

Project Recommendations

Zsuzsanna Arendas and Violeta Zentai (coord.)

Central European University

Background and Rationale

1. The effect of free movement of people on labour/workplace relations

Recent waves of migration, both inter-and intra-European, have further diversified the composition of labour force in most sectors of the European economies. In spite of political controversies over the political and policy paradigms of multiculturalism, several EU member states, mostly the old ones as primary targets of migration, have made various efforts to integrate foreign born employees in their labour markets. Our research has endorsed the understanding that a dual need is being articulated on the side of migrant workers. On the one hand, a strong urge is expressed to learn the host country language in order to obtain better job security, get safer and higher paid jobs, reach a sufficient level of health and job safety, and in general to be able to represent their rights better towards their employers. At the same time, migrant workers expressed ambition to speak their native language in different (often informal) situations, with colleagues, sometimes customers and clients. This enables them to feel emotionally comfortable, secure in their own group, often leading to more human dignity and empowerment.

2. Language use as basis of disadvantage

In the European anti-discrimination and equality policies, the issue of language rarely appears as an important issue relating to protection. Parallel to this, one could observe the underplaying the role of language in the enforcement of rights and entitlements. The importance of language rights of migrant labour is often devalued with an excuse that it „happens on its own”, as a natural process. This is a misconception, to say the least. Our research revealed that a pro-active approach towards linguistic rights of migrant labour needs to be taken on all levels, including national, sectoral, and company level.

Language specific forms of discrimination at workplaces are often part of complex issues of class discrimination, discrimination against 'foreigners', or 'foreign workforce', tantamount to racial discrimination. This means that issues of linguistic discrimination can be understood and tackled as part of a wider set of discriminatory practices taking place at different levels of the host society, and from a macro-perspective they are often being part of larger structural problems.

3. Linguistic differences in regulations and protocols of industrial relations

Generally speaking, national collective agreements do not provide any reference and/or terms concerning the promotion of multilingualism and multiculturalism in most countries and companies. Moreover, national legislation does not refer explicitly to the linguistic rights of migrant workers. Often, the underlying idea is that migrant workforce needs to assimilate/integrate fast, for its own personal interest and economic survival. Knowledge of the language of host society is usually an expectation. Yet, it is rarely spelled out clearly what it means, to what extent an employee should speak the host society language/language of the company or may use her language at workplace in different situations. In addition, the experience based on our case studies is that having a multicultural/ multilingual workforce often remains un-reflected, not felt as an 'aspect requiring special attention'.

Based on a review of company policies and their level of tolerance towards informal practices, our research resonated with an explanatory framework for the linguistic diversity at work introduced in the Comparative Report of our research. The theoretical framework developed by Martin Artiles, Godino and Molina (2016), based on company policies and their level of tolerance towards informal practices, evidences three ways of managing the linguistic

diversity at work. The first one, the assimilationist model, is characterised by voluntarism in terms of linguistic policies and a low level of tolerance towards informal practices. In such scenario, a dominant language is implemented by the Management, which prohibits or denies the use of the migrant workers mother tongue. The second one, the cohabitation model, is characterised by either a “laissez faire” or an explicit use of linguistic diversity in business strategies. In this scenario, diverse cultural and linguistic communities are using their mother tongue but there is a very low level of interaction between each community. The third one, the integrative or “bottom-up” model, is characterised by a pragmatic management of linguistic diversity, based on cross linguistic and cultural communication. In such a scenario, there is high level of workers participation in decision making with high flexibility and adaptability in the use of diverse languages during the work process.

4. The need for a common vehicular language

Our research, in particular its case studies, reveals that the current industrial and management paradigm dwells on a need for a common vehicular language in order to meet the needs of global coordination. This fosters the march of a global English language over time, by now having been imposed in most multinational companies. Our research identified several problems with this concept (apart from its imperial overtones): the segmentation of workforce, increased difficulties in upward mobility and mutual misunderstanding. Words are used differently with different meanings in the background attached to particular cultures.

English language skills were both a workplace problem as well as obstacle to union organization. In addition, the notion of English as a vehicular language seems to be often debated or questioned by social partners and others.

5. Language diversity as an enabling opportunity for business efficiency and workplace solidarity

What are the alternatives to the implicit single vehicular language approach? How to manage diversity to avoid discrimination of migrant workers? The research also found limited knowledge of and a perceived lack of access to trade unions (e.g. amongst NHS nurses) and a perception that not only employers but some potential members would not welcome union

involvement. Thus, unions might not be interested in organizing 'foreigners'. The lack of access can be directly linked to the lack of language competencies and organizing foreign workforces (empowering them) is a delicate issue to unions.

In the following section, we summarize our main findings in terms of recommendations for improvement of the linguistic and cultural rights of workers, for enhancing intercultural dialogue and better communication at workplaces, and ultimately to reduce the highly precarious situation of lot of migrant workers employed typically in low-paid, low-prestige sectors, in physically and mentally challenging jobs of host country economies.

Recommendations

1. Tackling direct and indirect discrimination at the workplace and enhancing labour safety

1.1. EU and national level anti-discrimination legislation, law enforcement and court protocols shall be amended in view of growing experience and knowledge of linguistic discrimination. Academic, civil society, and trade union research and experience shall be channelled in the necessary legal reforms.

National anti- discriminatory and/or equality frameworks shall make explicit reference to language differences (e.g. the UK, France). Broader EU norms setting instruments shall recognize the links between linguistic diversity and disadvantages at the workplace.

1.2 Provide a supplementary section to the EU Charter of Diversity focused on language diversity at work.

1.3 Access to effective language training needs to be a requirement at workplaces. It has to be within the workplace, during working hours, and the related expenses need to be covered by the company. If necessary, the health and safety training should be adapted to non-national workers characteristics implementing contents in their language (particularly recommended for sectors such as construction).

Lack of host country language results in workflow dysfunction and violation of safety regulations (for example in the case of the UK hotel workers). Employers often try to resist such obvious needs or suggest that it is the interest and responsibility of the migrant employee

to attend language courses and cover their costs. But as especially the case of the German hospital shows investing in language skills of migrant workers pays in the long run in motivated, well-educated and loyal workers.

1.4 Language requirements must be made more precise for each job and should be reasonable according to the tasks to be fulfilled. They must be articulated to corresponding training provisions (see point 1.3 above).

Language may vary across company structure and could be based on particular tasks and duties connected to each position. Often, migrant employees are hired with no or minimum language requirement, however, during their work, the knowledge of the language of host country turns out to be essential for several reasons: to be able to communicate with customers, to be able to understand proper instructions from the management, to be able to follow important safety measures.

PROBLEM ADDRESSED	RECOMMENDATIONS	RESPONSIBLE ACTORS
1.1 Discrimination at workplace based on knowledge and use of language creates obstacles in hiring, promotion and task delivery for non-native speaker workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize language as a ground of direct discrimination • Legislation and incentives to language policy • Organizational self-check-up • Code of practice • Organisation/Company policy on language use based on commitment to value linguistic diversity and support (host) language training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU, Member States • Employers
1.2 Broader EU norms setting instruments or national equality policies do not recognize the links between linguistic diversity and disadvantages at the workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a supplementary section to the EU Charter of Diversity focused on language diversity at work • National frameworks for monitoring equality should make explicit reference to language. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU • Governments

1.3 Limited knowledge and exclusive use of main language generates dysfunctionalities in workflow and violations of safety regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage peer support and local language courses (free and in working time) • Co-ordinate with education providers locally • Precise language requirement in Job search articulated to training plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers/Unions at local level • Education providers
1.4 Lack of clear language requirement at workplaces for particular positions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language training should incorporate job specific requirements (e.g. hospital English in the NHS) and cultural awareness relating to specific roles (e.g. end of life care in the NHS). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company/Organisation Boards, Senior Management, Policy Committees etc.

2. Increasing the understanding of the significance of language in creating enabling working environment and increase productivity

2.1 The promotion of learning different languages is a tool to enhance the coexistence between national and non-national workers at company level. Introducing job specific language and cultural awareness trainings.

Though national collective agreements do not provide any reference and/ or terms concerning the promotion of multilingualism and multiculturalism, initiatives favouring the linguistic and cultural integration of non-national workers can be set out in collective agreements conducted at a company level, in internal policies, and through agreements between trade unions and employers on a case-by-case basis.

The issue of linguistic diversity management is to be addressed, including HR departments, mid-level managers, and company leaderships. The managerial attitudes seem to be diverse: some represent assimilationist positions, some speak for integrative and reconciliatory approaches, others for cohabitation strategies applied between languages and cultures. What we find important is a context-specific approach which reflects specific needs of migrant workers and takes into account their precarious situation with a clear intention of improvement of their situation in linguistic and other aspects of their rights. This might start by conducting an audit of the languages spoken by employees, a clear statement expressing commitment to linguistic diversity and responsibility for supporting host language training. It

would also be useful to launch intercultural training, courses, and initiatives in different sectors, specifically at companies which absorb large numbers of migrant workers but lack the approach of diversity management.

2.2 Intercultural trainings should be introduced at company level, as they can be an important tool and forum to develop mutual understandings. In addition, 'intercultural glossaries' might be developed to enhance

Accepting the plurality of languages in the company has undeniable benefits. It empowers those speaking minority languages, gives migrant workers emotional comfort and security on one side, and voice and rights on the other side. By obtaining dignity and confidence, migrant workers may develop better productivity, loyalty and cooperation within the workplace. The use of minority language may better serve customers in certain sectors. This was evident in the UK health case study where a senior nurse of migrant background whilst understanding the importance of the use of English also encouraged the use of diverse languages to support communication on the wards, as well as recognising the importance of informal communications amongst migrant workers in their native tongue.

Intercultural trainings can serve a complex set of goals. During one's daily work, lot of technical terms need to be used in that language, often communication with clients, customers also takes place in the host country language. In addition, the cultural dimensions of a language and its social contexts can be as important as the former. Experts and migrant workers equally believe that a successful integration and meaningful communication happens only if beyond technical language, the newcomer employee acquires the cultural codes and knowledge related to the language. Therefore, intercultural training can be a tool to develop these mutual understandings. In case of interlocutors, being able to understand other languages but not being able to speak them, each speaker can speak his/her own language in a conversation. Such trainings should be held regularly, for host country employees and migrant employees as well, as acceptance and understanding is a two-way process, with an active participation of all the parties. Such a strategy could be especially fruitful for companies that traditionally work with larger (distinct) groups of migrant workers like in construction industry or metal branch.

In addition to intercultural training, a special 'Intercultural glossary' would be useful to enhance mutual understanding in a company environment, containing various cultural codes,

expressions, signs and meanings, and assist communication amongst all company/organisational members. A list of culture-specific expressions, idioms, and codes of behaviour can be collected and taught during intercultural training. Special training to sensitize employers, management and migrant workers would be useful.

PROBLEM ADDRESSED	RECOMMENDATIONS	RESPONSIBLE ACTORS
2.1 Lack of recognition of linguistic/ cultural plurality on a company level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural awareness campaigns and training • Audit and register of languages spoken by employees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers • Trade unions
2.2 Lack of positive approach to or knowledge on diversity management by employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide evidence of good practice and its impact • Develop multicultural trainings and favour mutual understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU, researchers, running projects on Diversity • Management • Trade Unions

3. Making representatives of labour equipped with knowledge and tools to promote progressive workplace practices

3.1 Union involvement of non-national workers should be enhanced so that migrant workers are able to defend their rights. Also, representation of the multilingual diversity among the committee members should be introduced on company level.

Low-level awareness of language related issues by trade unions at local/national/EU level results in reluctant or poor involvement of migrant workers in labour organization. Therefore, migrant workers and speakers of minority languages need to be actively involved in workers' representation, in union leadership, to be able to voice their language related concerns, to actively participate in identifying and working out solutions, and above all to defend their rights at work. For this purpose, specific language classes for immigrant employee representatives could be added to the resources employers have to provide for social dialogue.

3.2 Cross-sectoral and cross-border learning opportunities could be explored by labour organizations to support and learn from each other in the agenda setting and framing actions. (see the MultiLing Project DVD and accompanying guide as an example of how training might be undertaken).

Linguistic differences often turn to conflicting interests within organizations undermining solidarity among groups of workers and foster employers' convenience in fragmenting labour force into cultural groups with different contractual conditions, etc. Adding multilingual composition of the workforce both as challenge and resources for labour representation on all levels shall be both a self-protecting and a strategic empowerment move.

3.3 Language as basis of group solidarity and alliances. By changing this mutual distrust and by bridging the gap between the unions and migrant employees, both could benefit- the unions by gaining new members and thus strength, the migrant workers would have better access to collective representation and could voice their problems. Moreover by systematically recognizing the needs of migrant workers, unions would strengthen their representational competencies of a growing multinational workforce. From good practices (e.g. in the trade union initiatives in the UK cleaning industry) and the case studies it is clear that case-by-case, situation-sensitive answers are the best ones to respond challenges of diversity and of the management of a multicultural/ multilingual workforce.

PROBLEM ADDRESSED	RECOMMENDATIONS	RESPONSIBLE ACTORS
3.1 Low-level awareness of language related issues by trade unions at local/national/EU level result in low migrant participation in labour orgs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness and training for TU • Involve migrant workers as TU representatives • Establish network of Advice Centres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TU at national level • Local Administrations/Training Departments • EU/MS through TU initiative
3.2 Linguistic differences often turn to conflicting interests within organizations undermining solidarity among groups of workers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness session (e.g. Forum Theatre) • Company negotiation table 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TU • Employers • Employment agencies