



ENHANCING INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

The European Intercultural Workplace



SMALL & MEDIUM SIZED ENTERPRISES

**A comparative investigation into workplace practices
in the SME sector across ten European countries**



Education and Culture

Leonardo da Vinci

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PREFACE

European workplaces are experiencing major transformation. Economic and political changes in Europe over recent decades have resulted in a vast increase in the cultural diversity of those living, working and being educated within its borders. The expansion of the EU coupled with labour shortages in many parts of the continent have brought about a steady increase in mobility both within and from outside the European Economic Area, a trend that is likely to continue and expand.

How similar are the challenges and opportunities of the intercultural workplace in different sectors and in different Member States? What pitfalls to be avoided and examples of good practice can be shared between EU countries? What are intercultural training needs and how best can they be addressed? These are some of the key questions that inspired the development of the European Intercultural Workplace (EIW) Project (2004-2007). Originated in Dublin City University, Ireland, and funded by a grant from the EU Leonardo da Vinci Programme, the EIW Project has been developed and expanded through a network of ten partners from all across Europe, north to south and west to east, from the earliest to the newest EU Member States, from countries with a long experience of integrating foreigners into the workforce to others for whom interculturalism is a wholly new phenomenon.

A core outcome of the EIW Project and a primary aim of this SME report is the establishment of an overview of sector-specific work practices across Europe based on national situational analyses and workplace case studies. In each partner country, research was conducted in a variety of workplaces across the private sector. The perspectives of managers, employees and customers/service users from both host and migrant communities were examined and compared. Subsequently, findings from the ten countries' EIW National Reports were drawn together to produce three trans-national comparative reports in the following key areas: Business and Economy (SMEs), Social Services (Healthcare) and Education and Training (focusing on formal education at primary, secondary and third level).

This SME report aims to provide information to help policy makers and practitioners identify intercultural training needs and good practice responses within Europe and to inform the production of effective intercultural training materials to a common European standard. To this end, the EIW Project has produced training materials (DVD & Manual) based on the results collated in this Sector-Specific Report and the ten individual EIW National Reports, to help management and employees develop more effectively the process of integration and intercultural harmony in the workplace.

This Report is by no means exhaustive; inevitably the editing process has meant leaving out some material which may be of use to prospective users. For more detailed information, and to find out more about our training materials, please visit the European Intercultural Workplace website (www.eiworkplace.net).

1. Introduction

This report deals with small and medium-size enterprises, referred to as SMEs. Together with Health and Education, these are distinct spheres in which the lives of immigrant workers and the host community intersect, and they are therefore important areas of enquiry for the study of the intercultural nature of the workplace.

The report deals specifically with a detailed analysis of small and medium-size enterprises in the private sector¹. The reason for focusing on these companies is that they are the most representative and identifiable type of enterprise within the private business sector. SMEs effectively constitute the backbone of business in many of the countries participating in the project and play a dominant role in absorbing immigrant workers into the host workforce.

Whereas multinationals took on the task of incorporating foreign workers into their organization some years ago and restructured accordingly, SMEs are only now having to deal consciously with this process.

It is also important to note that in SMEs, human capital, its knowledge and skills, acquired over time, are fundamental to their success and this knowledge is largely passed on by word of mouth. Immigrant workers are mainly employed in manufacturing, in construction or in supply chain services, and they contribute new knowledge to the organizations they work in.

Finally, because SMEs exist in primary, secondary, industrial and service¹ industry sectors, they provide the basis of 'cross-sectional comparison' for the analysis of the intercultural workplace.

Before explaining the objectives and method of analysis, it will be helpful to define the term SME.

1.1 Definition of an SME

The key criteria for identifying an SME are the number of employees and turnover. Even if the literature and researchers in the field within the individual countries do not always agree on the parameters for identifying SMEs, the main classification used by the European Union for Statistics and Community Policies for Aid to Community Countries refers to a maximum limit of 250 employees and a turnover of 50 million euros (or 43 million euros on the balance sheet). The table below (Table 1) details the classification of the size of micro, small and medium-size companies, as defined by the EU, according to the number of employees and the turnover or the balance sheet total (recommendation of the European Commission no. 2003/361/CE of May 6, 2003). We should qualify this by saying that in order for a company to be recognized as belonging to a certain type, it has to satisfy both requirements – employees and turnover or balance sheet total.

¹ The term 'private sector' usually refers to the economic activities developed on the initiative of individuals and private associations in sectors of the economy:

- primary (agriculture): the farming of natural products, the breeding of livestock and fish
- secondary (industry): the transformation of raw and semi-worked products into finished goods, using industrial or craftsman-like processes. There are various divisions within the sector (manufacturing industry, construction, chemical, pharmaceutical industries etc).
- tertiary (services): provision of services. Again there are various divisions (services to companies and individuals; transportation, commerce, communication, banks/insurance, training, entertainment, tourism etc).

TABLE 1 EU criteria for defining small and medium-size enterprises

	Employees	Turnover	or Balance sheet total
Micro enterprises	< 10	< 2 million euros	
Small enterprises	< 50	< 10 million euros	
Medium enterprises	< 250	< 50 million euros	< 43 million euros

1.2 Aim of the SME Report

The aim of this document is to provide a summary of intercultural practice in the private sector, and in particular in small and medium-size private enterprises, using a trans-national approach. This involves comparing the experiences of project partner countries, outlining possible similarities and differences, and highlighting operational features that will be helpful to immigrant workers, their colleagues, companies and institutions.

In particular, from an analysis of the development of intercultural awareness in the workplace it will be possible to:

- highlight good practice with regard to cultural diversity within the SMEs of the various countries by analysing the relevant country case studies.
- identify training needs to help immigrant workers integrate into the workplace.
- produce a series of final recommendations that can guide policy makers and practitioners in their work to create a harmonious intercultural workplace.
- promote a culture of understanding and integration of different cultures in the workplace.

The report focuses on the social behaviour of the institutions analysed in the country case studies rather than on their economic structure. It takes a pragmatic view of what actually happens in the workplace and recognises that in the absence of clear legislation or political or company guidelines, people working next to each other have to work out solutions to problems as they arise. Integration comes from the capacity and willingness of the people involved to deal with the practical problems that arise every day in the workplace.

1.3 Methodology

The methodological approach used the analysis and comparison of the various case studies presented in the National Reports (wp4) from the countries participating in the project. These are not exhaustive surveys of the situation in each participant country but broadly represent the current development of the intercultural workplace. The SME report should be seen as a second level analysis of this material, drawing out common themes.

Table 2 below summarises the case studies examined in this document, divided by nation and sector of reference.

TABLE 2 Case studies examined

Nation	Sector	Division	Case study
Bulgaria	Private - industry	Construction	Construction sites as intercultural workplaces
Bulgaria	Private - services	Tourism	Hotels, hotel bars and restaurants as intercultural workplaces
Bulgaria	Private - services	Transportation	The transportation sector as intercultural workplace
Finland	Private - industry	Manufacturing	Manufacturing
Germany	Private - services	Tourism	Hotel and restaurant industry
Germany	Private - services	Training provider	Vocational training in media and IT professions
Germany	Private - services	Training provider	Vocational training in office administration
Greece	Private - industry	Construction	Building company
Greece	Private - industry	Construction	Building company
Greece	Private - services	Retail trade	Chinese clothes shop
Ireland	Private - industry	Construction	Construction site
Italy	Private - industry	Manufacturing	Small, family-run manufacturing firm
Norway	Private - industry	Construction	Construction and Building Workers Union in Oslo
Norway	Private - industry	Manufacturing	Wine and liquor manufacturing company
Sweden	Private - services	Retail trade	Retail
UK	Private - services	Catering	Café, branch of a chain

All the nations participating in the project are represented. The case studies involved the secondary sectors (8 out of 16) and the service industry (the remaining 8 cases), reflecting the importance of these sectors in the various countries investigated. Information is also included from the Polish EIW Situational Analysis Report although no case study was carried out.

1.4 Structure of the SME Report

The report has been organised with the objective of answering the following questions:

Chapter 2 Background

What is the background of the various countries in relation to cultural integration at work?

Chapter 3 Legislation

What special regulations and legislation, if any, guide practice in the intercultural workplace?

Chapter 4 Accreditation of Qualifications

Do countries have systems for the accreditation of the qualifications attained by foreign workers in other countries?

Chapter 5 Key issues/Challenges

What aspects of intercultural diversity are considered most likely to cause misunderstanding?

Chapter 6 Good Practice

What examples of good practice regarding cultural diversity have been developed in the workplace?

Chapter 7 Training Needs

How can the intercultural skills of the workforce be further developed and what are the training needs, both for the workforce and management?

Chapter 8 Conclusions and Recommendations

What conclusions can we draw from the report about best practice in the intercultural workplace and what recommendations can be made as a result?

2. Background

Restructuring of the private sector, both in industrial and post-industrial economies, has now been achieved in Western Europe. In recent years there has been growth in the service sectors to the detriment of the industrial sectors. Western Europe has relatively low unemployment levels and can attract workers from other countries.

The story is slightly different for the two countries of Eastern Europe participating in the project. **Bulgaria** and **Poland** has only recently made the transition to a market economy, with corresponding growth in the private sector. These countries have high levels of unemployment in the primary and secondary sector.

In the environments discussed in the case studies, the presence of immigrants in companies is very common. Immigrants with solid educational and professional skills in their country of origin are often employed as manual skills workers or workers with clerical duties. They are mainly employed in the secondary sector in manufacturing or construction or in the tertiary sector in tourism, (hotels and restaurants) or retail. Unemployment is a widespread phenomenon among immigrants.

There are also a number of business initiatives started directly by foreign nationals, usually in the retail and restaurant sectors.

A more detailed description of the role of immigrants in the private sector in countries participating in the project follows.

Immigration in **Bulgaria** is varied. There are some communities, like the Chinese community, that are quite homogeneous and which seem to have integrated well, while there are other quite heterogeneous ones, such as the Arab community. The private sector seems to be the one most affected by an increase in cultural diversity. Most Chinese immigrants do not have high levels of education, while Africans do, and the latter work as engineers, doctors, etc. Chinese and Arab immigrants can be found working in restaurants and in the retail industry. There is only partial acceptance of indigenous minorities such as the Roma.

In **Germany** the situation varies within the different Federal States. The research, carried out in the Federal State of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, highlights high levels of unemployment among immigrants in that area. Some sectors, such as catering, represent viable alternative employment opportunities for immigrants since they do not require high levels of education. Also, since the pay is low and the working hours unattractive, native workers are less likely to work in this sector. Another element that contributes to the growing number of those employed in restaurants is the fact that many of these firms are run by foreigners, and if the restaurant offers a particular type of cooking then at least the chef has to come from that country. In some sectors, such as the restaurant business, intercultural communication is now a natural part of the workplace, and in recent years specific knowledge of the business and the culture and a good command of the language has been required. Also, other sectors, such as IT and the media, are becoming more internationalised. Cooperation between mixed work groups is required, and quite often, clients are also foreigners. Due to the general market situation of the country, SMEs have to look for markets abroad more than in recent years (The relevance of Baltic markets is increasing, for example). Intercultural and foreign language competencies represent new factors of competitiveness for local SMEs.

Most of the immigrants who live and work in **Greece** are described as unskilled, and are often employed in the manufacturing sector (light industry, such as clothing), construction, tourism (hotels and restaurants), and also in agriculture and domestic work.

Ireland has also seen significant changes in recent decades, with a transition from a mainly agricultural economy to one with rapidly growing secondary and service sectors, and, since the accession of ten new countries into the EU in May 2004, a transition from a basically homogeneous society to a country with markedly increased levels of immigration. Unlike other nations, Ireland's new immigrants are usually skilled workers with high levels of education, who often, because of language difficulties, end up working as labourers in the construction industry, for example. Small businesses account for almost 82% of all industrial enterprises in Ireland; the majority of these are Irish-owned (95%, against 40% of larger firms). In the service industry almost all enterprises are small (98%), accounting for more than 50% of the total employment and turnover in this sector. While tourism employs the highest percentage of non-Irish nationals, the construction industry is the largest overall employer in Ireland. Small firms employ 75% of all those working in the construction industry. Across all sectors, small businesses account for over 60% of the work force and of this number, 18% are non-Irish nationals. More than half (55%) of all non-Irish nationals work in small enterprises. Of those, 26% are in highly skilled non-manual occupations while over half (56%) are employed in low-skilled occupations. Of the overall labour force, one in eight is a non-Irish national.²

Immigration is now a structural component in the **Italian** manufacturing industry. As well as immigrant workers the number of companies managed directly by foreigners is growing. A variety of socio-economic variables influence the lives of foreigners living in the country. These variables include the role of small and medium-size enterprise and business systems,

² 'Small Business in Ireland', Central Statistics Office, May 2007. Available at: http://www.cso.ie/releasespublications/documents/other_releases/smallbusiness.pdf. See also the 2006 Census of Population. Highlights available at: <http://www.cso.ie/census/census2006results/PSER/Principal%20Socio-Economic%20Results%20Press%20Statement.pdf>

the concentration on traditional light industrial manufacturing, specific local and regional cultural characteristics, the widespread use of dialects, the role of trade unions and the Catholic Church, and the role of the state and welfare policies. Recently some Italian companies have been moving their operations overseas, where immigrant workers have also been used.

During the last 40 years **Norway** has been affected by huge waves of immigration from non-EU countries, so much so that today 8% of the population have both parents who are immigrants. Recent data shows that many immigrants and refugees are employed as unskilled workers and that discrimination by employers is not only due to a lack of skills but also to poor language skills and the lack of the professional competency required by many jobs.

In **Poland** the transition to a market economy has seen private initiatives flourish, and today 99.87% of private initiatives are small and medium-size enterprises. There are quite high levels of unemployment, both for native Poles as well as immigrants. Foreign workers are mainly employed in the agricultural and construction sectors.

In **Sweden** the private sector is mainly composed of small and medium-size companies (92% of companies employ less than 50 people), operating in 6 cases out of 10 in the service sector. The private sector in recent years has seen a rise in ethnic diversity. On a business level, 12% of company owners have foreign origins, and they are primarily concentrated in the retail and communications sectors. Levels of unemployment are higher for immigrants than for Swedish nationals, at each level of education. The sectors in which immigrants usually find work are generally heavy industry, restaurants and hotel work, cleaning and maintenance services.

The UK is traditionally a country that has welcomed immigrants. Ten percent of the workforce in this country are foreign workers coming from a multiplicity of countries and with different cultural practices. In some cases, especially in larger companies that were not specifically the subject of our analysis, policies have been implemented to deal with the subject of intercultural communication in the workplace and many companies have benefited from applying such initiatives. Such policies need broader diffusion, as well as a greater effort to communicate them effectively. Employment rates among immigrants are relatively low. Many immigrants have difficulty achieving managerial or professional status, although in recent years the situation has improved slightly. Immigrants consistently receive less pay than their British counterparts.

3. Legislation

The national case studies show there are two approaches to establishing and implementing diversity law and rules of behaviour in the workplace in participant countries. We describe these as 'top down' and 'bottom up'. In the top down approach, integration is guided and supported by legislation. Examples of legislative measures follow below. However, the survey suggests that the bottom up approach, in other words, local initiatives to achieve intercultural communication by putting in place rules and practices in the workplace, is the most common. The 'top down' approach, the application of national and European legislation in the workplace, is much less evident.

In the **UK**, The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) was set up in 1976. The CRE has a statutory code of practice on racial equality in employment. It outlines employers' legal obligations under the Race Relations Act of 1976 and contains general advice on the policies they will need to safeguard against discrimination and harassment, as well as more

detailed recommendations on the procedures and practice that will help ensure fair and equal treatment for everyone.

The CRE conducts general investigations to establish whether discrimination is occurring in a particular sector or area of work, such as the accountancy profession. If the CRE suspects that a particular company or organization is discriminating on racial grounds, it can embark on a formal investigation. The CRE can:

- order respondents to produce documents and give evidence
- issue a non-discrimination notice to the respondents, requiring them to take specified action to prevent any further discrimination
- enforce compliance with the terms of a non-discrimination notice
- make recommendations to any relevant individuals or bodies
- produce and, if appropriate, publish a report of the investigation.

In **Bulgaria**, there are policies and legal measures for the workplace aimed at integrating groups of disadvantaged workers and reducing unemployment levels (see the Jobs Project, a model for the creation of new jobs through the support of micro and small enterprises).

In **Ireland**, the environment for foreign companies setting up in Ireland is generally favourable, with special grants and tax benefits available to companies that fulfill the requirements. All employers must comply with the requirements of the Employment Equality Acts (1998 & 2004) and Equal Status Acts (2000 & 2004).³ Ireland was one of the few countries to develop a National Action Plan Against Racism (2005-2008)⁴, which originated from a commitment at the World Conference against Racism in 2001. The plan's overall aim is to provide strategic direction to combat racism and develop a more inclusive, intercultural society in Ireland, based on policies that promote interaction, equality of opportunity, understanding and respect. In the fight against racism, Ireland is regarded by the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination as a 'pioneer and example of good practice'.⁵ According to the European Centre on Monitoring on Racism and Xenophobia (now the EU Fundamental Rights Agency), Ireland is one of the top six countries in the EU in terms of its equality infrastructure, systems and processes in this area. There is no legislation specifically designed for SMEs; instead they must comply with the same legislative requirements as all the larger firms. The smaller companies can often find the administrative burden of trying to meet regulatory requirements (which are often not relevant to their core activities) both uncompetitive and costly. Several entities, such as the Irish Small & Medium Enterprises Association (ISME)⁶ and the Small Firms Association (SFA)⁷, offer SMEs a range of advisory, training and development services, while Fás, Ireland's National Training and Employment Authority⁸, offers advice and training to both employers and jobseekers. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland has developed an

³ <http://www.equality.ie>

⁴ <http://www.diversityireland.ie/Publications/Publications/NPAR.html>

⁵ http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/ecri/1-ECRI/2-Country-by-country_approach/Ireland/Ireland_CBC_3.asp#TopOfPage

⁶ <http://www.isme.ie/index.html>

⁷ <http://www.sfa.ie/>

⁸ <http://www.fas.ie/en/>

Irish National Framework of Qualifications and offers a free service for the recognition of international qualifications (not including translation of documents).⁹

In **Poland**, under Polish law, foreign companies have equal rights with Polish companies to conduct business in Poland, provided a reciprocal agreement is in place. Where no such agreement exists foreign companies can only operate as a limited partnership, limited liability or joint stock company. A number of foreign-owned companies run by immigrants have established themselves in Poland by this means. The most popular form of foreign business for SME's in Poland is the civil partnership. This applies to companies with net sales of under EUR 400,000 in two consecutive financial years.

In 2000 the Polish government put forward the 'National Strategy of Employment Growth and Human Resources Development', a policy document based on European Employment Methodology guidelines. This policy document is still in force but quickly lost its effectiveness for a number of reasons, one of which was the limits to growth of small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) due to higher taxation.

In **Sweden** there is no specific legislation regarding the integration of immigrants in SMEs but the anti-discriminatory legislation applies to all public and private companies.

4. Accreditation of Qualifications

Recognition of the qualifications gained by immigrants in their own country is something that was not specifically investigated in the national investigations.

However, a common phenomenon in all countries surveyed was immigrants with medium to high levels of education (technical diplomas or degrees obtained in their own countries) employed in positions that did not require any special technical skills or knowledge.

Immigrants also face problems in obtaining certificates demonstrating the equivalent qualification in the destination country. This is particularly the case in countries like **Bulgaria** and **Norway**. On the other hand, in countries such as **Sweden**, employment agencies offer unemployed immigrants the opportunity of validating their foreign diplomas.

5. Key Issues/Challenges

This chapter focuses on factors influencing relationships in the workplace between people of different cultural backgrounds. It is clear that national differences provide many challenges to intercultural cooperation. The key factors we will examine are:

- intercultural communication: language, non-verbal communication, and the communication styles used by workers from different cultural backgrounds;
- the influence of cultural values and practices: the perception of time, the role of religion, customs regarding food, and the role of the community;
- relationships in the workplace between colleagues;
- discriminatory behaviour.

⁹ http://www.qualificationsrecognition.ie/recognition/rec_foreign_qual/index.html

5.1 Intercultural communication

5.1.1 Language

Language is the key influence on successful intercultural integration in the workplace. *"The worst cultural issue is language. It creates tension because we can't understand them,"* said an Irish manager in the construction industry. Poor command of the host country language, normally used to develop relationships in the workplace and normal social relationships, is the first element that isolates and excludes a foreigner.

Language is the main element to be taken into consideration when dealing with cultural integration, having a strong influence especially on:

- the selection of foreign workers.
- relationships, possible misunderstandings and conflict between different cultures in
- the workplace (with colleagues, managers, foreign suppliers and clients).
- relationships outside the workplace in general, with public administrations and other institutions.

National case studies showed that in many cases immigrants come to a country without knowing the host language and as a result are unable to communicate adequately in the workplace with employers, superiors or colleagues, or to cope with the bureaucratic procedures demanded by institutions such as the social services, health services, schools, etc. The point also needs to be made that a knowledge of languages is becoming increasingly important since enterprises, and SMEs particularly, are dealing more and more frequently with foreign suppliers and clients.

What clearly emerges is how an adequate understanding and command of the host language represents one of the main criteria for **selecting foreign workers** in some sectors, for example the construction industry. A **Greek** manager is quoted as saying, *"We prefer the collaboration with Greeks. The foreigners do not know many times the language well and it is difficult to collaborate with them."* Employers may be reluctant to hire a foreigner when it is obvious there will be communication problems because of the poor command of the language. All things being equal, it is clear that a person capable of understanding the tasks that need to be done, and who knows how to express him/herself in an appropriate way linguistically is preferable to one who does not. A **Norwegian** in the construction industry said, *"The employees do not take responsibility, and less than in other sectors in Norway. They cannot employ them because they do not understand Norwegian."* He continued, *"Some of the employees with ethnic minority backgrounds have problems expressing themselves."*

The language skills of an immigrant are important not just in looking for work but also **in the workplace** itself. Poor linguistic skills cause misunderstandings. As a **Greek** manager in the construction industry observed, "Language is a very important problem. If your co-worker does not understand well what you ask him there will be errors that cost money and time. When we speak for a construction of a building, there are no margins for errors. All must happen accordingly with the rules and the requirements of the customers." He added, "You are never absolutely sure that they understand. On the other hand, to understand them you have to repeat things twice!" In the **UK** case study, the majority of workers felt that language barriers were one of the main disadvantages of a culturally diverse workplace as they felt that communication within the organization was somewhat impeded.

The fact that an immigrant does not understand what is said to him/her may lead colleagues to mistakenly assume that he/she is not very intelligent. They take it for granted that

foreigners at work understand what is being said to them in the host country's mother tongue, no matter how extreme the speaker's accent.

In some cases, language skills are so poor that an interpreter is needed in the workplace, usually a fellow co-national who has been in the country for some time. This allows instructions about the job to be given, as in the case of the **Norwegian** and **Irish** construction industry, but it inevitably lengthens the communication. As one **Irish** manager said, "It takes longer and I don't know if I get my message across. You have to trust the translator, but you never know if you are understood."

However, asking one employee to translate for another can raise awareness of cultural differences, as another **Irish** manager found out: "I asked a Russian to interpret for another East European. He was offended and told me it was the same as calling an Irishman an Englishman. We tend to see them as all the same. They are proud of their identities."

Sometimes immigrants try to overcome their poor host country language skills by using a third language. This can cause further confusion for the people they are speaking to. Where the host country language is not the common language, one solution is to agree on a common lingua franca. English often fulfils this role, as happened in the construction industry case study in **Norway**.

The situation becomes more complicated when there are groups of immigrants in the workplace who come from the same country. In this case, the immigrants use their native language to communicate with each other and this makes it easier to understand what needs to be done in terms of work. An immigrant worker in **Greece** said, "*Many times I do not understand precisely what they say, but I don't show it. I prefer not to show my ignorance. It is always easier when I work with somebody of my country. He explains to me what they say.*" On the other hand, it makes it impossible for the other workers to understand what is being said, thereby creating a climate of suspicion and mistrust between colleagues. It is impossible to know if work instructions are being translated for those whose command of the language is poor or whether mistakes are being covered up, or something bad is being said about someone. A **Greek** employer summed it up like this, "*They speak their language. That constitutes a problem because you do not understand if they want to cover an error or to hide something. And the other workers resent it and a climate of mistrust is established.*"

Another problem is that **some languages have different forms**, used in different social and work environments. This may make it more difficult for the immigrant to learn the host country language and it could lead to misunderstandings when language is used in the wrong situation.

Usually we find one style of language used for informal communication in the workplace, a technical or professional language used in the particular industry, and then another more formal language used, for example, in written communication and with bureaucracy.

Informal language is often influenced by dialects and local accents. The analyses of intercultural communication within SMEs show, for example, how in workplaces in **Italy, Greece, Bulgaria** and **Norway**, many workers speak in a dialect or with local accents, making the task of learning the host language more difficult. As one immigrant in **Norway** put it, "*Some ethnic Norwegians are using a dialect which is difficult to understand.*" This means that the language learnt in the workplace, influenced by accents and expressions in dialects that are typical of that particular area, can only be used by foreigners in informal contexts outside the workplace, since it would be unwise to use this type of language in banks, government offices etc.

Speaking with a **foreign accent** can also cause problems. Immigrants surveyed felt this was completely normal and almost impossible to change. For **Greeks** and **Swedes**, listening to immigrants speaking with a foreign accent was not a problem, but foreign visitors to **Bulgaria** complained about immigrants' accents, as well as about tour operators' poor command of foreign languages.

Technical jargon also causes problems for immigrants. A failure to understand and use technical jargon might be a reason for failing to get a job, or, once employed, for misunderstandings in the workplace. In particular, immigrants surveyed said the lack of understanding of technical jargon made it difficult to express themselves appropriately and effectively in the workplace.

In some sectors, such as construction, failure to understand the language meant that procedures were not fully understood and safety regulations were not observed. This is hazardous when machinery has to be used correctly in order to prevent accidents, as emerged clearly in the analysis of the construction industry in **Norway**.

Finally, understanding of the language, especially the formal language of the host country allows foreign workers greater independence in their **relations with government offices and other institutions** (banks, insurance companies etc). In Sweden the government is offering advanced courses in written and formal presentation skills in the Swedish language for foreigners who speak it well (often by using it in their job and through contact with the public)

5.1.2 Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication, composed of gestures and expressions, is seen as a way of overcoming communication problems in **Italy, Norway** and **Greece**. However, the same gesture or expression could be perceived differently by workers from different cultures.

Moreover, the use of gestures by foreigners can have different effects depending on how accustomed people are to it and the general environment in which the communication is taking place. Cultures such as **Mediterranean countries** are more predisposed to the use of gestures than, for example, **Nordic countries**. The national analyses showed how, for example, the **Greeks**, and to some extent all Mediterranean peoples, are very expressive and use body language a lot, appreciating and understanding its use by foreigners. On the other hand, in other contexts, excessive use of gestures may produce the opposite effect to what is desired. Although non-verbal communication can work in interaction between two people, it can become complicated when more people are involved.

Other communication factors may influence the interaction, such as conversational overlap, i.e. the degree to which members of a community are used to interrupting each other and accepting interruption.

5.1.3 Communication styles

In addition to language and non-verbal communication, another issue causing misunderstanding is communication style.

In most of the national case studies, **speaking directly** is appreciated. In the **Swedish** case study, for example, a direct style of communication was preferred at all levels, in discussion about jobs to be done, about holidays, and about pay. A direct attitude was also used in relating to people outside the workplace, and if necessary with employees or customers perceived as annoying. Nevertheless, it was clear that even if the style of communication between colleagues was for the most part direct, language comprehension problems

remained. In other cases, however, it emerged that direct language could cause problems. This was the case with **Bulgaria**.

Humour is also a factor to be taken into consideration when analysing intercultural communication in the workplace. It emerged that in many intercultural settings the use of humour between colleagues was reduced, out of fear of hurting the feelings of colleagues from a different culture, even accidentally. A case in point is the construction industry in **Ireland** and the transportation sector in **Bulgaria**. As one manager put it, *“You have to be more careful about what you say – more conscious of political correctness. You joke less because foreigners don’t understand the sense of humour.”*

Workers from different cultures may not understand their colleagues’ humour. For example, in the case of the **Greek** construction industry, foreign workers were not particularly responsive to the humour of their Greek colleagues and they received the same reaction when they tried to be humorous in their turn.

Expressing one’s opinions and feelings openly appears to be a problem in some places. For example, in the **Greek** construction industry, foreign workers, mostly Albanians and Russians, had serious difficulties in freely expressing their opinions. In many cases they preferred to take a neutral position and not disclose their real opinions in order to avoid arguments. One worker explained, *“I do not want give motives. I want to do my work and to leave. Many times others seek reasons to quarrel with you, but I do not want to give them this reason.”* Problems of expression in this case were not due to the immigrant’s poor language skills, but to the fear of being judged for the opinions he expressed.

In other cultures, such as **Sweden**, being able to express one’s opinions frankly is a basic right, considered an integral part of a society that is open to interaction with other cultures.

Freedom to express one’s feelings is important but equally important is learning the appropriate way of expressing them. As one survey participant said, *“The **Greeks** are always more spontaneous and on the other hand they are always ready to misinterpret. We must be careful how we speak and often we ignore certain comments or behaviour.”*

Another aspect of difference in communication style between different cultures is that of **politeness**. On the whole, issues of politeness and impoliteness, especially in relation to hierarchy and authority, were not felt to be an issue in SMEs. This may be due to the character of SMEs, perceived as being more flexible and less hierarchical than larger firms or government agencies. In the **UK** catering case study, concepts of politeness were similar across the group with regard to formality, e.g. terms of address, and the understanding of what constitutes polite behaviour.

In general, however, immigrants experienced difficulty in recognising the right way to behave with regard to, for example, polite forms of address, conversation overlap, physical closeness while speaking and tone of voice (loud or soft). This was particularly the case in the retail, catering and service industries, such as the **Greek** clothes shop or the **Bulgarian** tourist industry.

5.2 Cultural values and practices

5.2.1 Time

Attitudes to timekeeping are a contentious aspect of intercultural communication.

Some believe that the perception of time and its management varies from person to person, and that different behaviours cannot be directly reduced to cultural differences between

people. For others, however, cultural differences do influence timekeeping and notions of punctuality.

Timekeeping was not considered an issue in the handling of intercultural relations in the **Norwegian, Greek** and **UK** case studies. In the **Greek** construction industry case study, workers were paid by the hour. It seems that there was a widespread practice of prolonging the time it took to do the job so as to earn more money, but it was not stated whether this was common to all workers or just immigrants. This practice increases costs for companies, and increases conflict in the workplace. However, punctuality and attitudes to time are considered more personal than cultural.

In **Germany** and **Italy**, however, time seems to be a crucial factor and is influenced by cultural differences between people. The difficulty encountered by some **Italian** firms was related to the scheduling of holidays and shifts, since for some immigrants these were not perceived as rigid.

5.2.2. Religion, food and eating habits

Different religions and religious practices can create difficult situations not only between immigrants and their colleagues but also between immigrants and employers, because they clash with companies' productivity and performance objectives. The most important example is the period of Ramadan for Muslims. In some countries workers and employers object to different things. In the construction industry in **Norway**, for example, there seemed to be a poor level of acceptance of other religions or cultural behaviours at work but no particular resistance to the wearing of religious clothing, and even the canteens modified their menus to try to meet the dietary requirements of the various religious groups. As the case study stated, "*Wearing religious dress is no problem, and one worker used a veil, but this is no problem. The cultural dietary provisions at the workplace are fine and the canteen personnel give information and write down the ingredient in various dishes.*"

In the **UK** restaurant case study, workers identified issues concerning religion, food and dress. The majority of workers thought that there was a problem regarding the degree of respect that colleagues had for the observance of others' religious practices. There was also some discord as to how dietary requirements were met by the employer for employees, although most of the workforce seemed to be content with their employers' and colleagues' tolerance of different dress codes such as the wearing of the veil and turban.

In **Ireland** it was noted that international workers preferred to eat their own food, which led to criticism by the Irish workers. As one Irish worker surveyed said, "*They bring stuff in and microwave it or take it out of a jar... They have their own foods and the smell turns me off.*" At mealtimes Irish and international workers tended to sit in their own cultural groups in the canteen. This was interpreted by the Irish workers as mainly due to English language difficulties and also to lack of common topics of interest to talk about over lunch.

These factors affected relationships between colleagues within the company and could be the cause of tensions between workers and management, affecting not only the quality of the work, but also the general working atmosphere. Mealtimes provided an opportunity for workers to socialise and develop relationships with each other which was not exploited by workers or management. A large number of managers did not see this self-segregation as a problem and felt anyway that there was nothing that could be done about it. As one Irish manager put it, "*It is in the nature of people to stick to their groups*".

The survey also found that in **Italian** companies the measures taken to promote respect and tolerance towards religion and other cultural differences in the workplace were minimal and extremely informal.

5.2.3. Role of the community

In many cases belonging to a community of immigrants plays a very important part in the support of the individual.

A good example of this is the case of the Chinese clothes shop in **Greece**. The Chinese community is very well organised, since it provides 'initial training' for the new immigrant regarding bureaucratic procedures, rights and duties, and is the organization through which the immigrant can find accommodation and work, and acquire a better understanding of Greek society.

5.3 Relationships with colleagues

Relationships with colleagues can be influenced by cultural diversity with regard to the role of women, personal habits etc.

In some of the case studies, it appeared that **gender** did not lead to discrimination, since people were valued for their skills and performance regardless of their culture or ethnic origins. This is clearly stated in the case of the **Italian** manufacturing industry. As one female worker said, *"I have always been esteemed and listened to since I joined the company, because of my technical background and specific experience."* However, In the UK catering case study, taking and giving orders between genders was seen to create difficulties.

It is clear from the case studies that **conflicts in the workplace between different levels in the hierarchy** are considered normal. Nevertheless, the presence of diverse cultures is sometimes observed to cause an increase in conflicts between workers and superiors. Differences, therefore, are often not perceived as beneficial factors for the company, but as a cause of friction. In the **UK** case study, there was considerable difference of opinion regarding how much respect should be accorded to superiors. However, overall, it emerged from the case studies that the conflicts reported were mainly between fellow workers, and not normally with superiors or customers.

Only in the case of the **Norwegian** construction industry were there no specific problems reported between fellow workers, subordinates or superiors, while in other contexts, such as that of the construction industry in **Greece**, it emerged that conflicting relations often arose between different groups, especially in relation to the language barriers that were present. Usually in these cases the supervisor played the role of a mediator, in that he/she tried to solve problems and convey information correctly.

In some environments, such as the construction industry in **Greece**, a degree of mistrust by local workers of immigrants was noted. As one foreign worker put it, "It is very difficult to work with other persons, when you are a foreigner. They all believe that they know better than you and they tell you constantly how to do the work". Immigrants, therefore, start from a 'natural' position of being mistrusted. They have to win trust 'in the field', by demonstrating their skills.

Team work, which involves employees from different cultures working together, is expressly reported as a problem in some cases, such as in the construction industry in **Greece**. In other contexts, however, such as the retail business in **Sweden**, team work and workplace harmony is consciously pursued. In the **UK** catering business, team work did not present a challenge.

Work ethics among workers can differ significantly. **Irish** managers for example viewed immigrants as more respectful of hierarchy and more disciplined than Irish workers. An Irish Health and Safety manager pointed out, *"I told them they had to have a Safe-pass. 11 out of 12 had it. One was very apologetic that he hadn't got it. They are respectful to the roles and*

what you ask. ...International people tend to be more compliant with rules and regulations. Foreigners will work without having to be told. ...They just do what they're told immediately. It makes my job much easier."

The **Swedish** and **Italian** case studies presented noted that the emphasis on the relationships between fellow workers was often on the communication of **precise work instructions** for jobs to be carried out rather than on the development of a good relationship between the parties. The first leads to the successful execution of the task. The second leads additionally to a sharing of methods, behaviours, values and customs that can be of use to the immigrant both in the workplace as well as in social relationships. The challenge is to find a balance between the successful completion of a task and the development of deeper relationships.

In some cases, such as the initial training of foreign workers in **Italy**, the assimilation of the work skills and habits of a highly skilled worker was reasonably straightforward. However, **genuine integration** was more difficult. This was confirmed by the **Norwegian** construction industry case study where integration of ethnic minorities was seen as important, but in many cases the desired integration was mostly identified as assimilation into the culture of the host country. Typical statements by host country workers and managers were, *"They have to learn how to behave like us, speak Norwegian fluently, accept that this is how we do it here."* For example, **Norwegian** training courses were organised with the aim of inducting immigrants into Norwegian culture, while there was no similar openness to the cultures of the immigrants.

In some cases, specific difficulties emerged in adapting the **style of management** to the workers the manager had to deal with. As a manager in the **Irish** construction industry said, *"Russians are used to doing what they are told. But the Irish will fight and hide around. I have had to become cute to get them to do things they don't want to do."*

Finally, it should be noted that **relationships in the workplace develop mainly within the same ethnic group**, as for example in the **Greek** construction industry. In many workplaces there is no real mix of cultures. In **Norway**, as another example, relationships tended to be developed within the ethnic group, and it was difficult to find examples of relationships between different ethnic groups, with cultural exchanges and an appreciation of diversity.

Breaks at work and meeting in the canteen could offer opportunities for socialising, but in some cases, such as in the **Irish** construction sector, there was a clear separation between groups of workers. In some cases, the differences between the groups even translated into different times for using the canteen, and in some cases not using the canteen at all but bringing packed lunches from home.

However, one exception to the above is the experience of workers in the **UK** catering case study, where the majority of workers interacted with colleagues from different ethnic groups, believing that an ethnically and linguistically diverse workplace improved communication, social atmosphere, customer relations, creativity and ability to respond to new challenges.

Relationships between fellow workers outside working hours are not common, since, in their time off, immigrants usually spend time with their own community, a custom which is sometimes viewed by host country workers as a way of cutting off from the host country. This can create further mistrust between cultures. As one host country worker said, *"They are all related, so they tend to stick together and won't integrate. They have each other and bring their own supplies."* This feature is common to a number of the countries analysed, such as **Italy, Norway, Ireland** and **Greece**, the exception being the **UK** catering workers, who socialised with fellow workers outside working hours.

5.4 Discrimination

Another feature examined was the presence of different forms of discrimination in the workplace. This is a very sensitive subject but the three forms of discrimination towards immigrant workers that emerged from the surveys were lack of opportunities for promotion, pay disparity and racist comments.

One common complaint of immigrants was the **lack of opportunities for promotion**. In **Norway**, for example, many immigrant workers, despite their professional skills and qualifications, started out as unskilled workers. Their situation did not change over time, and they had little possibility of using their skills or being promoted. Employers claimed that this was because of poor language and communication skills. Similarly, foreign workers in the construction industry in **Greece** complained about the impossibility of creating a better future because they could not set up their own business due to Greeks already working in the sector. One worker put it like this: *"As long as we work for them they accept us. Think however if we took their jobs from them! They will not allow this, but also the customers will not prefer us."*

There is also another phenomenon, which the **German** case study noted. If immigrant communities were large, service companies with foreign customers or suppliers tended to employ people of the same ethnic origin as their customers or suppliers. They found that sharing a common language, behaviour pattern and interests eased access to the client.

Another problem highlighted was **pay disparity**. Immigrant workers in construction companies in **Greece** complained that they could not explain why they were paid less than their Greek colleagues for doing the same work, unless it was due to discrimination on the part of the employer. Even though they were aware of these injustices, they agreed to work under these conditions. As one worker put it, *"When you need to work and you are a foreigner, you compromise. You see that there are iniquities, but what to do? You do not have many work opportunities in order to choose."* Another worker pointed out the disparity in pay between **Irish** and foreign workers but felt it was unimportant in relation to the difference in wages between the home country and Ireland. *"We expected to get less pay. It's such a jump in salary for us."*

Racist comments made by fellow workers or customers were also reported in some cases. In the case of the **Greek** construction industry, interviewees admitted that negative comments or jokes about immigrants concerning their origins or culture were made on a daily basis. One example was, *"Certain workers do not like Albanians at all. They can work together and you hear them calling them 'Albanian' and not by their name!"* The **Bulgarian** transportation case study also reported this. It should be pointed out, however, that these incidents occurred between people of different cultures who had not been working together long and who knew each other only superficially. It is also important to note that such incidents were not tolerated by management. The **Bulgarian** case studies showed that some workers tended to create negative stereotypes of immigrants in order to promote a feeling of superiority towards them. It should be noted that no racist comments were reported in the service sector case studies in **Greece** or the construction industry in **Ireland**.

The **attitude of management** towards racist incidents varied from a zero tolerance attitude in the case of **Norway**, **Sweden** and **Ireland**, to a softer, more moderated approach. A foreign worker gave an example of the zero tolerance approach. *"There is no tolerance for racism. Some defamatory paintings that were painted on the walls had not been tolerated and these things were stopped at once and letters of protest given to all employees."* The softer approach recognised racism as *'a normal characteristic of the sector'*. This is a very dangerous attitude since it tends to justify unacceptable behaviour.

In the case of **Ireland**, the introduction of specific **legislation** on discrimination, with the identification of new areas of application and their implications, has led companies to be more aware of discrimination, even if there is still little familiarity with the detail of such regulations. However, both Irish managers and employees mentioned in one of the surveys that there was no company policy for dealing with racism and discrimination on-site. Cases were all dealt with on an individual basis, with managers' actions being influenced by *"experience and common sense. No real plan or document."* Managers received no training on how to deal with racist incidents, and were generally unaware of the nine grounds of discrimination outlined in the current Irish Equality legislation. Irish employees were sceptical about managers' ability to manage racial conflicts and other incidents due to their lack of training. As one said, *"They've no experience whatsoever. I've never heard of anyone going through a programme for racism anyway."*

In the **UK** catering establishment, the majority of the workers were unaware that their company had an ethnic diversity policy. While 75% felt that they had not experienced any kind of discrimination or racism at work, the remaining 25% stated that it was difficult say whether or not this was true.

Meeting the requirements of legislation is a challenge for SMEs. A lot of time and resources in small SMEs is taken up with compliance with regulations in areas that are not particularly relevant to them, and this affects their profits. As the case study noted, *"While regulatory requirements can be absorbed by larger companies, many smaller firms are being pushed to the limit in an effort to meet criteria which, much of the time, are not relevant to their core activities."*

In some cases the perception of discriminatory behaviour may simply be ignorance of the administrative and operational policies to be implemented, as seems to be the case in the **Greek** retail sector case study.

6. Good Practice

The trans-national analyses also reported on examples of good practice in intercultural communication in the workplace. A summary of the findings in the following areas follows.

6.1 Developing language skills

To solve problems related to the poor language skills of immigrants, the following initiatives were regarded as successful:

- Using more than one language within the company. In the case of the restaurant business in **Germany**, even though German is the main language, all employees were required to be able to relate in English with their co-workers, especially in the case of conflicts, so as not to put immigrants, who were not fully confident in using the language of the host country, at a disadvantage in the discussion. In the case of the **Norwegian** construction industry, difficulties with the language of the host country were overcome using a *lingua franca*. A similar practice occurred in the small **Italian** manufacturing enterprise where the various parties had agreed the languages for communication, both written and oral.
- Organising courses to teach the language of the host country (a practice started in
- the construction industry in **Norway**).
- The introduction of interpreters/mediators

- The broadening of non-verbal communication, with the use of universal symbols so that immigrants can more easily understand what is being communicated, including the safety regulations for the workplace (a practice that emerged in **Ireland**).
- The development of multimedia material (CDs and videos) for Health and Safety Training for SMEs, and the production of Foreign Safety Induction Booklets available in foreign languages (Russian, Polish, Latvian, Romanian and Lithuanian) (a practice started in the **Irish** construction industry).

Concerning teaching immigrants the most appropriate way of addressing people, the following was successful:

- training in rules of behaviour between colleagues and with customers. In the case of the retail sector in **Sweden**, it was the foreign owner who educated all his employees in appropriate ways of addressing customers and answering the phone. Special attention was paid to this subject, and the owner expected all his employees to effectively develop their interpersonal skills with people from different cultures.

6.2 Cultural values and practices

To respect and accommodate the needs of immigrants concerning their cultural values and practices, the following examples of good practice were noted:

- Planning work shifts that respect the various needs of employees. The practice of drawing up plans and work shifts taking into account the needs expressed by the workers was reported both in **Italy** in the manufacturing sector and in **Sweden** in the restaurant sector. For example, in the Italian company, shifts were allocated in such a way as to take into account the various needs of Muslim immigrants, with respect for the period of Ramadan, and, in general, the holiday times of other religions.
- Adjusting the canteen menus to the dietary habits of minorities, with the provision of vegetarian menus and alternative choices, and with a display of the ingredients contained in each dish (a widespread practice in **Norway**).
- An **Italian** human resources manager's practice of telephoning immigrants before the end of the holiday to remind them of the return date.

6.3 Job-related training

To help the immigrant worker settle into a job through the acquisition of technical skills, these practices were noted:

- Mentoring/On the job training.¹⁰ In **Italy** the problem of understanding the work and instructions was resolved by providing a period of mentoring for the immigrant¹¹ (often young and without the specific skills to carry out the work by himself/herself) by an experienced worker who is responsible for providing knowledge about how the work should be carried out and then checking that it is done properly. One immigrant worker found this particularly useful. *"My colleagues and employer were very patient, they showed me what to do and they supervised me because I didn't know the language."* With this system the immigrant can benefit from being observed by a skilled worker, and he/she learns work techniques that can only be transmitted through practice. There is the opportunity to ask the more skilled worker about

¹⁰ Mentoring is effective not only in developing technical skills related to the work to be carried out, but also in developing language skills and interpersonal relations in general.

¹¹ We should remember, for example, that in a country like Italy there are also specific apprenticeship contracts, which allow people without experience to enter the job market. Pay levels are lower than other contracts, but they do allow a worker to learn a profession. Together with hands-on practice, time is also set aside specifically for training.

particular aspects of the work. This method was also used in **Greece**, as one worker explained: *"When I began the construction work some Greeks helped me a lot. They explained the work and tried to explain if I did not understand something."*

- In **Bulgaria** there are professional training projects that allow non-skilled immigrant workers to acquire basic skills and receive a professional qualification. These projects enable immigrant workers to gain access to sectors such as construction, tourism and transport. For example, the Beautiful Bulgaria Project tackles long-term unemployment, integrating foreigners into the job market, strengthening small and medium construction enterprises and improving the quality of life in cities.

6.4 Relationships with colleagues

To encourage the formation of good relationships with colleagues, the following examples of good practice were reported:

- The establishment of cultural mediators entrusted with the control and resolution of possible conflicts. An example is the case of the construction industry in **Ireland** and **Greece**, where the director did not follow a precise policy for multiculturalism but acted both as a business coordinator and mediator, often going to the workplace to discuss problems and any conflicts that have arisen with the workforce. Cultural mediators can work constructively in conflicts between host country managers and foreign workers, between colleagues of different cultures, and between the workforce and customers. In the **Irish** construction industry cultural and linguistic mentors were employed on site to assist managers.
- Encouraging the building of stable relationships. In the case of the **Greek** construction industry some managers highlighted the importance of establishing stable working relations with people as individuals, not just as workers. The principle behind this is that when you get to know a person, you judge him on his skills, and therefore his cultural background and his origins automatically become secondary and fewer judgements are made about them. As one co-worker said, *"When you know a person and collaborate with him, without problems, his nationality does not have importance for you."*

6.5 Intercultural skills

Regarding the improvement of intercultural skills, the surveys identified a number of positive initiatives:

- Combining professional training and training in intercultural communication. In the case of the **German** media industry, as part of a general job training programme, young multimedia employees and IT technicians were given training in intercultural communication as well as work-related training. This was successful because, in the media industry, having some understanding of cultural diversity and different ways of communicating is basic to carrying out one's occupation in a professional manner. An important objective of the initial training was the acquisition of intercultural communication competency and conflict resolution skills. These skills were developed through practical activities related to their profession.
- Initiating collaboration between various parties, so that workers being trained could acquire a better understanding of diversity and inclusion. Within the **German** media industry, this practice involved using immigrant associations for specific activities. In this way employees entering the workplace for the first time were able to improve both their job skills and their social skills in an intercultural environment.
- Organising cultural exchanges, outside working hours, through international evenings, with food and entertainment from different countries, as in the case of **Norway**.

- The support of SMEs in improving the foreign language and intercultural competencies of their staff. This is an activity that SMEs would not be able to do by themselves. In the case of the ECOVIS project, developed in **Germany**, the aim is to motivate SMEs to send employees for initial vocational training to the ECOVIS Academy, in order to have better qualified staff with regard to English and intercultural awareness.

6.6 Discrimination

Below are examples of good practice with regard to discrimination:

- Enacting specific legislation against racial discrimination. In the **UK**, The Commission for Racial Equality has a statutory code of practice on racial equality in employment. If the CRE suspects that a particular company or organization is discriminating on racial grounds, it can embark on a formal investigation. (For more detailed information in this area, see Chapter 3, Legislation.)
- The setting up of an individual (in **Sweden**, the Discrimination Ombudsman - DO) charged with supervising the observance of regulations and dealing with complaints. Legislative intervention of this type also exists in **Ireland** through the Equality Authority.¹²
- The introduction of policies by SMEs to promote racial equality in the workplace. In the **UK**, in response to legislation and to demand from their workforce and customers, many companies have produced such policies and procedures.
- The circulation of information in seven languages concerning salary levels, workers' rights etc by **Irish** trade unions.

6.7 Business community response

In this area, the following good practice initiatives have been identified:

- Establishing organizations whose aim is to address the issues raised in a multi-cultural workplace. In the **UK**, private companies and organizations have emerged to support and enhance the position of ethnic minority workers.

The organization Race for Opportunity is concerned with inspiring and working with business to demonstrate the clear opportunity and business case for working on race in the UK environment. Race for Opportunity works with over 180 private and public sector organizations across the **UK** to help them reap the business benefits of implementing an effective race and diversity action plan. In particular, the Campaign works with affiliated organizations across the following key areas of business activity:

Employment, including recruitment, selection, progression and retention.

- Working with ethnic minority small businesses.
- Diversity-proofing community involvement programmes to include ethnic minority community activity

Ethnic minority businesses make an important contribution to the **UK** economy. The role of the Ethnic Minority Business Forum (EMBF) is to help ensure these businesses are given the right help and advice to succeed. EMBF does this by working with the Small Business Service and Business Link franchises. EMBF provides independent advice to Government in relation to small and medium enterprises (SME) policy and practice as they relate to ethnic minority business. They

¹² <http://www.equality.ie/>

are also there to listen to the views and needs of ethnic minority business communities and convey them to Government and policy makers. The EMBF is happy to receive views/comments on the business needs of ethnic minority entrepreneurs, to assist its dialogue with Government. The EMBF does not provide advice to individual BME businesses or deliver any business support services. For such enquiries, there is a Business Link web site.

6.8 Integration into the host country

Finally, regarding more comprehensive assistance for the integration of the immigrant into the host country, there was evidence of:

- General counselling. For example, in the case of **Italy**, on-site counselling is provided for workplace issues and also offers guidance in dealing with outside agencies. In the case of the Italian company, the Human Resources manager helped the immigrant with the paperwork required by government offices, the search for accommodation, and also with the application for a loan to buy a house. In **Norway** it is mainly the Workers' Associations that have this function.
- Support of immigrant workers by the relevant immigrant community. One worker said, *"What we learnt, we learnt from our compatriots. Partly because we did not know the language, partly because people did not want to help, we had to search for months in order to regularize our papers."* It has already been noted how, thanks to their involvement in their own community, the Chinese in **Greece** have achieved a dual objective: they have kept their own cultural identity alive, while at the same time they are supported by the community in the understanding of the host culture and practical aspects of life in the host country.

7. Training Needs

It is clear from the trans-national surveys that there seems to be a cycle whereby employment enables immigrants to integrate more easily, as well as giving him/her an opportunity to acquire professional qualifications. Also, acquiring the technical skills needed to carry out a job increases the possibility that an immigrant will obtain skilled work.

Training should focus on the following areas:

- Improving the language skills of immigrants through language instruction.
- Improving technical skills and know-how, and consequently technical qualifications that can be used in the job market through professional instruction.
- Improving intercultural skills, both of immigrants and management, for better mutual understanding.

The trans-national surveys identified language skills as being the most critical for SMEs. The principal need was for improvement in the immigrant's command of the language, to be met through specific training such as **language courses**. This need was clearly identified by all the countries taking part in the project. While in some cases, such as **Norway**, there are already initiatives of this kind, in **Greece** there are complaints about the lack of state initiative in this area.

Any training should deal particularly with the written language, and take into consideration the various linguistic registers that the immigrant often has to recognise in order to be able to relate to people in different situations.

To improve the technical skills of immigrants in particular professions and allow them to obtain qualifications in order to begin or advance in a career, ad hoc **vocational training courses** organised for the various sectors are indispensable. In planning the training there should be an evaluation of the sectors that need priority. For example, in many countries the construction industry is one of the priorities, and courses regarding safety at work should be available.

Vocational training should be aimed at immigrants who have started their own business. The **Bulgarian** case study highlighted the fact that some tourist operators lacked the basic skills to carry out their job efficiently and that this made it more difficult for them to handle the increasing complexity of an intercultural environment. Specific programmes were then organised to deal with this lack of skills. (The Kavarna Municipality project concentrated on business skills and proficiency in the tourism sphere.)

Courses can take hybrid forms, both improving the language skills of immigrants and providing professional training. The experience of **Germany** in the training of media and IT professionals is a good example of this. This is an important aspect to be taken into consideration, as cultural training complements technical instruction by improving communication with colleagues at work. In this way, the motivation of participants can be increased, since it is clear that training in intercultural communication leads to practical results.

In addition to cultural training aimed at complementing the language skills and technical competency of immigrants, more general **cultural training** needs emerged.

In **Greece**, programmes teaching the host language and customs in order to help immigrants integrate more easily into their host country were introduced by the management of the Greek and Norwegian construction companies. These programmes, however, focused on assimilation of immigrants into the host country rather than on mutual understanding and acceptance by host country workers and immigrants of each others' cultures.

To achieve real integration and mutual acceptance of each others' cultures it is also important to provide specific training for the company managers of the host countries, as well as other institutions such as trade unions. This was highlighted by the experience of **Greece, Germany, Norway and Ireland**.

It should be pointed out that in sectors such as the restaurant business in **Germany**, there are already language courses aimed at improving the skills of workers in dealing with foreign customers, and in some cases workers have obtained language qualifications and also economic assistance from the company to attend such courses. However, there is a shortage of more in-depth courses on intercultural communication. In particular, an examination of the correct conventions of communication with foreigners (verbal communication and also physical contact, posture, gestures, eye contact etc), the rules of dialogue, the understanding of customs, dietary customs, religious practices and how to handle conflict should be included in such courses. These courses should be aimed above all at employees who, at various levels, have to interact with colleagues or customers from other cultures. They could also be combined with more specific vocational training and could be seen as an integral part of the training needed to fully develop one's professional skills.

Courses in intercultural communication aimed at managers should have the goal of improving their ability to handle diversity. This, however, also implies developing open-mindedness and empathy, the ability to see issues from the immigrant's point of view. It should also deal with the appropriate way of approaching people from other cultures with the aim of developing mutually beneficial relationships.

Finally, two more recommendations:

- The organization of courses should not overlap with work time so as not to create difficulties for the company's production schedule.
- Training should cater for both groups and individuals and it would be wise to have materials for both group and one-to-one training for those who are limited by working hours.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

From the trans-national analysis of the intercultural workplace in small and medium-size private enterprises, some final recommendations emerge for the promotion of integration and intercultural harmony. These are summarised below.

With regard to the workplace itself, the following areas of intervention are recommended:

- Extensive training aimed both at immigrants and the organizations that they work for. The training required essentially falls into three areas – linguistic, professional and intercultural training. Specific courses on intercultural communication in the workplace are recommended. Alternatively, the topic of intercultural communication could be inserted in job training courses.
- Providing written communications at all levels of the company in different languages, and instructions in more than one language concerning safety in the workplace, the use of machinery and the use of company facilities (canteens, transportation etc.)
- Drawing up specific company policies to promote multiculturalism, and publishing behavioural guidelines for management and workers on how to welcome and integrate immigrant workers into the workplace.
- Lobbying for legislative intervention to introduce or improve legislation regarding the reduction of discrimination in the workplace and the promotion of intercultural communication.
- Training a multicultural middle management, especially where immigrants have difficulty in making progress in their career and obtaining promotion at work. It is also important to develop job adaptation programmes and other in-house training to provide immigrants with opportunities for advancement.
- Cultivating an open and constructive attitude within companies, in order to clearly identify the causes and mechanisms of friction between different cultures and to reduce possible causes of conflict. The objective is to benefit from the varied experiences and perspectives in the company, and to produce a positive attitude toward diversity. In this respect, it is important to point out that if, on the one hand, the multicultural composition of a team introduces communication difficulties, on the other hand it stimulates creativity within the group, adaptability to changes and, in the final analysis, also raises the general level of competence within the company.
- Recognising the abilities and qualifications gained by immigrants in their home countries.
- Supporting not only immigrant workers, but also foreigners who intend to start their own businesses.
- Tackling bogus 'self-employment' in the construction industry at European level by drawing up new legislation. A large proportion of building workers are operating under a false self-employment regime – either out of choice or at the request of an employer

– but in practice they have a subordinate employment status. This practice is leading to huge skills shortages and denies workers basic employment rights.

Recommendations can also be made regarding the after-work environment. These should involve, as far as possible, the entire socio-politico-cultural context which the immigrant has entered. Suggestions that have been made include:

- Promoting activities aimed at bringing cultures closer at all levels (e.g. the organization of forums on the topics of integration and understanding other cultures), and the creation of after-work opportunities for cultural exchange and social events (e.g. ethnic events attended by immigrants' families). Understanding different cultures through direct experience is the most effective way to break down stereotypes. Discrimination can be overcome by starting to recognise that differences are not threats and by emphasising the synergies between different cultures.
- Developing tools for the transfer of good practice between organizations, for example, by providing certification¹³ recognising the ethical practice of a company.
- Producing guidelines and information in more than one language regarding the procedures needed to resolve administrative problems (e.g. how to complete the paperwork for work permits, information on how to obtain insurance cover and access to welfare services) and any changes to the rules concerning immigration.
- Paying attention to the cultural integration not only of immigrant workers but also their families, especially with regard to second generation immigrants, with the provision of intercultural training environments aimed at increasing understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity.

Finally, SMEs' support in increasing the foreign language skills and intercultural competence of their staff is very important. In order to implement all the initiatives proposed, it is important to establish cooperative relationships between the various parties, such as trade unions, local government institutions and the mass media. By doing this it is possible to create a range of complementary initiatives and to publicise them widely and systematically. In this way, each party is able to support intercultural projects by providing a different perspective on the phenomenon. Host countries need to have better relations with local immigrant communities. It emerged that in some countries immigrant communities need to be better organised in order to carry out the important role of providing their co-nationals with information about the rights and obligations involved in residing in a particular country. In these cases, intervention should be aimed at encouraging the formation of such groups. On the other hand, it also emerged that some communities, such as the Chinese community in **Greece**, are already well organised, with networks that could be used to disseminate useful information such as job availability in different sectors.

¹³ See also the EFQM: European Foundation for Quality Management.