand higher qualifications for a given job than they would have pre-crisis).

Likewise, it was found that unemployed or poorly employed migrants typically had a lack of informal **social networks**. The lack of social networks was found to run in parallel with insufficient individual support and a lack of available mentoring; all of these lacks have a mutually reinforcing effect on migrants, hindering their social mobility. Botkyrka also identified a lack of positive **role models** for qualified migrants.

A key barrier associated with overqualification in Sweden was found to be that of demand for advanced and specific **language** skills. Likewise, it was found that language courses focussing on **needs of a**

“There is a tendency for many who have a higher education to start looking for lesser skilled work after a while of being on the labour market”

“Those who succeeded in getting a job have usually gone through a long process of learning the system of how the Swedish labour market works. Gradually you learn how the job market works, which requires that you as an individual are persistent as the road to get a job is often quite long”

specific work activity were most effective in facilitating employment chances.

Perhaps something more specific to Sweden is the finding that the labour market Botkyrka residents contend with is highly **formalized and computerized**. Learning to deal effectively with such a system is a key challenge Botkyrka residents face – and in some sense can be viewed as an intercultural issue.

Locally, Botkyrka identified a lack of evaluation – specifically, there had been no **comprehensive evaluation** of the impact of integration policies, conducted thus far, as a whole.

An interesting problem identified, in terms of integration policies, had to do with **outsourcing of services**. The issue was not one of quality of these services, but rather dispersion of knowledge; it was found that the more services were being outsourced to various deliverers, the more it was becoming difficult to put together a good complete map of who is doing/has done what, and how they do/did it.

The complete local diagnosis report of overqualification in Botkyrka can be downloaded from the REALISE blog on: <http://realise2020.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/a-local-diagnosis-botkyrka-10-may.pdf>

Borough of Westminster, London, UK – situation

The Migrant Resource Centre finds itself trying to support migrants in an **environment of increasing competition** for jobs and an apparent **disinterest** in migrant overqualification at policy level.

“When (skilled migrant) don’t get the job or they don’t get the interview, they don’t get shortlisted, they always think it’s the qualification and in my experience it never is. Not only not often, but never. It’s the presentation of what they’re doing”

Many of the issues MRC’s clients find themselves dealing with are comparable to what one encounters elsewhere in Europe. Many of the rules affecting migrants act as **barriers** to their potential employment strategies; such as residence permissions that restrict the migrant to working in certain fields only.

As elsewhere, immigrants often cope through relying on networks. This is a mixed blessing, as on one hand such cooperation within communities and among peers can be quite effective, and the qualities of solidarity and the independent practical initiative displayed by such systems of mutual aid are commendable. However, such networking often leads to a **ghettoisation of work** (similarly observed in e.g. Cesena and Budapest), whereby a given migrant community consistently works in a given field, even becoming identified with it by the local population. Breaking out, of what is in practice a sort of informal and loose ethnic segmentation of the labour market, can be quite difficult and the existing accessible networks are of little or no help – e.g. if all one’s contacts work in cleaning, they are unlikely to be much of a lead to getting a different sort of job.

The **low-income trap** is also a constant issue, whereby migrants find themselves locked into a kind of downward spiral of means, health and ability to act to change their circumstances.

Overqualification issue

As widely reported throughout the REALISE network, MRC finds **employers not understanding** rules affecting the hiring of migrants (restrictions, required bureaucracy, etc.) to be a fundamental barrier in

“I think one of the most important shortcomings is that I didn’t have any experience and I couldn’t prove an experience of working in England and that was a big ‘no’ for most of the companies”

practice. Likewise, employer (in)ability to understand and evaluate migrant qualifications and experience is an impediment to hiring migrants.

However, the Migrants Resource Centre, in its research, raised some fundamental questions about the issue of the validation of qualifications – which is often focused on as a central problem for combating migrant overqualification. They found validation of diplomas simply wasn't that important.

Obviously formal validation is an issue that has to be dealt with and which is of central importance for certain jobs (e.g. civil engineering, medicine, etc.). Nonetheless, MRC found that in the clear majority of hiring processes, the **ability of the applicant to present him or herself effectively and convincingly** was the make or break factor.

This realisation points to a need to support migrants in improving their **communication skills and confidence**, particularly in terms of better understanding relevant cross-cultural communication dynamics – e.g. in some cultural contexts, strongly asserting one's own value, abilities and various merits is frowned upon, whereas in the context of the UK job market, employers expect one to 'sell oneself' to them.

"(The job Centres) could be (distributing quality information for professionals) instead of telling qualified individuals that they should take a cleaning job... Their bog standard reply to people with wonderful skillsets is so demoralising and dehumanising"

In line with this need to 'get' the local culture, employers were found to consistently place great emphasis on a job candidate having **UK work experience**. Hirers were quite clear in explaining this preference was not so much due to a disbelief in the quality of work done elsewhere (e.g. math skills of foreigners, etc.), as to a need for a person to be familiar with the norms and dynamics of a British workplace – i.e. to know what is expected implicitly, how things are resolved, and so forth.

It was also found that there was a need to:

- **Train advisors** better, provide better quality and quantity of attention and guidance, and not lump all migrants together.
- **Tailor language learning** to the learner's needs *vis-à-vis* the labour market – i.e. for communication in specific jobs and sectors, for going through hiring processes, and so forth.
- Get help to the migrant **early** – timing makes a difference.
- Pursue **work placement** programmes, as they seem to be the most effective at getting qualified migrants into work.

"The longer professionals are unemployed, the greater the impact on their mental well-being and confidence levels... I tend to see people who are newly arrived quite confident and the longer they're unemployed (they lose confidence)"

The complete local diagnosis report of overqualification in the London borough of Westminster can be downloaded from the REALISE blog at:

<http://realise2020.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/london-westminster-diagnostic-report-final-march-2012.pdf>

Ghent, Belgium – situation

In general terms the labour market conditions in Ghent are rather promising; there are **more jobs available than there is active population** in the city. Effectively Ghent is a labour magnet, attracting people from the city surroundings to make the commute there for work.

Overqualification issue

Overqualification is, however, disproportionately high among non-EU immigrants. Likewise. Migrants on average wait longer to get a job, are more often in precarious work, and have felt the impact of the crisis more than the general population (in part because they more often work in the types of service sector jobs that were more affected by the crisis).

Why might this be? In Ghent the main causes of this inferior migrant performance on the labour market were found to be:

- Difficult **selection** procedures and demanding **Dutch** language requirements
- **Acceptance** of getting onto the labour market by taking low level jobs – which then become rather ‘sticky’, with migrants finding themselves unable to move upward. This lack of upward mobility and a generalised acceptance (by both migrants and the receiving society) of the migrant’s place on the job market being in low level jobs was found to be a pretty common situation throughout the localities involved in the REALISE network.
- Employers finding it difficult to **evaluate** foreign qualifications – again, a problem encountered widely in the network.
- Interestingly, in Ghent a key issue that surfaced was that of using right or wrong **channels** for job seeking; migrants were found to be disproportionately using the wrong ones. More qualified and less qualified jobs are generally not advertised in the same way – not posted on the same boards and sites, not passed along by the same people through word of mouth, etc. Migrants were found to be most typically using and familiar with the channels through which less qualified jobs are communicated.
- Also interesting, in terms of methodology, Kom-Pas Gent found it most useful to divide barriers to labour market integration into **categories**: i.e. barriers coming from the immigrant (e.g. insufficient knowledge of the labour market), the employer (e.g. prejudice), and society (e.g. language requirements).

Additionally, migrants were found to be **less often self-employed** than natives. Why this might be in Ghent, or Belgium more generally, Kom-Pas Gent was not able to adequately clarify, but it is clear that this trend varies widely; in some places (e.g. Budapest) migrants are *more* likely than natives to pursue self-employment as a solution to their need for an income.

Why this discrepancy occurs **needs to be better understood**; it could lead to some valuable insights.

On the local Ghent labour market, significant variation was encountered, regarding the situation and relative success of individual migrants. The most important **variables** were found to be: **gender**; country of **origin**; length of **stay**; knowledge of **Dutch**; **recognition** of foreign competences (i.e. depending on what type of competence it was, it was more or less easy to have it recognised); branch of **study** (technical studies correlated with the least overqualification); **sector** (teaching had the least overqualification, industry the most).

Another variation raised more questions than were answered, and it had to do with quality of assistance. The over-qualification rates of high-skilled immigrants were found to be higher among those who had received job-seeking help from **private** services (e.g. employment agencies). It has not been adequately clarified whether this is due to a lower quality of assistance or, for some reason, migrants who are more prone to overqualification more frequently using such services.

Again, this needs to be better understood.

The complete local diagnosis report of overqualification in Ghent can be downloaded from the REALISE blog on: http://realise2020.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/ghent_ldr.pdf

Cesena, Italy – situation

Cesena had traditionally been well off by Italian standards, whereas now **decline** has brought Cesena down to current (poor) Italian average levels of economic performance and employment.

"I have always found jobs by myself, because agencies never call you ... once they even told me that they don't employ black people. All the jobs I did I found them alone, so neither through temporary agencies, or through the Centre for Employment"

The area's economy and productive system have significant structural problems **predating the crisis**, which has of course worsened everything. Overqualification is already high among native university graduates.

Overqualification issue

Most of immigrants in Cesena are in low qualified jobs, though **three quarters** have medium to high qualifications.

There is a noted **segmenting** of labour market (certain ethnicities or nationalities consistently working in certain types of jobs, e.g. a given group works in healthcare, another in cleaning, etc.), which is the fruit of migrant networking systems; they help each other get jobs and as they only have leads on jobs in sectors where they already work, they gradually reinforce their prevalence in that segment.

It was found that, in practice, for third country migrants, **validation** of qualifications and capacities is slow, if not impossible. This difficulty and other such barriers to accessing qualified employment lead to erosion of people's competences, and a mental state characterised by resignation and **demotivation** – this is an all too familiar story, repeated consistently throughout the network.

Residence permit restrictions (another issue arising throughout the REALISE network), were found to significantly condition employment objectives and strategies – i.e. people look for a job so as to maintain their residence permit, not as part of a career strategy.

Likewise, it was found that **job centres and agencies** had little awareness of and usefulness to qualified migrants; this was also the case throughout the REALISE network.

Yet another commonality was the negative portrayal of migrants in the media.

Research also identified a lack of **language courses tailored** to work needs – as such they developed such courses as part of their REALISE activities.

A particularly interesting finding of Cesena's research was that qualified foreign workers were **most likely to be hired**, in roles corresponding to their capacities, by Italian **companies that work abroad** (either having foreign clients or offices or plants abroad). As such, another of the actions they carried out was to create a database of these companies present in the area.

"I started working in my company as a labourer. When they realized that I was also a draftsman and that I could speak a very good French and English they decided to promote me and they let me travel around Europe"

The complete local diagnosis report of overqualification in Cesena can be downloaded from the REALISE blog at: <http://realise2020.wordpress.com/results/>

Heraklion, Greece – situation

Somewhat like Spain, Greece has seen a recent and accelerated increase in its immigrant population since 1990. However, a lot of this migrant population sees Greece as a **bridge** country for entering EU.

At 69.2% **Albanians** are by far the main component of the immigrant population. Generally, the African, Asian and Muslim immigrant populations tend to live in a **segregated** way. In Greece there is a problem of getting **accurate data** due to extensive irregularity and 'under the table' work.

In terms of job opportunities, **tourism** is one of the few, possibly the only sector able to occupy qualified migrants.

The impact of the current economic crisis is manifested through:

- An **outflow** of migrants
- Worsening **perception** of and attitudes towards immigrants

Overqualification issue

Few of the migrants in Greece are highly **qualified**; only 4.9% are reported to have any form of post-secondary education. However, as was found throughout the network, in Heraklion **women** seem to be consistently more overqualified than men.

While the gender dynamic is much in keeping with what was found elsewhere, there were unusual findings regarding **language** – 60.1% of migrants consulted said they did **not** have to improve their Greek language skills. Why this is was not established, but it would be interesting to clarify this issue.

Public services and support were reported to have various key deficiencies:

- In practice, diploma **validation** is almost impossible for third country nationals; as such few even try.
- Only 9.9% of migrants have bothered to use any **support** services.
- Immigrants cited a range of bureaucratic **barriers** to their pursuing **freelance** and **professional** work.
- An overriding general problem that emerged from the research was that of **misinformation** and lack of information in all directions, for migrants, for citizens, public authorities and employers.

In what seems to be something of a compensatory behaviour, there is a marked trend of migrants relying on informal **networks** of family and their community – this is much in keeping with findings elsewhere.

In Greece at the current juncture, there is an acute need to address **attitudes and public awareness**, and moderate the effects of the crisis on attitudes to migrants.

In conjunction, there is a need to identify viable strategies for employment, particularly in terms of what sectors are most likely to pick up as the crisis eventually recedes.

The complete local diagnosis report of overqualification in Heraklion can be downloaded from the REALISE blog at:

http://realise2020.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/realise-diagnostic-report_greece-12-4.pdf

2) Processes

This section serves to bring out points of interest arising from the partners' experience of developing and implementing their strategies and tools for addressing overqualification of skilled third-country nationals in a sustainable way. Said points are clustered around seven principles of approach that have emerged from the REALISE experience.

In the subsequent section dealing with products, all of the partners and practices developed are not represented, as many worked on similar tools (logically, given they have come together to tackle the same problems and have been exchanging learning and practice among each other for two years) and it was judged best to avoid repetition for the sake of reader interest. For example, Cesena developed a 'Competence Card' tool, as did Menedék; specialised language courses, as did Botkyrka, and a mentoring initiative, as did Bilbao; Heraklion provided support for the validation of migrants' diplomas, as did Seville – and so on. While there is thus overlap, neither are these experiences and products identical.

As such, this section will also serve to showcase any aspects that particularly need to be brought out⁴⁹.

Engaging employers

Engaging with businesses and understanding their needs and decision-making criteria is obviously fundamental to interventions and practices concerned with employment, and – in projects built around public bodies and NGOs – the involvement of private sector employers is often a weak link. As such, REALISE stressed from the beginning the need to engage with employers and the private sector. Some salient examples:

- **Cesena** was exemplary in working with local business; the local coordinator personally canvassed several businesses, making on-site visits and establishing personal and fruitful rapport with the relevant management figures. The Cesena REALISE team fed the **input** they got from business people into the design and implementation of all their actions – such as in the design and use of a

⁴⁹ Note: for more in-depth information on the partners' situations and work, see the Local Diagnosis Report and final Long-term Strategy Report each partner has produced, available on the REALISE website: <http://realise2020.wordpress.com/>

‘Competence Card’ tool (not unlike what Menedék did, and thus an opportunity for mutual learning) Cesena developed.

This close work with local business leaders allowed Cesena to better understand which companies were appropriate for which job seekers, and thus provide more effective guidance services as to where and how to approach employers.

Of particular interest was Cesena’s finding that qualified foreign workers were **most likely to be hired**, in roles corresponding to their capacities, by Italian **companies that work abroad** (either having foreign clients, or offices or plants abroad). Likewise these companies were more willing to provide their insight and able to give valuable insight into hiring practices and dynamics of concern to qualified migrants.

Accordingly, one of the actions Cesena undertook was to create a **database** of such companies.

- London’s **Migrants Resource Centre** was also of note in engaging with businesses; they conducted a **survey of employers** (discussed in more depth later) whose findings – insightful regarding the peculiarities of the London job market, but also of interest farther afield – clearly made the exercise worthwhile.

Using the PLS to build alliances and capacities

The Panels of Local Key Stakeholders (PLS) were always meant to be used as a tool for increasing and improving the partners’ capacity for impact and for achieving a legacy of ongoing cooperation, after the project itself was over. The following three examples illustrate this principle:

- **Kom-Pas Gent** in Ghent discovered another project, Eminentia, was carried out and there was a potential for **rivalry and duplication**. Rather than go down this route, Kom-Pas Gent invited the other project members to be a member of the Panel of Local Stakeholders, and thus part of their own decision-making process. This built trust, shared goals and cooperation – resulting in an approach based on complementarity, greater capacity for impact and efficiency in use of resources.
- The **Heraklion Development Agency**, recognised that addressing, in any serious way, the problems of Greek public perception regarding immigrants could only be a **long-term** and slow battle – and one that quite simply exceeded the Agency’s own capacities, as a local public body. The only solution was thus to build alliances of like-minded actors with different profiles and capacities for action – i.e. NGOs, educators, private sector people, media people and so on.

Accordingly, the Development Agency focused on using the REALISE and PLS structure as a means to establish such an alliance locally, with a view to said alliance continuing to cooperate around the same mission well after the project cycle was finished. This is what they have done.

- The **Multicultural Centre of the municipality of Botkyrka** functions as a platform, bringing together decision-makers, municipal employers, institutions and civil society organisations operating in Botkyrka and at regional and national levels. Accordingly, from the outset the centre took initiative in making full use of its Panel of Local Key Stakeholders (PLS) to influence decision-makers and policy priorities within different municipal departments. The idea was, by building support and agreement among institutional stakeholders, to achieve substantive change in how things were done, rather than some one off action.

Connect with more general interests and multiply beneficiaries

The partners consistently found that receptivity – to adopting proposals, tools or practices for helping skilled overqualified migrants (frankly something of a ‘tough sell’ throughout much of Europe) – was obtained or increased, when said practices were linked with supporting additional groups or the general population and contributing to larger issues and needs. Some examples:

- Menedék developed a skills evaluation and validation tool (a ‘competence card’) and, when presenting it to employment agencies and other potential users, explained how it could easily be used for **other groups** as well – and was thus more useful to their work (i.e. than a tool only applicable to migrants). It is therefore more likely to be adopted as a tool by such organisations.
- Bilbao developed actions supporting overqualified migrant women and then placed this practice within the framework of larger programmes and policies addressing the **general female working population** of the city.
- Cesena developed a mentoring programme for migrants, wherein the mentors are to be retired local businessmen; in this way the same practice responds to objectives and policies for ‘**active aging**’.

Coherent development of focus and practice

In Bilbao, the Department for Equality, Cooperation and Citizenship had an **established track record** of working on gender differentiated needs and situations and migrants. This has involved, for instance, developing initiatives, and participating in European exchange, regarding women’s health issues and services, and migrants.

As a result, moving to a focus on how gender issues and dynamics played out in the local labour market, and related services and policy, was a smooth and logical step for the department staff, capitalising upon their previous work and built up know how. That is, staff had already developed its capacities for reaching migrant women, addressing messages to them and understanding their specific needs, dynamics and concerns. There was an understanding of who the relevant stakeholders were, the key social partners, and so on.

In short, not starting from scratch, not jumping erratically from one issue to another but rather a coherent ‘segue’, allowed the staff to capitalise on previous work, and thus get more done, faster and better.

Financial sustainability and resources

In the present climate, money is particularly scarce for migrant issues and public services. This is true across Europe, but more so where the impact of the economic crisis is more severe.

- Accordingly, **Cesena** pursued an approach of admirable frugality; they were very careful to limit themselves to developing actions with a clear financial sustainability. No new **overhead** was allowed to be generated in any way; all actions and reforms were built on existing and available resources only (in addition, of course, to the one off funding from REALISE to develop and pilot such interventions).

Cesena's approach also largely depended on improving and establishing **coordination** among relevant actors and bodies – i.e. different public services, departments, bodies and administrations, businesses and business people, and the range of civil society actors and NGOs active in the local territory. Again, the rationale behind this was to improve effectiveness in ways that don't involve any additional monetary burden for the municipality.

- Likewise, in Seville, **Sevilla Acoge Foundation** built all its actions into ongoing programmes, with already secured financing. The Foundation also made admirable use of free and low cost tools – see for example their rather well done blog at: <http://sevillaacoge.wordpress.com/>
- Additionally London's MRC, Cesena and Sevilla Acoge all made effective and creative use of **volunteers** – in all cases giving volunteers empowering, interesting and meaningful work seemed key to obtaining their contributions.

Think independently and locally

Actions that were interesting, suitable and well implemented generally questioned – in a constructive way – generic received ideas and always kept sight of the specifics of the local context.

- Menedék **problematised** the notion of migrant overqualification by raising questions that need to be asked:
 - What if a person **changes sector** (and perhaps wants to) and/or goes into **business**? In such cases can we talk about overqualification? Or is it a more horizontal move in that person's life?
 - What if overqualification is a normal local experience? At what point does it make sense to talk about overqualification? **How much time** should go by? Right away upon arriving or after a given time? Wouldn't the amount of such a given time have to vary from one local context to another? – i.e. How fast or slow is entry into the local job market? What types of opportunity exist? etc. (Of course such questions are likely to collide with a concern for early action, which is found to be more effective. Nonetheless the question can't be ignored.)
 - What about **cultural** questions and different cultural values: e.g. concerning **personal** career success versus **family** success (e.g. dedicating oneself to the success of a family business as opposed to an individual career plan) – can these just be ignored? What are their implications?
- The Migrants Resource Centre, in its own way, questioned received wisdom; its research raised some fundamental questions about the issue of the validation of qualifications – which is often focused on as a central problem for combating migrant overqualification. They found validation of diplomas was often not very important; rather, in the majority of hiring processes, the **ability of the applicant to present him or herself effectively and convincingly** was found to be the determining factor. This understanding led to a focus on self-presentation skills and cross-cultural understanding in MRC's work.
- Conversely, in **Seville** it was found that formal validation of educational qualifications *was* a fundamental barrier to qualified migrants appropriate employment.

→ **Know the local context.** *The labour markets of different countries and localities across Europe can have very different dynamics, hence the decision to begin REALISE with a diagnosis of each partners' local labour market.*

For and by skilled migrants/target group

The involvement of the target group itself – in this case overqualified third country nationals – is fundamental to designing interventions well and appropriately, to implementing them effectively and to any evaluation and revision process. Botkyrka, for instance, developed some strong arguments for empowering migrants to articulate their own needs and solutions; however, within the REALISE partnership, Seville offered perhaps the clearest illustration of the principle in practice.

- *Sevilla Acoge* is a foundation, run by migrants, which provides support services to migrants – i.e. everything is for and by the target group concerned.

The people running the organisation understand its beneficiaries; they are them. Within delivering REALISE, Sevilla Acoge understood that local migrants needed support to simply survive in the immediate situation of socio-economic free-fall, that if this need were not addressed, talk of long-term issues and approaches would be ignored. So, the Foundation developed a two-speed approach, providing migrants with support addressing their immediate needs while at the same time showing them how to combine this with actions addressing longer-term issues – i.e. they could do both.

In some sense this approach mirrored the situation of *Sevilla Acoge* itself, which is forced to navigate and survive a crisis situation, but at the same time cannot allow itself to lose a sense of strategic purpose and mission (where are we going as an organisation? how should our role evolve?), by getting caught up in ‘putting out fires’ and its own day-to-day survival. While the situation of the Foundation is not easy, it ensures its work stays relevant to the community it serves.

3) Strategies and tools

A mentoring programme for highly skilled immigrant women in Bilbao

Strategy:

The city of Bilbao found that **long-term residence** in Bilbao correlates with greater integration, and this was seen as a rationale for putting in place a mentoring programme where established skilled immigrants would put their own employment experience and networks at the service of other, more recently arrived, skilled immigrant women. The objective is to improve the employability of highly skilled immigrant women and break their professional isolation, by helping them develop their job seeking strategies and their professional networks and understanding of the local workplace culture. The initiative also seeks to strengthen the participants’ self-esteem and motivation, via techniques tried and tested for establishing emotional and psychological support among women.

It was found that in many cases these highly skilled women only plan to be in Bilbao **temporarily**, but then end up residing permanently in the city. This means they first accept low-skilled jobs thinking of it as a temporary thing; things then go on to become a permanent situation, and they give up on thinking about other options or career progress. Thus, the mentoring programme is also meant to

encourage them to consider pursuing a **long-term job market integration strategy**, in which they develop a strategy to make the most of the skills and qualifications they already have and/or to pursue suitable further education.

The programme was successfully tested in 2012 on a group of 23 highly skilled immigrant women and will be extended to another 50 women from 2013 on.

Bilbao is particularly active in promoting and implementing gender equality policies, and the mentoring programme fits into this wider strategy.

The mentoring programme is part of a holistic strategy to tackle different causes of overqualification at the same time. The strategy includes three other complementary initiatives that are being implemented:

1. Completing the **online resource guide** of the city for immigrants with information on (i) how to get recognition of qualifications acquired abroad and (ii) how to get professional skills and competences validated by the employment department of the regional government. The information is available in 7 languages, see: www.bilbao.net/inmigracion
2. **Training the counsellors** of the employment services to provide more tailored and effective services to highly skilled immigrants. The training will take place this year (2013), within a broader staff-training programme of the regional government.
3. Conducting **campaigns to raise awareness** on the added value of highly skilled immigrants and their contribution to local economy. The initiative bases itself on the existing Municipal Diversity Management Plan, which includes an awareness-raising dimension, dedicated to improving the image and perception of immigrants.

Implementation:

The mentoring programme was implemented in **four stages**:

Outreach and selection: Suitable mentors and mentees are identified through other city programmes they have already participated in, through various organisations working with immigrants or through the employment services. Programme staff then contacts them, explains the programme offered and invites them to participate.

Orientation sessions: Mentors and mentees are invited to participate together in three consecutive workshops of 2-3 hours. In the **first** workshop mentors and mentees get an overview and update of the different support **services** available in the city relevant to their job search. Mentors are to update themselves on these services and mentees are to find out about them and begin using them. Participants share their experiences of using these services and tips on which services are most fit to their needs and how to access them.

The **second** workshop works on strengthening the mentees **self-esteem and motivation** to look for a job better corresponding to their qualifications. Mentors and mentees discuss and gain more understanding of each other's migratory project and expectations, share experiences with other skilled women in the same situation and listen to success stories of mentors working at the level of their qualifications. This workshop also helps clarify the profile of the participants and their expectations.

In the **third** workshop, the mentees identify what guidance and support they would like to **receive** from the mentor. The mentors identify what learning and experience are **worth sharing** with their mentees. This consultation results in an agreed schedule of activities for both parties to work on, e.g.: identifying and navigating through the different existing employment and career guidance support services; drafting CVs; using job search websites; local work culture and expectations of employers; visiting professional associations and building professional peer networks.

Matching and mentoring: skilled women are paired in a mentor-mentee relationship or put in small groups with one mentor and 2 mentees maximum – according to professional profile and other factors of affinity (country of origin, language, etc.). Mentors and mentees meet over three months, as time and schedules permit, to carry out the agreed activities. They can get programme staff support at any point in the process.

Pilot evaluation: the programme was first tested as a pilot during 4-month period, with 23 highly skilled immigrant women, including mentors and mentees, in summer 2012. At the end of the pilot, the mentoring process was assessed through a **focus group** and a **questionnaire** completed by the participants. The mentees felt they gained more knowledge on the different existing support services and how to navigate them; they were more prepared to assess and value their own skills and competences and to search for a job corresponding to their qualifications (i.e. how to focus a job search, write a CV and motivation letter, etc.) and they were more confident that their foreign qualifications and skills were valid in the host country.

Mentors ended up provided support in more areas than planned, e.g.: prepare for an interview with a Spanish employer, identifying the right sectors and job advertisement channels, contacting the right services and preparing the right documents for diploma recognition. Mentors also shared with mentees on applying for scholarships for post-graduate and PhD studies, and on university language classes. Mentors motivated the mentees constantly and supported them individually.

Total budget will be **18,500€** for mentoring in early 2013 involving 50 highly skilled immigrant women (including mentees and mentors). This amount covered staff costs, workshop facilitators, mentor expenses (transport, telephone, etc.), producing a guide for mentors, **childcare** for mentoring participants and programme dissemination.

Results and evaluation:

The 3-month mentoring process was evaluated in terms of its ability to equip mentees with strategies to seek a job corresponding to their qualifications and also in terms of assessing the type of support activities provided by the mentors. At the time of writing, it was not yet possible to assess fully the impact of the mentoring on obtaining more suitable employment. The city will put in place a **monitoring** system to follow up on the women who participate in the mentoring programme and to maintain contact with them.

In 2013, the mentoring **programme will continue** with another 50 highly skilled immigrant women (40 mentees and 10 mentors), within a city project involving **Spanish** professional women who have been successful in their professional careers or are successful entrepreneurs. The mentoring programme will involve these Spanish women as mentors for the highly skilled immigrant mentees. Implementation has already started.

The city of Bilbao has identified the following areas that need **improvement** to increase effectiveness of the mentoring programme and is currently tackling them:

- Better strategies and channels for **outreach** to mentors and mentees
- A **guide** for mentors helping them understand and better define their role.
- Involving **business**.
- **Support measures**, such as childcare, to help mentors and mentees reconcile work and family life and thus follow the mentoring programme properly.
- **Knowledge management**: creating a blog for collecting and sharing mentor and mentee experiences.

Supporting recognition of foreign diplomas and promoting self-employment for highly skilled immigrants in Seville

Strategy:

The Foundation *Sevilla Acoge* had to find a sensible balance between short-term and long-term needs and approaches. In the current environment, immigrants see they must be pragmatic; they need to get a job quickly – for economic reasons (i.e. basic survival) and to maintain their residence permits. In such circumstances, *Sevilla Acoge* found little or no interest, among its clients, in longer-term slower approaches.

The Foundation thus decided to try to combine immediate support with actions that address the longer-term. Likewise, as an organisation, the Foundation needed to combine an emergency mode of operation with long-term strategic thinking for its own development – i.e. stay proactive, despite significant pressure to slip into a reactive mode.

The Foundation has identified support to the **validation** of academic qualifications (i.e. getting diplomas legally recognised) as something they can provide, and which an immigrant can combine with immediate job seeking. Validation is particularly worthwhile as a topic in their context, because having foreign qualifications recognised is a *sine qua non* condition, not only to access a job that corresponds to immigrants' qualifications, but also simply to be registered by the public employment service (INEM) in the right category as a job seeker (if a diploma has not been legally validated the INEM ignores it and the person is listed as without studies).

Self-employment, on the other hand is one of the more viable employment alternatives open to immigrants, in the present circumstances of dismal job offer. As such, the Foundation decided to address the lack of information and advisory available to immigrants on **self-employment** and how to start and run a **business**.

Implementation:

The strategy consists of regularly delivering two types of informative/guidance workshops – one on how to obtain the **recognition of foreign diplomas** and degrees, and one on **self-employment and business creation** – designed specifically for the needs of qualified migrants.

Both workshops are currently offered; each has been delivered **monthly** since January 2013. The workshops offer a mix of verbal presentations and explanations, group discussions, individual testimonies and audio-visual supports. Each participant gets an accompanying *info pack*. The methodology in both workshops includes the use of success stories and **testimonials**, by skilled

migrants who managed to have their qualifications validated and/or carry out a successful business venture/self-employment strategy.

The workshop programme also provides complementary support. For instance, the diploma recognition workshop includes support with exam preparation and identification of which Spanish degree programmes most closely correspond to the foreign qualification.

The self-employment workshop receives technical support from the Andalucía Employers Federation (FEANSAL), Seville County and the Andalusian Regional Government Centre for Entrepreneurial Development (CADE). Participants are directed to **specialised** self-employment technical support, provided by the Andalucía Regional Government, for further and more in-depth information and guidance. In the future, an entrepreneur may accompany the participants to these meetings.

The programme is reviewed and revised **every 3 months**. The technical personnel delivering the workshops receive ongoing training, directed by the evaluation findings.

Results and evaluation:

The two workshops were successfully tested and evaluated with 77 qualified immigrants and will be made **sustainable** by integrating them into a larger existing programmes – the '*Andalucía Orienta*' (≈ Andalucía Orientation), which is carried out by *Sevilla Acoge* and is financed by the regional government as part of its active employment policies. This financing has been going on for over 10 years and the current high levels of unemployment make it likely such pro-employment programmes will be continued for the foreseeable future.

The Andalucía orientation programme is also implemented by other organisations and *Sevilla Acoge* Foundation will work on **transferring** the workshops to these other service deliverers.

A **monitoring** programme will be implemented with funds from the Andalucía Orientation programme, so as to improve workshop quality and measure performance through follow-up of participant success in diploma recognition or business creation.

Competence cards for highly skilled immigrants in Budapest

Strategy:

Given that employers attested to a lack of information they could rely on when hiring migrants, Menedék association decided to focus on developing tools for **demonstrating competences** of migrants to employers – specifically, a kind of competence card system, which has several precedents elsewhere that could be drawn upon.

The competence card was designed and issued for assessing and recording the skills and competences third-country nationals have. The Competence Card is to be attached to the Curriculum Vitae of the third-country national when applying for a job.

In Human Resources management, working in terms of competences – such as teamwork or problem solving – is a global trend. By using such a card, qualified third-country nationals are to be able to manifest their competences, in a recognisable way, to local employers, rather than just attempt to describe their foreign work experience. The point is to increase their chances in an interview phase.

Self-presentation in terms of competences is useful for third-country nationals for three reasons:

- Competences are now considered **globally understandable**, measurable and transferable; European employers can comprehend competences even if the work experience is acquired abroad.
- The organisation issuing the Competence Card is **Hungarian** (Menedék), and as such acts as a bridge with local employers, mitigating mistrust of foreign qualifications and the professional experience of a third-country national applicant.
- It addresses some of the factors hindering employers from hiring third-country nationals, particularly language as it emphasizes language **abilities** (ability to communicate abstract ideas, etc.) rather than language knowledge (assigning a level such as 'B2' etc.).

Implementation:

The competence card is issued by Menedék's Social counsellors, who provide job coaching to third-country nationals seeking a job. These counsellors received a one-day specialised training for assessing and recording primary competences, e.g. problem solving and team work; secondary competences, e.g. client focus, analytic skills, persuasion, interpersonal skills, adaptability/flexibility, initiative, leadership; and finally language ability.

Representatives of a **recruitment agency** led the training, based on up-to-date human resources competence assessment practice. Said training placed a special emphasis on the methodology of '**Behaviour Event Interviews**' and measuring competences through them; this is a form of competence based interviewing, where the questions to be asked in the interview are open, in order to give the client the opportunity to bring up examples – e.g. not formulated like 'Are you good in solving problems?', but 'Please, tell me about a case when you think you solved a problem well at your workplace'. A manual is used along with the training to explain Behaviour Event Interviewing. The manual explains the competences used and their interpretation, and summarises question types and questioning techniques, providing instructions on how to evaluate Behaviour Event Interviews and how to fill in a competence card.

In addition to this first technique, the **STAR** model is also used – whereby the client is questioned until the answer includes: S=Situation, T=Task, A=Action, R=Result.

On a practical level, it is possible to fill out a competence card after a one or two hour interview, and deliver it immediately to a client. However, it is considered best if the interviewer has more time to process the information. The interview is conceived in relation to the personal objectives of the migrant, and the level and type of qualifications needed for a given position. The interviewee is asked to describe in detail examples of when he/she practiced given competences. When collecting the answers, it is important to complete the STAR model described above. The most relevant examples can even be mentioned on the card to demonstrate, to the potential employer, why Menedék believes a given individual has, for instance, excellent problem-solving skills.

If the migrant is applying for a specific job position, then the key competences of that position have to be determined first by the counsellor, and the card is issued based on an assessment of these specific competences.

The client receives the competence card in a digital format and can print as many copies as needed to attach to a CV.

For an effective competence assessment, one is advised to focus on a **specific job** position, otherwise the card becomes too general and more of a self-help exercise (i.e. supporting self-esteem by learning to identify and appreciate one's various skills and personal strengths) for the migrant, than a tool for directly obtaining employment.

Results and evaluation:

The competence card and the training of social counsellors to use it were developed **based on the findings** of the initial local research into the causes and severity of overqualification. Secondly, the approach was **participatory**; a diverse pool of stakeholders (private sector input was particularly useful) working in the field was successfully involved, so as to ensure the response was adequate to the problem addressed.

The Competence Cards have been delivered in a first phase in 2012, to a small group of qualified immigrants, and, in January 2013, was adopted and extended to a larger group. Evaluation is under way, feedback from the users on their employment situation and their experiences with the competence cards will be collected in June 2013, the results of which will be used in improving, developing and disseminating the competence card and its use. Menedék will also collect feedback from new employers, the methodology of which is currently under elaboration.

The cards will be issued for newcomers as well as for those already settled in the country, and – with a view to extending their use and familiarity – will be freely available to any of Menedék's users or visitors.

Governance, structural municipal reform and putting skilled third-country nationals on the agenda in Botkyrka

Strategy:

On the basis of the local diagnostic process and the capacities and opportunities available, Botkyrka decided to **focus** on:

- Updating and **revising how they do things they already do** (i.e. existing initiatives and projects, services for migrants, job centres etc.). At the time of the development of their action plan, the municipality was carrying out a general review, revision and reorganisation of its services; the idea was to take advantage of this general review and work with it to introduce adaptations more suitable to the needs of qualified migrants and to raise **awareness** of such migrants, which was generally low among service providers.
- Better **interconnect** (i.e. eliminate and reduce 'silos', make sure 'the left hand knows what the right hand is doing') services, departments, administrations and individuals active in the territory of Botkyrka. This means better coordination and consolidation of multiple strands of policy and action – from the local up to the national level, the ESF Managing Authority, and so on. For instance, there is an interesting Swedish pilot programme – 'National Matching' – which identifies job openings across the country for those willing to move, which should be engaged with.

Correspondingly, the Multicultural Centre adopted these main **objectives**:

- Put qualified migrants '**on the radar**' locally (i.e. improve awareness among civil servants, employers and the general population) and **adapt services and governance** to cover their needs.
- Provide support to integration (social and labour market combined) **earlier, when it is more effective**.
- Strengthen the Centre's role as a **platform** for networking, exchange and integration in the local community.

This would be done largely through **governance** and structural reform in the municipal administration. Such reform was achieved through convincing and taking advantage of an already planned official revision of municipal services and internal organisation, so as to introduce greater concern for and attention to qualified immigrants.

The Multicultural Centre of the municipality of Botkyrka – having a unique structure connecting decision-makers, municipal employers, institutions and civil society organisations operating in Botkyrka and at regional and national levels – started from the beginning of the REALISE project to work heavily in partnership, to achieve early influence on decision-makers and policy priorities within different municipal departments. The idea was to thus affect **permanent change** in how things were done, rather than carry out some temporary actions, based on the fleeting financing of a project budget.

Implementation:

Botkyrka's strategy has focused on **early** support for qualified migrants, particularly through newcomer orientation and language **courses** and **guidance** services.

1. The Department for Labour Market and Adult Education (AVUX) – being responsible for adult education and Swedish language courses for Immigrants (SFI) in the municipality – was identified as the key institution to work with. AVUX developed **Swedish language** courses specifically for more educated migrants, with tailored teaching approaches and a focus on career direction.
2. Based on cooperation with REALISE and a structured consultation process with the immigrant target group, in 2012 AVUX created '**Academic Track**' (Akademikerspåret) – an introduction programme of Swedish studies and career guidance counselling for academics. The programme provides its graduates with professional certification and connects them with employers, trade unions, education centres and universities. The working method developed by Academic Track is skilled immigrant-centred. It uses the target group to identify its own needs and demands, and then seeks to match the right content with these needs and demands, rather than imposing a set of predetermined contents.
3. The multicultural centre has influenced the Department for Labour Market and Adult Education AVUX, in how it has revised the municipal Guidance Services. The new service arrangements are scheduled to be up and running in 2013. These services will then – for the first time – offer **specialized advisory and career counselling for highly skilled migrants**, by hiring a specialist in the field.
The mentality has been to think in terms of getting immigrants "**a job**" rather than "**the right job**"; the Department is now shifting its focus onto achieving greater employability and meaningful employment.
4. The adult education services have started a weekly scheme, made up of various activities in support of job-seeking – e.g. workshops on mapping of skills and qualifications, on identifying and

planning career paths, on the Swedish educational system, on CV writing and using job hunting websites, on business creation, on social codes, self-marketing and networking, and so forth.

5. As part of its efforts at **awareness** raising, the Multicultural Centre:

- Is organising an **exhibition** 'Warning for race', which started November 1st 2012 and will run until spring 2014. In conjunction with the exhibition several conferences, talks and public discussions will be held on the subject. (<http://mkc.botkyrka.se/utstallningar>).
- The REALISE project was presented in February 2013 in a **parallel exhibition** to the one described above, based on interviews and life stories from individual high skilled immigrants. Together, these two exhibitions are meant as a platform for generating discussion and networking possibilities, both on a local level and at national level. The centre regularly hosts discussion group events and welcomes many different visitors, from local officials and politicians to civil society actors as well as students and teachers from secondary schools around Stockholm County.
- Academic Track students attended a **national recruitment fair** called, Working for change, focusing on diversity and recruitment of international expertise, in December 2012. Qualified migrants were able to meet employers with a need for personnel with immigrant background and/or international qualifications, as well as to interact with representatives from the National Employment Service of Sweden, so as to present their views and experiences to them (i.e. to gently lobby them).

One of the major **challenges** encountered was that of achieving consensus among the different local and regional actors; these different organisations are generally focused on their **own respective issues** (e.g. entrepreneurship, racism, local development, etc.) and it is difficult to construct a single message or narrative across the silos. Likewise, the private sector, the public administration and NGOs all have **different styles of working**, and this can make synchronisation among them challenging. While perhaps worthwhile, such efforts are not necessarily easy.

Results and evaluation:

The Multicultural Centre will continue to advance their agenda through:

- Suitable **prioritization** of already existing resources
- Collaboration with the national European Social Fund-financed project "**National Matching**" which seeks to match the expertise of foreign graduates with the needs of the labour market (<http://www.esf.se/en/Projektbank/Behallare-for-projekt/Stockholm/Nationell-Matchning----->). The project is coordinated by the Swedish Employment Agencies and will last until 2014.
- Seeking further project **funding**: local stakeholders decided to submit a project application "Academic Power" for the European Integration Fund (http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/financing/fundings/migration-asylum-borders/integration-fund/index_en.htm), as an extension of the Academic Track programme. The focus of the "Academic power" project is on the individual goals of highly educated newcomers in Botkyrka. The rationale is that each individual has his/her own studies profile, language proficiency, and career fields are so broad and varied, that it is impossible to provide a one-size-fits-all solution to the issues of overqualification. Hence the **empowerment** method, whereby the individual has a voice on his/her situation, capacity, needs and objectives. If the European funding is not obtained, AVUX will still provide the "Academic Power" service, but on a smaller scale.

- The navigation and counselling at the Academic Track and the Guidance Function will be further developed in 2013 **widening participation** to mentors, business associations, employers, unions and other relevant stakeholders.

Improving access to information and support services and raising awareness of local employers in Ghent:

Strategy:

The Kom-Pas Gent association's strategy consisted of creating a local consultative platform composed of key stakeholders⁵⁰ from diverse organisations and skilled immigrants, who worked together on: (1) improving efficiency, coordination and responsiveness of already existing services and (2) raising awareness of employers about the value of hiring skilled immigrants.

The objectives of this approach were:

- To improve and better coordinate knowledge of the local labour market for high-skilled immigrants and hence their job search abilities and channels. This was done by creating a **website** and printed **guide** which provide high skilled immigrants with information in the areas of job search and career guidance; acquisition of work experience and traineeship programmes; recognition of foreign diplomas; Dutch language classes; lifelong learning; legal information, and linking them to support services and projects already available for them. The website and the guide are also meant to be a working tool for support services themselves, when providing guidance to skilled immigrants in their job search.
- To increase skilled immigrants' chances to get employed in adequate jobs by encouraging employers to hire them using an existing policy measure (*article 60§7 of the Social Service Department*⁵¹) that provides subsidies and social security exemptions for employers who hire a job seeker. This was done by conducting an awareness-raising **campaign** to encourage employers from third sector organisations to use this financial incentive in order to hire skilled immigrants in positions that correspond to their levels of education and skills, and to increase the value and appeal of hiring skilled immigrants.
- To improve effectiveness of the Social Orientation courses provided by Kom-Pas Gent in the framework of its civic integration programme for newcomers, by conducting a review of its contents and delivery.
- To provide support services a tool when giving job search guidance to skilled immigrants.

Implementation:

1. The website and the guide

The website address is: <http://realise.kompasgent.be/>

⁵⁰ Kom-Pas Gent platform of key stakeholders is composed of: The Flemish Employment Service (www.vdab.be); The Integration Service of the City of Ghent (<http://www.gent.be/integratiedienst>); Eminentia project funded by the European Social Fund and that seeks to support high skilled immigrants find adequate jobs (<http://www.gsiw.be/eminenta>); Via Educatie project funded by the European Social Fund and that seeks to increase the participation of third country nationals in higher education (<http://www.onderwijsvoorvolwassenen.be/nieuws/via%20educatie%20EIF%20project.shtml>); Masereelfonds project on interculturality (<http://www.masereelfonds.be/index.php>), University of Ghent (www.gent.be); Trade unions (www.acv-online.be; www.aclvb.be; www.abvv.be); Skilled third-country nationals.

⁵¹ Employment in accordance with article 60 § 7 is a form of social service whereby the PSWC (Public Social Welfare Centre) arranges a job for someone who stepped or fell out of the employment market, with the aim to bring this person back into the social security system and the employment process <http://www.mi-is.be/be-nl/node/63100>.

The website and the guide are a sort of one-stop-shop, whereby skilled third-country nationals living in Ghent can access all the relevant information and related support services to help them during their job search process. The tools are also for support services, to use in referring high skilled immigrants to the appropriate service.

The contents were written and organised in an accessible way, detailing the usual steps towards finding a job. Existing support services were mapped out, and the website and guide contents were written and reviewed in an editorial meeting with key local stakeholders, including high-skilled immigrants themselves. The final contents were reviewed by a specialist service meant to assure non-native Dutch speakers can understand them, by favouring accessible vocabulary and so forth.

Both the website and the printed guide were disseminated among existing support services, which already have established networks and communication channels within the migrant community and among local practitioners.

2. The awareness raising campaign towards employers of the non-profit sector

The campaign consisted of encouraging non-profit organisations in Ghent to hire skilled immigrants under an existing measure of the Belgian Social Service Department, which provides incentives to employers to hire job seekers. Said measure doesn't specifically target migrants but can be used for them. The campaign was targeted at non-profit sector employers under the rationale that they are more likely early adopters, less reluctant to hire immigrants.

The initiative was prepared in partnership with the city's **Social Service Department**. An information session was held – gathering 27 employers representing 19 local non-profit organisations – during which Kom-Pas Gent explained the rationale for hiring skilled immigrants and the Social Department explained how the measure works in practice.

An illustrative first-hand **experience** was presented – by hirer and hiree – of an organisation that recruited high-skilled migrants to suitable jobs using the measure.

The event led to a **debate** on the content of the measure itself and proposals for improving it – i.e. making it more conducive to hiring high-skilled immigrants and lowering the costs of hiring.

A **policy document** was then drafted by the city Integration Service (with input from Kom-Pas Gent), discussed among the stakeholders, and submitted to the head of the local Social Service Department – who also happens to be the city alderman for employment.

The proposal is now under debate in the municipality, with a fair possibility of measures being taken to lower hiring costs as an outcome – i.e. an example of local lobbying as part of the activities generated by REALISE.

3. The review of the Social Orientation course for high-skilled immigrants

The purpose of the Social Orientation course provided by Kom-Pas Gent in the framework of the Flemish introduction programme is to provide information and guidance to newcomers on employment. The course does **not differentiate** between the needs of high-skilled job seekers and those of job seekers looking for low-skilled jobs. Likewise, course counsellors are **not prepared** to provide guidance suitable to high-skilled immigrants. As such the current course content and guidance service have been reviewed and the results put into draft recommendations for making the Social Orientation Course more adequate to the needs of high-skilled immigrants. The website tool and the

guide described above are part of this revision process; the social orientation course counsellors will use them so as to advise high-skilled immigrants better.

Results and evaluation:

One significant **institutional** legacy of benefit to high-skilled immigrants, in the medium and long-term in Ghent, is the **consultative platform** that has been established, as a result of the REALISE process of working in partnership with key local stakeholders, over a year and a half. The process led to a shared realisation of the need for continuing cooperation and exchange among the members of the platform, after the end of the REALISE project cycle in March 2013. If the ESF EMINENTA project for high-skilled immigrants (<http://www.gsiw.be/eminenta>) gets its funding renewed, it will manage the new platform; otherwise the Panel members will set the platform up among themselves.

Encouragingly, other parts of Flanders are looking at the REALISE and EMINENTA project activities, with a view to replicating them and using the European Social Fund to do so.

Addressing ‘soft skills’ in London

Strategy:

The Migrant’s Resource Centre (MRC) strategy focused on boosting **self-confidence**, promoting **recognition** of one’s own transferable skills, and improving **presentation** skills and **networking** of skilled third-country nationals; these factors having been identified as determinant in the hiring process.

The strategy consisted of delivering a series of innovative **workshops** in partnership with the National Theatre, Community Service Volunteers CSV, and Resonance Radio that can contribute to raising confidence of skilled immigrants; identifying skills, strengths and their applicability in a variety of fields; and to understanding transferrable skills and how best to present these in local labour market terms.

All workshops involved professionals. The language and approach used start from the premise that workshop participants have valuable skills and experience to offer – which simply needs repackaging – and not using **negative language** of need and support, which in itself can be disempowering. As expressed by one of the participants in the workshop evaluation *“you take your own tools and build confidence from there.”* The workshops were based on a ‘real-world’ participatory approach, focused on allowing participants to use their existing skills practically.

Complementary to the workshops, the Migrants Resource Centre sought to engage with **employers** through carrying out a research on the experiences of employers in hiring third-country nationals. The research sought to gain more understanding of the varying barriers that can hinder employers from hiring skilled immigrants and how these can be overcome, and to raise awareness among other employers of the potential for their business of hiring third-country skilled immigrants.

Implementation:

‘Being Yourself/Playing The Part’ workshop – by the National Theatre (<http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/education>):

The workshop ran over 2 days and sought to explore skilled immigrants' presentation and communication skills, by enhancing their communication strengths and increasing the range of choices they have when transitioning into UK working life.

The course activities looked at how to approach meetings, networking, interviews and presentations, so that the participant feels confident in presenting the 'best' version of themselves to other people. The focus of all the exercises is on the '**how**' rather than the 'what', with a view to increasing their flexibility and awareness when communicating. The training draws on **techniques used by actors** and directors to encourage confident and creative communication. It is not about turning participants into actors – but rather benefiting from the insights and *know how* that theatre can offer.

Status games were used to investigate how our status can effect how people perceive us, and how we can manipulate our status to create better outcomes. The course is participatory and the exercises involved working in small groups, in pairs and individual activities.

As part of the training workshop, participants were invited to attend a free event in London (a list of free events around London was given to them) between the two training days to **practice** their networking and communication skills. On the second workshop day participants reviewed their experiences together, asking questions and getting feedback on improving their networking skills and acquiring new skills.

The course was planned and delivered by the National Theatre using professional actors and experienced trainers. At the end of the workshop the National Theatre provided **qualitative evaluation**.

'Discovering your transferable skills' and 'interview practice day' – with the Community Service Volunteers (<http://www.csv.org.uk/>):

This one-day workshop was organised in partnership with the Community Service Volunteers (CSV), which is an employee volunteering programme. The CSV identified the volunteers, who came from the **Cabinet Office**⁵² to deliver the programme and prepared the content of the workshop in collaboration with MRC.

The Cabinet Office volunteers were first providing an overview of common problems experienced by skilled immigrants at interviews, and how the team might best use their skills to help. After introducing the volunteers and their roles to the participating skilled immigrants, a **transferable skills** activity was carried out where volunteers worked one-to-one with the participants to help them prepare for some common interview questions. Volunteers helped **draw out** participants' previous transferable skills and experience. This was followed by mock interviews with the participants; first an introduction to the mock interview activity was given, explaining how it would work, what to look out for and how to provide feedback. Subsequently, volunteers and participants divided into small groups to ask and answer mock interview questions and provide feedback. Finally, a feedback session with the entire group provided the opportunity to give qualitative feedback to the participants – followed by an opportunity for participants to engage informally with the Cabinet Office volunteers and ask any left over questions they had.

⁵² The Cabinet Office is the department of the UK government responsible for supporting the Prime minister.

Radio broadcasting course with Resonance Radio ([Resonance 104.4 FM](#)):

The Radio Broadcasting course was developed in partnership with Resonance Radio⁵³ and covered all aspects of radio broadcasting and programming, such that by the end of the course participants would be able to both plan their radio programme, conduct interviews (or other verbal radio content), record and broadcast the programme.

The objective of the course was twofold: train skilled immigrants to practice their written and spoken communication skills, and at the same time give them a voice and work on public perception of them.

The employers' survey: "Migrant Under-Employment: The Employers' Perspective"

The survey was conducted through interviews with six employers and one statutory career guidance organisation; an online survey completed by eight companies and interviews with three skilled migrants seeking employment and one already employed.

Results and evaluation:

The innovative workshops were successfully tested as a pilot on 60 skilled immigrants in total. Qualitative evaluations were undertaken at the end of each workshop and showed a high degree of satisfaction among the participants, who valued, in particular, the fact that such workshops were not easily available elsewhere and addressed multiple barriers facing skilled immigrants. The workshops also allowed the professionals involved, such as the Cabinet Office employees, to gain better understanding of barriers to employment faced by skilled migrants – so the effects were two-way.

The Migrants Resource Centre plans to continue to offer these workshops on an ongoing basis, circumstances permitting (availability of volunteers and so on). The "Discovering your transferable skills and interview practice day" was already repeated in 2013 and will continue to be offered, both in partnership with the Community Service Volunteers and as part of an ongoing programme at MRC where a professional teacher and a recruitment specialist run a preparation for interviews class, supported with mock interviews.

The 'Being Yourself/Playing The Part' workshop will continue to be offered by the National Theatre if MRC secures funding. Fifteen broadcasts by skilled immigrants were produced as a result of the workshop, were aired starting 1 February 2013 at Resonance 104.4 FM, and will also be downloadable from the resonance website. The Radio broadcasting course will continue to be offered to skilled immigrants by Resonance Radio.

The employers' survey "*Migrant Under-Employment: The Employers' Perspective*" main findings concerning barriers hindering recruitment of third-country nationals in the employers' perspective are:

- "Some employers expected to recruit migrants to entry-level jobs, below their skill level, but offer career progression. For these, overseas qualifications and experience were less important than **experience** of working in the UK, in whatever capacity. The emphasis there is on familiarity with the UK work culture: how the employee relates to colleagues, superiors and clients. These firms are **unlikely** to engage with processes of validation of qualifications.

⁵³ Resonance 104.4 fm is the world's first 'radio art' station, established by London Musicians' Collective in 2002.

- Where a professional qualification is essential, employers rely on **recognition** by UK professional bodies, so that the validation process is at a distance. Once there is recognition, however, migrants are likely to be employed at their skill level.
- A major potential barrier to employment for migrants is the **recruitment process**. UK procedures of application, shortlisting and interview may not be familiar. It is essential for migrants to understand them and to master an appropriate tone in, for example, the personal statement on an application form. This can be learnt. More complex is the area of psychometric testing, which is culturally specific and inevitably favours those speaking English as a first language.
- The requirement of some employers that migrants have previous **UK experience** would appear to be a catch-22, but **unpaid work placements** are an effective way of overcoming this. However, in the current environment, there is increasing competition for even such unpaid work, particularly from unemployed UK graduates.
- No employer said that uncertainty about **immigration status** deterred him/her from employing migrants. There was frustration with the complexity and slowness of the system of obtaining visas or work permits, such that at least one employer reporting being willing to do this only if no easier option were available. The abolition of the Post-Study Work scheme appeared to another firm (as well as to outside commentators) as a waste of an excellent resource.

Results of the survey were presented at different events and will be used when approaching employers about potential work placements with MRC skilled immigrant clients.

The employer's survey report is available on the REALISE blog for free download: <http://realise2020.wordpress.com/results/>

V) Conclusions and Recommendations

The partners' Local Diagnosis Reports and final Long-Term Strategy documents enumerate a range of specific recommendations and conclusions, which all together are quite extensive and speak for themselves; the conclusions of this report are not a complete repetition of all these outputs – space doesn't permit – but rather a set of salient points, arising from the overall REALISE experience and looking forward.

Awareness raising

The problem of overqualified third country nationals is one that receives little attention publicly; awareness and understanding of the issue are low across Europe.

While awareness needs to be improved throughout society, it is particularly important to address:

- **Employers**, who consistently repeated similar things about not understanding what was involved in hiring migrants (requirements and permits, the rules and paperwork etc.) and how to evaluate their qualifications and suitability for a given job (foreign diplomas and work experience, and so forth) – this came out as a fundamental barrier to qualified employment, and must be emphasised.
- **Staff of employment related services**; for instance, job counsellors themselves often have erroneous perceptions about migrants, and do not appreciate that many are actually quite qualified or the need for distinctions of approach between low and high qualified migrants (i.e. different learning approaches, different job seeking strategies, etc.).

Grow buy in

The experiences of the different REALISE partners produced, among other things, insights of a more tactical bent – for instance, for getting support for migrant integration on the labour market, which is never easy and in the current climate is quite hard. One general principle that emerged, for overcoming this resistance, was that of generating '**buy in**'. The principle is general and thus vague, but looking at different approaches across the network threw out various ideas on how to do this, e.g.:

- Express the need for action or the action proposed in broader terms than 'helping migrants' – e.g. in terms of contributing to overcoming general problems of **concern to all**, or at least of concern to additional collectives (not least of all businesspeople), in terms of overcoming challenges for local development, and so on.
- Create tools and initiatives of use and benefit to *other* groups than qualified third country nationals – e.g. a skills validation tool that can be taken advantage of for other types of jobseekers.

Business and economic arguments

This is perhaps a more specific aspect of awareness raising. While pursuing the REALISE network's activities, it became clear that economic arguments and the business case (e.g. 'there is a need for a greater economic competitiveness, and thus an optimised use of human resources' 'international background people can be conducive to internationalisation of business activities') against accepting migrant overqualification – which underpin this project's whole rationale – still come as a **novelty** to a lot of European people.

The general public needs to be made aware of the relationship between putting qualified migrants to work and tackling issues like dependency ratios (i.e. paying for pensions and so forth).

Business needs to understand better how they can and why they should employ skilled immigrants in suitable work. Arguments need to be made more forcefully and clearly for openness and diversity as good things, as assets to successful business.

Entrepreneurship

There was great divergence across the REALISE network with regards to entrepreneurship and self-employment; in some places migrants were much **more** likely than natives to go into business, in others they were much **less** likely. Given how important entrepreneurship and self-employment are to European and national policies and objectives, to job creation, to economic growth and so forth – this erratic variance **needs to be properly understood**.

The explanations are likely to be illuminating, not only with regards to the employment of third country nationals, but also to more general issues of governance, strategy and economic dynamism.

Local approach

The employment and integration of a person happens where he/she is located, or it doesn't happen at all.

Specific labour markets are always local; national figures and descriptions are amalgamations (European ones all the more so), often unsuitable – for being too generic – for concrete action and guidance, delivered on the ground and aimed at specific individuals.

There is thus a clear need for understanding local needs, options and circumstances when implementing interventions and policies. Local and regional administrations, actors and stakeholders **must** be mobilised, and meaningfully involved in designing implementing and evaluating any initiatives seriously aiming to improve employment in Europe.

Stakeholders

While it has become something of a commonplace to say the right thing to do is to consult and work with stakeholders, the experience of REALISE has reinforced the practical truth of this. The most

innovative and effective actions involved a bracing range of contributors: volunteering stage performers and high level civil servants, television journalists, community leaders and role models, regular users of services and job seekers, business people and private sector professionals... and the list goes on.

These people had varied roles and participated in different ways and at different points in the project cycle.

It became clear from this experience that a key capacity for a project partner at the centre of this constellation of local stakeholders was the ability to manage and coordinate these participations and contributions. The person(s) doing this coordination had to be able to get and keep interest, understand motivations and integrate specific contributions and actions into an overall coherency.

Any other body or administration thinking of pursuing similar projects should understand, from the outset, the need to place someone with that sort of (generic?) skill set in the corresponding position.

Gender

Going forward, future policymaking and the design of interventions have to take into account the gender dimension of immigrant overqualification.

Gender consistently came up as a major issue and correlating factor vis-à-vis immigrant overqualification; quite simply women are more often overqualified across Europe. Likewise, gender ties in with differing requirements from support services and so on.

Recognition of qualifications

The ability to have one's formal qualifications (diplomas and the like) in a timely, accurate and affordable manner is a glaring problem; within the partnership, a migrant's chances of doing this seemed to go from **difficult to impossible**.

Moreover, there is the matter of recognising work experience and informally acquired skills that a migrant may have acquired in his/her past abroad.

This needs to be severely improved; it is a problem not just with employers and succeeding in selection procedures, but also with job centres and official labour market statistics, as in many cases if a migrant cannot validate his/her qualifications he is entered into the database or file as not having any.

As such, future policy and interventions need to address improving formal validation procedures, as well as providing more non-formal learning for migrants regarding how to effectively present and explain their skills and capacities (i.e. how to 'sell oneself' in the local environment).

Third country/non-third country migrants

While REALISE was specifically designed to address migrants from outside the EU, questions arose continually as to just how different the needs and circumstances are between EU migrants and third country nationals, or how greatly such needs really change when a third country national is naturalised a European citizen. Clearly, EU nationals have an entirely different situation in terms of legal issues, permits and residence requirements – which is no small distinction. However, in terms of support services provided and need for support, on the ground the distinction between the two groups often seemed abstract.

For instance, all other things being equal, a migrant from Bulgaria and one from the Ukraine, or their children, are likely to face similar challenges learning, say, French or Dutch. However, across Europe one often finds services being offered to one group to be distinct from those being offered to the other; at times no equivalent service is offered. Bizarrely, in some instances, being an EU national is a **barrier** to accessing such services and support.

While accepting there are indeed important differences of situation and opportunity arising from being from, or not from, the EU, the practical need for differentiation should be questioned constructively, and concerns for real utility should always take priority over any artificial categorisation.

If an administration cannot do this, then it has a governance problem that needs to be solved.

How immigration is viewed

Finally, when going through the literature and public documents related to the issue of overqualified migrants, it was with some concern that one continually finds the term 'host' – 'host society' 'host economy' etc. – being used, rather than say 'receiving'.

Such concern does not stem from a taste for pedantic word games. If we talk about 'hosts', by extension we are talking about immigrants as '**guests**', a term and conception deeply linked to mistaken migration policies and failed integration policies of the past; the dissatisfactory results of which we are still living with decades later. Wilfully repeating the self-evident mistakes of the past would seem ridiculous, though for all that it often happens.

Now, for a set of reasons discussed throughout this document (and for others left out), for any foreseeable future, **immigration into Europe is here to stay**.

If it is to be successfully managed, immigration must be recognised for what it is; **new people coming to a country**. Certainly, some will go back or move on elsewhere, but many will be staying. Anyone in doubt need only take a short walk through the streets of any number of Western European cities and towns to see that many of the previous 'guests' did in fact stay, and even had children.

If we are going to deal with migration better, It would probably be helpful if Europe were to discover the notion of '**new Europeans**' – i.e. 'new Germans' 'new Spanish' etc.

And act accordingly.

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