

Educating the children of migrants

2008/2328(INI) - 05/03/2009

The Committee on Culture and Education unanimously adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Hannu TAKKULA (ALDE, FI) on educating the children of migrants, approving the Commission Green Paper entitled "Migration and mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems".

Given that all Member States are facing the same type of challenges in this area, MEPs call for efforts to be made, including at European level, to improve the education of children of migrants, above all because there will be more and more of these children in schools in the EU in the future. In addition, workers within the Union may be more willing to work abroad if there is not a risk that their children will suffer educationally. MEPs therefore encourage the development of a model of partnership between schools and communities enabling children whose parents are working abroad to benefit from programmes of assistance, support and counselling from the community.

Learn the languages of the host country: MEPs reiterate that migrant children and adults must have and be willing to take the opportunity to learn the languages of the host country if they are to integrate fully in it. They therefore call on the Member States to ensure education for the children of legal migrants, including the teaching of the official languages of the host country and the **promotion of their native languages** and cultures. MEPs suggest, in particular, that additional financial and administrative support for language courses should be provided to legal migrants, by trained staff who also understand the mother tongue of the migrants. Moreover, MEPs believe that the parents, and especially the mothers, of migrant children should be involved in the programmes for teaching the official languages of the host country. According to MEPs, multilingualism should be **encouraged from pre-school age**. They also recommend that children accompanying parents who move to another Member State for employment should **not be faced with difficulties in registering in school** at a level corresponding to that at which they had been studying in their Member State of origin.

Improving measures for integration: MEPs stress the need to integrate migrants and social categories (such as Roma people) in society. Integration must be based on the principles of equal opportunities in education, ensuring equal access to quality education. Any solutions - whether temporary or permanent - that are based on segregation must be rejected. MEPs also consider that, in order to improve the integration into society of children of migrants, it is necessary to involve them in a wide range of extracurricular activities (e.g. sport).

Avoid creating ghetto-type schools: MEPs recommend that the Member States avoid creating ghetto-type schools or special classes for migrant children. Instead they should promote an inclusive educational policy under which children are allocated to classes on the basis of educational level and individual needs. Moreover, MEPs consider that in schools attended by migrant children the curriculum should pay much more attention to their needs, and that the teachers should be trained in intercultural skills to enable them to deal as effectively as possible with diversity in the school. MEPs are concerned about the high level of early school leaving of the migrant children and therefore believe that efforts should be made to ensure the completion of the courses by the migrant children, bearing in mind that the earlier and the more successfully migrant children are integrated into schools the better they will do at school and in the labour market.

Improving teacher training: MEPs stress the need for quality training for teachers, including special training for teachers that explicitly addresses the special situation of the children of migrants. They encourage, for example, mobility schemes under which teachers are recruited from the country of origin so as to facilitate migrant children's contact with the culture and civilisation of their country of origin.

Teachers should also have the opportunity to spend one or two semesters at host universities abroad. MEPs also believe that **schools need immigrant teachers** as they offer an important experience to their colleagues.

Counselling services and support for non-formal education: MEPs highlight other needs related to immigration. They emphasise the need for counselling services to help migrant children deal with culture shock and adapt to the host society. To help them integrate better, MEPs propose that individual Member States develop educational programmes aimed at improving awareness of human rights issues and personal freedom. All migrants and non-migrants should have the same equal treatment and cooperate more intensively with providers of non-formal education such as youth organisations.

Rejecting all forms of discrimination: MEPs call for discrimination on any grounds, including nationality and residence status to be outlawed in the field of education. Coming round to the Commission's position on this point, MEPs recognise that the current provisions of Directive 77/486/EEC do not correspond to the new social reality of the Union. They therefore support the consultation process launched by the Commission and call for the directive to be amended in order to cover the education of children who are nationals of non-Member States or children whose parents are non-nationals of Member States.

Lastly, MEPs call for:

- schools with a high proportion of immigrant children to receive the necessary staff and facilities to cope with the challenge of diverse classes;
- large towns and cities to better coordinate policy designed to promote the integration of migrant children with policies and strategies regarding housing, (child)care, the employment market, health and welfare.