



European Integration Forum

Summary report of the second meeting

12-13 November 2009

The second meeting of the European Integration Forum was attended by European and national civil society organisations alongside representatives of EU institutions and members of the network of National Contact Points on Integration. It focused on the priorities that should guide common EU actions aiming to promote the integration of third-country nationals during the next five years. Two plenary sessions were followed by two workshops on the future EU agenda for a cross-cutting integration policy and on the European Integration Fund.

Opening plenary sessions

The opening session, chaired by Irini Ivonni Pari, Vice President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), began with speeches by Jacques Barrot, Vice-President of the European Commission, responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security, Mario Sepi, President of the EESC, Juan Fernando López Aguilar, Member of the European Parliament and Chairman of the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee, and Catharina Bildt, representing the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Opening speeches underlined the **importance of backing integration policies even more in times of economic crisis** and the topical moment in which the Forum was gathering for the second time. Following the entry into force of the **Lisbon Treaty** in

early December, a legal basis offering new ways to act on the integration of third-country nationals legally residing in the Union will foster EU initiatives.

Integration policy is also a key part of the upcoming five-year programme for the EU area of justice, freedom and security, i.e. the so-called **Stockholm Programme**. On those bases the EU will enter the second phase of development of the Common Agenda for Integration.

The second plenary session, 'Taking stock and looking ahead: working together for integration', was an occasion to make the point on EU achievements in the area of integration and on possible ways forward, with interventions from civil society, local authorities and think tanks.

It was pointed out that EU initiatives find their way in different national social and political contexts. **Mainstreaming integration** remains an important goal to be pursued, as avoiding duplications and overlapping is still a challenge at all levels of governance.

In the last ten years, a normative framework and a common language have been developed at European level, namely through the agreement on the Common Basic Principles on Integration, through the establishment of the network of National Contact Points on Integration, with the launch of the European Web Site on Integration (www.integration.eu) and with the Forum itself. Through EU funding, these common references have been implemented both at European and national level. Nevertheless, it was also stressed that some issues such as access to citizenship, immigrants' rights and the consequences of the economic crisis in terms of potential cuts in integration policy budgets remain politically sensitive.

The challenge ahead would be to find the best way to address those issues and to identify in which areas EU actions can add value. The Forum could have a specific role to play as this regard, supporting the EU institutions in dealing with politically sensitive matters, and in identifying policy areas where EU action is needed.

Common EU priorities for a cross-cutting integration policy

Participants discussed future EU priorities for a cross-cutting integration policy and ways to further enhance integration mainstreaming in two working groups, following a kick-off presentation by the European Commission.

They pointed out that mainstreaming integration policy into other policy areas requires tools and training for officials at all levels. It also demands the involvement of civil society organisations, including migrant organisations, as well as action plans, targets and commitments for Member states. Participants also stressed that integration needs to be seen as part of broader social inclusion policies especially in times of economic crisis. Narrowing the gap between immigrants and other EU citizens in areas such as health,

education and employment requires active social inclusion policies, a truly cross-cutting approach and complementary focussed policies aimed at specific target groups .

In the area of **employment**, it was underlined that work needs to be done on **employers' attitudes** in order to enable them to better understand immigrants' requirements and not to discriminate. As regards **access to the labour market**, it was stressed how the principle of the preference for Union's citizens may constitute a barrier for immigrants .

In the area of **education**, participants agreed on the need to involve actors at all levels. In particular, **working with parents and children**, **training teachers** and encouraging recruitment of teachers with foreign background should be a priority. Moreover, the **teaching of non EU languages at school** should be encouraged. The so-called brain-waste and the issue of over-qualification should also be tackled appropriately. Participants also suggested not just tolerating but also supporting different cultures so that, for example, cultural traditions of immigrants –including their language, can be maintained through education.

As regards **participation in the democratic life**, it was stressed that **involving immigrants in public decision-making processes** should be a priority, so that they are encouraged to exercise their right to take an active role in society. Concerning EU actions in this field, it was suggested that **voting rights for immigrants** should be promoted, as well as **access to citizenship** .

Public perception emerged as a crucial issue to be addressed, in particular by **working with and on the media** and on the way they portray immigration and immigrants. The need to **raise awareness** about the various aspects of integration as a dynamic, two-way process and to change attitudes was pointed out.

Recognizing that **immigrants are not a homogeneous group** was deemed crucial for successful integration policies. Policies should therefore take into account for instance the differences between new arrivals and immigrants who have been residing in the EU for years. They should also pay special attention to the needs and the potential of migrant women. A further promotion of the concept of ethnic minorities was also proposed, in order not to refer to 'successive generations ' of immigrants.

As regards **knowledge and available data** on immigration and integration, participants suggested that existing evidence should be better analysed and should serve as basis to build on when carrying out new research .

Finally, according to participants, a key priority for a cross-cutting integration policy should be to ensure that immigrants not only are granted **equal rights** but that they can also fully benefit from **equal opportunities** in society.

The European Integration Fund : progress to date and future developments

Participants discussed their experience with the European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in two working groups, following a kick-off presentation by the European Commission.

Information (on funding possibilities and requirements) emerged as a key point in order to facilitate **access to funding**, both at European and national level. Different practices at member state level as regards the accessibility of funding for civil society organisations were also underlined. Specific calls for proposals tailored to the **needs of small organisations** were identified as a way to overcome their difficulties in accessing existing funding opportunities.

As regards procedures and requirements, issues such as **timing**, target groups and co-financing were addressed. Participants agreed that sufficient time is needed for organisations in order to prepare consistent funding applications, and also to be able to fully implement their projects. Public authorities should therefore pay attention to the various aspects of timing when managing the Fund.

Since the European Integration Fund is a **co-financing instrument**, the search for **matching funds** is crucial for potential beneficiaries. At this regard, participants pointed out that different practices exist at national level.

It was recalled that the Fund shall contribute to the development and implementation of national strategies for the integration of third-country nationals in all aspects of society, taking into account that integration is a two-way process of mutual accommodation by both immigrants and nationals of Member States. However, some constraints related to the specific **target group** of the fund were mentioned, as many organisations adopt a wider and more comprehensive approach to integration.

Dissemination of the results of actions financed is important in order to maximize the impact of the Fund. In order to improve dissemination across Europe, availability of information in different languages is crucial and translation has to be promoted.

Participants also discussed **which areas should be given priority** in future EU and national funding strategies. The following objectives were recognized as particularly important: **tackling discrimination and racism**; fostering **integration in the workplace** and promoting training for employers; promoting **equal opportunities in education**, in particular involving parents and teachers; promoting the **active participation of immigrants** in society and improving access to **citizenship**; supporting **information activities**, working on **media perception** and encouraging **cultural expression**. The need to continue working and investing on **integration as a two-way process** and on **mainstreaming** was also underlined. Moreover, the importance of funding for actions targeted at **migrant women** in areas such as prevention of violence, education and health

was recalled, as well as the necessity to involve women not only as beneficiaries but also as actors in those projects.

Conclusions

In the plenary debate held after the workshops, issues such as the necessity to improve coordination between different levels of governance both in terms of policies and in terms of funding, efforts to remove obstacles in the access to the labor market and ways to promote equal rights and to ensure that they are translated into equal opportunities emerged again.

A specific role for the European Economic and Social Committee in the debate in relation to migrants' participation in the labor market was suggested, as the Committee is a privileged venue for discussions with relevant stakeholders, in particular trade unions and employers in time of economic crisis. Migrants rights were mentioned as well as anti-discrimination and the support for immigrant organizations, identified as issues to be further addressed in future at EU level.

The **representative of the Spanish government**, after presenting the Spanish strategic plan for citizenship and integration and the Spanish Forum, stressed that integration will be a key priority for the future Spanish presidency of the EU, under which the **fourth Ministerial Conference on Integration** will take place.

After recalling the main points of the discussions, such as the importance of mainstreaming integration into all relevant policy areas and ensuring a framework of rights for immigrants, the representatives of the Commission and of the European Economic and Social Committee thanked all participants in the second meeting of the Forum for their contributions and encouraged their further commitment.

Finally, participants had the opportunity to vote for the two members of the **Bureau of the Integration Forum** representing civil society organisations. The Council for Ethnic Minorities of Denmark and Caritas Europa were elected, representing national level organisations and EU level organisations respectively.