



Addressing the problems of "new immigrants" in Estonia and in the Baltic States

The immigration rate in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania remains low. In the years of crisis all three countries abolished independent public administration bodies to deal with integration of immigrants. Estonia continued most of relevant activities. In Latvia and Lithuania more problems were observed due to severe budgetary constrains. However also in Estonia lately negative tendencies started to occur. For example the Framework document against discrimination developed in spring 2011 does not see ethnic minorities and ethnic discrimination as issue important enough to be working with. As a result ethnic discrimination is falling out of the scope of the activities to be planned for 2012, the only possibility for to cover this issue would be then to address multiple discrimination. At the same time state realise that the level of intolerance in Estonia is higher than average in the whole EU.

The EPIM funded project covering three Baltic States was finalized in February 2010. The partners continued to distribute shadow reports on new immigrants in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania published in the frame of the project. This publication is available in a number of ways, including electronic version that is also available from the home page of the Integration forum. Additionally LICHR continued to involve media in the awareness raising activities that would address issues related to migration and integration of new immigrants as well as informing Estonian public about the culture, traditions and issues that come to the surface and regard recent immigrants. Similarly Afrolat Association (Latvian partner) is continuing its activities in Latvia and are able to bring better attention on the behalf of other civil society and authorities. Their level of proficiency to achieve dialogue with the authorities of various levels had significantly improved.

The Lithuanian partner, who in the course of the project highlighted that it is important for them to start being involved with migrant integration issues had also continued to act in favour of achieving better visibility of new-immigrants and improvement of the integration processes. Importantly in spring 2011 a centre aimed at providing support to new immigrants have been launched in Vilnius with the active participation of Lithuania Social research Centre (Lithuanian partner). The centre offers range variety of services including social and legal assistance.

Notably in 2010, Estonian authorities started to pay more attention to the needs of recent immigrants (courses of Estonian on the basis of English, training of people to support recent immigrants, etc). LICHR believes that this is at least partly due to lobbying activities organised within the project.

Despite the fact that still a lot needs to be done to improve level of tolerance and integration practices in all three countries we would like to assess that the impact made by the project is rather useful and yet can result in even more initiatives. We do have that they will follow in the nearest future when the results of the economic crisis will be overcome.