



The Employment Committee

Opinion of the Employment Committee on migration and integration

In response to the request of the Dutch Presidency, the Committee has considered the first annual report on migration and integration. The Committee has also taken into account the Presidency initiative to develop a set of common basic principles for immigrant integration policy in the European Union.

1. The Committee stresses that the Committee's Opinion from October 2003 on immigration, integration and employment, endorsed by the EPSCO Council in December 2003, remains valid and should be reflected in the present debate. The Committee agrees that immigration is a phenomenon that has important implications for the economic and social development of the EU.
2. The Committee emphasises that mainstreaming of the migration and integration dimensions into all relevant policies, including the Employment Strategy, is necessary. This also underpins the effective implementation of the Lisbon strategy.
3. The Committee welcomes the Commission's first annual report on migration and integration, in particular as it provides a comprehensive overview on the trends in migration and in integration policies. The report provides a good tool for increased mutual learning and for follow-up in this area, and also for improved co-ordination at national level.
4. The Committee welcomes the initiative to develop a set of common basic principles for immigrant integration policy, as called for by the Thessaloniki European Council meeting. While the implementation of integration policies remains primarily the responsibility of the Member States, it is in the interest of all Member States to pursue effective integration strategies within a coherent EU framework. In this regard, the Committee refers to the primary importance of access to jobs for immigrants with the prospect of remaining for their effective integration and to the need to raise the employment rates of the non-EU nationals in most Member States. The Committee reiterates its view that combating irregular immigration should facilitate the sustainable integration of immigrants.
5. Given the diversity of Member States' situations, the means to achieve successful integration of immigrants into the labour market may vary from one Member State to another. In addition, it is important to take into account the different individual needs of immigrants, recognising that the newly arrived immigrants are likely to benefit from more focused measures. Focusing may also support the adaptation of the receiving society and help to ensure that immigrants understand and respect the fundamental norms and values of the receiving country, including language skills. Anti-discrimination and gender equality should form integral parts of the integration policies, also as relates to people with migrant origin.

6. Providing real opportunities to improve skills, when needed, and facilitating the recognition of immigrants' qualifications, as appropriate, promote the labour market integration and enables the immigrants to contribute positively to the economic and social development. The assessment of the potential economic, financial and social implications resulting from immigration will need to cover also the longer term perspective and the wider European context.
7. The Committee considers that, in order to support the immigration services in the positive management of immigration flows, there is a need to improve capacities to anticipate national labour market needs and to identify skills and labour shortages. To underpin a more reliable assessment of the overall situation in the EU, there is a need, within existing frameworks, for strengthened co-operation between Member States and for data collection and statistics, including on undeclared work.
8. Successful integration strategies also call for increased dialogue with the Social Partners, the relevant NGOs and migrant organisations at the EU, national, regional and local level in order to establish a truly two-way process of mutual adaptation. At the EU-level, the committee of the national contact points on integration provides an added value to the work by focusing on the areas where it has the most expertise, namely on exchanging experiences in the field of induction programmes and the issue of civic and political participation of immigrants. A regular dialogue, both at the EU and national levels, is needed to ensure that the work of this committee will not overlap with the work of the Employment Committee and that of the Social Protection Committee.
9. At the EU level, in particular in the employment, social and anti-discrimination fields, several commitments and tools already exist to promote the integration of immigrants. In this regard, the exchange of experiences and good practices, developed in addressing the potential of free movement within the EU-25, can yield useful lessons for promoting the full integration of immigrants into the labour market. In line with the mainstreaming approach, the definition and follow-up of the proposed common principles on integration will have to be built on the existing policy objectives and instruments, in particular those of the Employment Strategy and the European Social Inclusion Process. The Committee recalls that the Employment Strategy provides a relevant framework to address labour market aspects and challenges related to immigration and integration. The Mutual Learning programme also constitutes an appropriate instrument for making progress in this area.
10. Given that employment is a key part of the integration process and the commitments on labour market aspects of immigration and integration, which are already included in the Employment Guidelines, the Committee considers that the EPSCO Council should be fully involved in the follow-up of the proposed common principles on integration.
11. The Committee takes note of the Commission's plan to launch a Green Paper on economic migration, and is willing to study the Green Paper relating to the areas which fall under the competence of the Committee.

* * *