Immigration and employment: integration of immigrants

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PURPOSE : to present a communication on immigration, integration and employment. CONTENT : with this communication, the Commission is calling for a better integration of immigrants in the EU. The Member States have been called upon to step up their efforts to integrate immigrants. Increased immigration flows are inevitable as a result of 'push' factors such as political instability in the world or welfare differentials. But properly managed immigration will also be necessary in order to meet the future needs of the European labour market. In order to make immigration a success not least for current EU citizens - Europe must achieve radically better integration of immigrants already based in the EU and prepare now for future immigration. The Communication reveals the Commissions' thinking on two different but closely related aspects of the migration phenomena. It is another important step in harnessing together different policy instruments so as to promote the development of the common immigration policy. It deals with one of the four guidelines identified by the Heads of State and Government at the European Council in Tampere in October 1999 and so completes the series of policy papers on the common immigration policy for the Union, called for at that meeting. Following its 2003 Spring Report on the Lisbon strategy, the paper also examines the potential impact which immigrants are likely to have on employment and economic growth. Given the demographic challenge which the EU is now facing, with its ageing and declining population, the Commission concludes that labour migrants will have an important role in the future in meeting the Lisbon objectives. The Commission emphasises that while immigration, on its own, will not provide a solution to all the effects of demographic ageing, more sustained flows are likely to be necessary to meet the needs of the EU labour market as the EU working age population is expected to shrink after 2010. Based on information obtained from a survey of national integration policies and figures on the employment of non EU nationals, the Commission concludes that more needs to be done to promote the integration of established migrants, as well as preparing better for future immigration. It calls for a comprehensive approach and for greater co-ordination of a range of relevant policies. Specific steps are needed to ensure that the needs of migrants are fully taken into account in mainstream policies which have an impact on the integration of migrants. At the same time the Commission proposes a new framework at European level to focus attention on the issues and to encourage exchange of information and experience. The Commission points out that, following the Amsterdam Treaty, a common legal framework is already being put into place concerning the admission and conditions of stay of third country nationals. It calls on the Council to speed up the process of adoption and implementation of this legislation. In addition, the Commission undertakes to explore further the concept of civic citizenship within the context of developing the legal instruments needed to provide immigrants with the comparable rights and responsibilities called for in Tampere. It also calls for new initiatives in other areas - notablyemployment, anti-discrimination and social inclusion - all key areas which underpin the integration process. A number of other issues which need to be addressed are identified including the importance of language, education and training and access to social and other services. The Commission calls for policies which take specifically into account the needs of immigrants to be strengthened in these areas with greater participation by immigrants themselves. It also underlines the role of the social partners and of civic society in developing and implementing such policies. The Commission emphasises the need to carry forward a number of its proposals within the framework of existing policies and mainstream programmes. It sets out a number of new priorities in particular for the European Employment Strategy, the social inclusion process, in the areas of economic and social cohesion and the fight against discrimination as well as co-operation in the field of education. It proposes a new instrument for ensuring cohesion in the form of an annual report to be presented by the Commission on the development of the common immigration policy The recent establishment by the Council of a network of national contact points for integration provides a forum within which to develop the exchange of information and good practice. This has now become operational and it will become the cornerstone of the

new co-ordinated approach to the integration of immigrants. It will have an overview of relevant policies in the EU and in the Member States. The Communication is expected to have a major impact on the strengthening of integration policy for third country nationals, which will be crucial for the development of the EU economy and the promotion of social cohesion in the next decades. The report concludes by stating that the Commission has both responded to the task conferred on it at the Tampere Council by setting out detailed proposals for supporting the development of vigorous integration policies for third country nationals in the EU, while at the same time fulfilling the undertaking it made in the 2003 Spring Report to review the role of immigration, integration and employment policies in meeting the Lisbon goals. The EU's ability to manage immigration and to ensure the integration of immigrants will greatly influence its overall ability to master economic transformation and to reinforce social cohesion in the short and longer term. Although the economic implications of socio-demographic change will only become fully visible as time goes by, a forward-looking approach to immigration is needed today to be prepared for the challenges of tomorrow. The economic and social benefits of immigration can only be realised if a higher degree of successful integration of migrants can be achieved: the EU must address the challenge of integration in a comprehensive manner. The rapid adoption by the Council of the draft directives already put forward on the conditions of admission and residence of third country nationals is an essential prerequisite for future actions since it provides the necessary basic framework of rights on which all further integration policies must rest. In this context the Commission will keep under review the development of the concept of civic citizenship as a new integration tool. In line with the principle of mainstreaming policies for the integration of immigrants, support for many of the proposals made must now be taken forward within the framework of existingpolicies and programmes at EU level, notably the European Employment Strategy, the Social Inclusion Process, as well as the Community action programmes to combat social exclusion and discrimination. Meanwhile the European Refugee Fund and the new pilot projects to promote integration will ensure there is a focus on specific issues concerning third country nationals which need to be addressed as such and to provide support for national integration policies. Finally, and in the light of the conclusions of the Thessaloniki European Council to be held on 20-21 June 2003, the Commission will endeavour to reinforce policy coordination. It will report annually on progress made with the development of the common immigration policy. The Commission will forward this Communication for information to the European Economic and Social Committee and to the Committee of the Regions.