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The social inclusion of the immigrant population in Europe through the development of new teaching and learning methods in vocational training

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Abstract

Introduction: In this paper, some of the results of a European Erasmus+ project - involving participation by Spanish (University of Huelva and University of Jaen), French, Italian and Greek institutions - are presented; its purpose is to conduct research into the skills needed for the education, employability and social inclusion of the immigrant population in Europe. Its aim is to develop new methods and interactive teaching tools, focusing on teaching and learning processes to facilitate the sociocultural and economic integration of the immigrant population in Europe. **Objectives:** Identify the factors that hinder the social and professional integration of the immigrant population and analyze the policies implemented and the responses implemented by organizations whose purposes the training and integration of immigrants. **Methodology:** We used a qualitative methodology based on semi-structured interviews and surveys with key informants. It has interviewed immigrants, trainers, technical administration, host organizations and local authorities with experience in the employment of immigrants. This article presents the results of semi-structured interviews in four European countries: Spain, Greece, Italy and France

Results and conclusions: The results have been grouped into two large groups. In the first categories that foresee the brakes to training and inclusion and that lie within the social context, training practices and profiles and casuistry of the immigrant population are located. The second group of categories are those that provide an opportunity for improvement and effectiveness of training practices that rely on the use of prior knowledge and skills in their countries of origin, in the processes of social and family organization of immigrants and good practices by trainers and social partners.

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1. Introduction

The influence of immigration on social cohesion is one of Europe's most pressing future problems and has established itself as a priority for the European Union. According to the Council of Europe, social cohesion is defined as "the ability of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding polarisation". In this regard, it is understood that the integration of the immigrant population is a prerequisite for social cohesion and economic progress. However, in its 2013 report on international migration, the OECD stated that in 2012, approximately one in every two immigrants in Europe was unemployed, and it is expected that many more immigrants will arrive looking for employment opportunities. Eurostat data also show that the migrant unemployment rate is approximately 21% compared with a 10% average for nationals of the Member States.

This high rate of unemployment affects mostly young people and has distinctive characteristics in the case of women. Although there have been few studies conducted into either cases, it has been shown that in some countries, such as Spain, the unemployment rate for young women is much higher. This situation also affects young and immigrant women as the jobs they do have are characterised by their poor quality and minimally acceptable working conditions (Oso et al. 2012; Vidal et al., 2011; Carrasco et al., 2011; Vazquez et al., 2015).

It is an indisputable fact that today, social integration of the immigrant population is closely linked to participation in the labour market. This is demonstrated by the many studies that have been conducted on this issue (Fernández, 2010; Martínez et al., 2008; Carrasco et al., 2011; Pérez, 2005; Fernández et al., 2014). Based on this reality, the majority of the policies and initiatives that have been implemented in this area have focused on employment strategies. As Martínez and Prior stated (2011), "employment as individuals' main source of income and status is fundamental to the integration of economic migrants in host societies".

An important issue to consider is the economic crisis occurring in Europe, which mainly affects the countries of the south and their unemployment rates, especially in Spain, where demand for migrant workers has decreased considerably as, according to some authors, a change in the economic cycle has taken place where fewer workers are needed (García et al., 2012; Sandell, 2008; Sagardoy, 2011; Osvaldo Estebán, 2011). To all this, the fact that the immigrant population is exposed to exclusion in employment, housing, health and education must also be added. They face many obstacles for participation and have difficulty integrating into the host society.

The Mediterranean has always been an area in continuous movement where invasions, wars and colonisation processes have consistently occurred; this has resulted in its current ethnic complexity and has made it one of the places where political and economic migration has been most intense.

In this paper, some of the results of a European Erasmus+ project[†] - involving participation by Spanish (University of Huelva and University of Jaen), French, Italian and Greek institutions - are presented; its purpose is to conduct research into the skills needed for the education, employability and social inclusion of the immigrant population in Europe. Its aim is to develop new methods and interactive teaching tools, focusing on teaching and learning processes to facilitate the sociocultural and economic integration of the immigrant population in Europe. The cooperation of the four countries from the Mediterranean region (Spain, France, Greece and Italy), with different approaches and experiences of migration, provide important innovation and wealth to the project. In this regard, it must be noted that immigration in France has stabilised in recent years, while in the other three countries there has been a significant increase.

This project aims to improve the education and training of immigrants, understanding that it is one of the key pillars to integration and to promoting social cohesion.

In this regard, two fundamental objectives are exposed:

- Develop an archive of formal and non-formal skills necessary for the inclusion of the immigrant population.

[†] To develop a referential of skills and training modules favoring the Inclusion of Migrants to Europe. This project is funded with the support of the European Commission Ka2- strategic Partnership for Adult Education - Erasmus + Agreement Number 2015-1-FR01- KA204-014959. It includes the following partners: INSUP (Coordinator, France), AIFRISSS (France), CIOFS/FP PUGLIA (Italy), EDRA (Greece), University of HUELVA (Spain) and University of JAEN (Spain).

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