Immigration and employment: integration of immigrants

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PURPOSE : to present the first annual report on migration and integration.

CONTENT : in June 2003 the Thessaloniki European Council invited the Commission "to present an Annual Report on Migration and Integration in Europe, in order to map EU-wide migration data, immigration and integration policies and practices. This Report, which should contain an accurate and objective analysis of the above issues, will help develop and promote policy initiatives for more effective management of migration in Europe". This Communication initiates the reporting process.

This report gives an overview of migration trends in Europe, analyses and discusses the changes in immigration and describes actions taken regarding the admission and integration of immigrants at national and European level. The report constitutes a new instrument to review the development of the common immigration policy.

Analysis : this report confirms that immigration continues to play an important role in the economic and social development of the European Union. In the context of an ageing and shrinking working-age population, increased immigration flows are likely and increasingly necessary to meet the needs of the enlarged EU. Europe must prepare for this. In this respect, there is a need for a level-playing field in terms of admission policies for economic migrants across the EU to be able to respond to labour gaps successfully and in a more transparent and coherent manner. While bearing in mind the inability of the Council to agree on the directive on economic immigration, the Commission hopes that the launch shortly of a Green Paper will pave the way for a new European legal instrument on this matter.

According to the report, admission and integration policies are inseparable and should mutually reinforce each other. With respect to integration in the labour market, it will be important, at Member States' level, to reflect further on the structures and instruments in place, in particular on the capacities to identify skills and labour shortages and to ensure higher participation of immigrants in the labour market. The Commission will support the exchange of experiences on these issues within the framework of the European Employment Strategy. In this respect the Commission has proposed a new and ambitious programme of exchange of experiences in the context of the Employment Committee, which can address these issues. The Community Programme for Employment Incentive Measures will also be used to improve the knowledge base concerning integration in the labour market. This report has shown that the assessment of skills and professional qualifications of immigrants remains important to make better use of their full potential. Facilitating the recognition of immigrants’ qualifications by applying to immigrants the same criteria for the recognition of foreign qualifications as applied to nationals, would be an important step.

Towards a further integration : in parallel, Member States are also increasingly concerned about the integration of the newly arrived in particular ensuring that immigrants understand and respect the fundamental norms and values of the host society and with respect to language abilities, which are major barriers to integration. Inevitably Member States will be reluctant to open up for further economic migration, unless they are able to integrate newcomers well into all aspects of society. The need for specific integration measures is also a concern raised by third countries during discussion of migration issues. This highlights the need to strengthen and develop policy instruments to address the integration of

third country nationals, in connection with progress on admission policies. The INTI Preparatory Actions are a further step to promoting specific integration measures for third country nationals by providing new ideas, exchanging good practice and identifying priorities.

Efforts are needed to boost the integration of existing immigrants. This calls for comprehensive integration policies, combining both mainstreaming and specific programmes. Mainstreaming immigration means actively and openly taking into account immigrant issues in all relevant policies and measures at EU and national level. One of the aims of the Annual Report on Migration and Integration is to ensure that the needs of immigrants are properly streamlined in all EU policies affecting them and to inform the Council on progress made. This first report shows that in some major policy fields the mainstreaming of immigration issues remains slow and that further efforts are needed to develop effective policies.

A number of commitments have, however, been taken at EU level since the adoption of the Communication on immigration, integration and employment, within the European Employment Strategy and the Social Inclusion Process in particular, and some positive trends are noticeable at national level. However, most commitments still need to be translated into action; recourse to targets is limited and developing a more systematic and comparable collection of information and data at Community level is crucial to allow for better monitoring of the impact policies have on immigrants. The Commission will pay particular attention to monitoring the progress achieved by the Member States in the next National Action Plans for employment and those for social inclusion. Moreover, exchange of experiences within the National Contact Points on Integration will also be of help to ensure mainstreaming of immigration concerns at national and EU level and the development of good practice which addresses the specificities of the target groups. In the light of the rising importance of and of the priority given to migrants' integration in Community funding, it is important that information on the use of such funds to promote migrants integration is improved.

To make progress, it is important to increase dialogue with migrant organisations. Dialogue between different communities built on mutual confidence is a crucial condition for supporting migrants' integration and maintaining social cohesion. At EU level the Commission encourages immigrants to take an active part in the debate. This report has shown that integration policies and religious and cultural issues continue to be major challenges in most Member States. With a view to enhancing the dialogue with migrant organisations and as a mean to overcome prejudices, ignorance and intolerance as well as religious extremism within the EU, the Commission will give priority to the creation of networks and co-operation under the INTI preparatory actions for 2005.

Another major issue is the growing diversity of populations in European cities which remains a challenge for many Member States. It will be important to strengthen efforts to exchange experiences and best practices at EU level, in particular in the context of the Social Inclusion Strategy. The Commission will also propose to the national contact points on integration to include this subject in its work programme.

The establishment of a common legal framework setting out the rights and obligations of third country nationals, underpins the EU approach to the integration of immigrants. The first EU directives have now been adopted and the Commission will closely monitor their transposition into national legislation. The Commission will also review the level of political rights granted to third country nationals during this process.

Conclusion : the legislative framework and the policy instruments described above constitute important components in the practical implementation of integration measures. There is a need, however, for greater coherence with respect to the objectives which such measures seek to fulfil. In addition the Thessaloniki European Council stressed the need for developing a common European framework within which national policies should develop and envisaged the definition of common basic principles with a view to intensify the development of such a framework. The Commission will make the necessary proposals to define a set

of common principles which could become the basis for the adoption of specific objectives to be pursued in the relevant policy fields.

The national contact points on integration can play an important role in this process. In light of these developments and with a view to strengthening the European framework for integration ahead of the new constitutional Treaty, the Commission will consider the need for setting up a more formal basis within which exchange of information on integration could take place in the future without prejudices to the European Employment Strategy and the European Inclusion Strategy.