

Tiina Ristikari
LaborNet Graduate School, University of Tampere
tiina.ristikari@uta.fi

31st CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL
WORKING PARTY ON LABOUR MARKET SEGMENTATION

Abstract

Across the world, an estimated 175 million people live outside their country of birth, 100 million of whom are labour migrants (Heikkilä, 2005). Although the majority of migration takes place between developing countries, today even countries located in “Europe's periphery”, formerly experiencing emigration, are having to rethink their immigration legislation as greater numbers of foreigners are attempting to enter the country each year. Numerous reports have highlighted the direct and indirect discrimination which immigrants experience in European labour markets (Craig, 2002). Not only do recent immigrants experience drastically higher rates of unemployment, but when managing to find employment their pay is often significantly lower than that of the white majority (Morissens & Sainsbury, 2005). Also, problems - from rejection of qualifications acquired in the nation of origin to institutional racism - are common experiences among immigrant job seekers. As a great majority of the welfare provisions in European countries are gained through a long-term and stable connection to the labour market, immigrants are in a particularly vulnerable position. Consequently, today European political actors are facing new challenges concerning the position of immigrants in their national labour markets (Wrench, 2004).

Agencies from local and national to regional (e.g., the EU) levels are all potentially important actors in removing immigrant barriers to the labour market. There are numerous non-governmental actors that strongly influence, whether positively or negatively, the labour market integration process of migrants. Non-governmental partners are important in at least two ways. First, they function as direct partners in the implementation of policies. But they are perhaps even more important as political actors. ‘They may influence the political climate and political outcomes, and may be important agents in combating exclusion, discrimination, and xenophobia’ (Arto, 2006).

This doctoral research project investigates the response of the Finnish trade unions to immigration and immigrants since the 1980s in Finland. The primary research questions are:

1. How have the Finnish unions reacted to immigration in general since the arrival of immigrants in the 1980s?
- did the unions cooperate with employers and authorities in the employment of foreign workers or did they resist?
2. Did immigrants get fully included in the ranks or are they considered a special category?
3. In light of the labour market difficulties of immigrants (i.e. Ethnic discrimination), are they insisting on equal treatment or advocating for the immigrants?