

SUMMARY

Green paper "Migration and Mobility: Challenges for EU Education Systems"

Citizen's summary

What is the problem?

Levels of migration, both within and into the EU, are at a historical high. Education systems, and schools in particular, must adapt to the significant new presence of migrant pupils while continuing to provide high quality education with equal chances for all. It needs to be ensured that migrant pupils are given the additional attention they may need to become integrated, successful and productive citizens. Education systems must play a leading role in creating an integrated society, as they represent the main opportunity for migrant and non-migrant young people to get to know and respect each other.

At the moment, education systems are having difficulties in meeting such challenges. It is clear from international and national data that there are educational disadvantages for many migrant pupils. What is more, in some countries the second generation of migrant pupils lags behind even more than that of their parents.

At the same time, adapting to increased numbers of migrant pupils makes it necessary to revise teaching methods and to develop new teaching skills. Also, the presence of large concentrations of migrant pupils can intensify tendencies towards socio-economic or residential segregation. This may lead to the creation of “ghetto” schools or to a shift in favour of private schools.

Why is this issue taken up at the European level? Why now?

Recent increases in migration have shown that it is high time for a thorough debate on how education may help to better integrate migrants into Europe's society and economy. Member States are fully responsible for the content and organisation of education and training within their borders. It is at the national or regional level that strategies need to be defined and put into practice. Nevertheless, EU Member States have expressed the will to co-operate on integration of migrants.

The European Commission can support this process of co-operation. It has been given the mandate in EC Treaty (Art. 149) to promote the exchange of information and experience on an issue that is having significant implications for education systems of Member States.

To this purpose, the Commission has presented this Green Paper on migration and education. Green Papers are documents published by the European Commission to stimulate discussion on given topics at European level.

What is the precise focus of the Green paper – and what not?

The Green Paper looks at the situation of migrant pupils in a weak socio-economic position, whose disadvantage is likely to be made worse by differences of language and culture between school and home. These circumstances are not only characteristic of pupils who were born in another country, be it in another EU Member State or in a third country. They are also found among the next generation, i.e. pupils who were born in the host country but whose parents were born abroad. Thus, the Green Paper does not look at the situation of a strictly defined group, nor does it deal with issues of legal status or of citizenship.

What is the purpose of the Green paper?

This Green Paper is meant to analyse the key problems and to serve as an input for the debate on what immigration means to our education systems.

International research shows that some countries succeed better than others in reducing the gaps in school performance between migrant and non-migrant pupils. It is one important result, for instance, of the PISA study in which the performance of schoolchildren across the world is tested and compared.

This suggests that the way in which education policy is made does actually matter, and that it can be useful to have an EU-level exchange on which policy measures work best. In this Green Paper the Commission refers to scientific evidence from solid research in the field and suggests using this as a starting point for possible solutions and good practices when it comes to the education of migrants. It also looks at the possible European added value, including what Community programmes, funds and processes might do to support policy development.

How will the debate be organised? What is the time frame?

The Green Paper is the starting point for a public consultation on education and migration. All interested parties, whether they are policy-makers, education experts or interested citizens, are invited to give the European Commission their views on the issue.

Participants will find in the Green Paper a set of broad questions which they can use as a guide in framing their contributions. The consultation will be open until the end of December 2008.

In 2009, the Commission will analyse the responses received with a view to identifying possible lines for future cooperation.

What are the expected outcomes of the consultation?

On the one hand the responses to this consultation may be used by policy-makers in the Member States. On the other hand they will be useful to define, if appropriate, priorities in European programmes and policies on the issue.