

Common contribution of EuroCommerce and Uni Europa commerce

Migration & mobility: challenges and opportunity for the EU education systems

1. Introduction

The Green Paper "Migration and mobility": challenges and opportunity for EU education systems has been adopted on 2 July 2008 as a part of the Renewed social agenda, the Commission's package on measures aimed to reinforce Access, Opportunity and solidarity among all EU citizens. It raises the important issue of the improvement of equity in education and in particular how to adapt teaching skills and build bridges with the migrant communities.

With this green Paper, the Commission launched a public consultation. The European Social partners of the commerce sectors hereby present their common contribution to this consultation.

Uni-Europa Commerce and EuroCommerce have a strong interest for this issue since they deal with both the question of integration of migrants and young people in the framework of their sectoral social dialogue.

Actually, in order to contribute to a better integration of young migrants into the labour market of the commerce sector (providing numerous employment opportunities also for students), they are involved in a further development of their common project called "European Competence in commerce", aimed to translate innovative pedagogical modules for the commerce sector in various languages and to disseminate the results at various level.

The social partners of the commerce sector also intend, through this project, implemented in cooperation with a professional school, contribute to train young people living in various EU countries of a migrant background to allow them to acquire competences enabling them to work in our sector throughout Europe.

While the social partners of the commerce sector fully recognize the work being done by the European Commission and applauds what appears to be an increased social awareness dimension to many of its policy suggestions, they would like at the same time express some concerns in regard to the Green Paper and the EU education policies.

2. The policy challenges

The main policy challenges are represented by:

EuroCommerce a.i.s.b.l
Avenue des Nerviens 9-31, B-1040 Brussels
F: +32 2 230 00 78
www.eurocommerce.be

Uni-Europa Commerce
8-10 rue Reverdil, 1260 Nyon, Switzerland
F: +41 22 365 21 21
www.union-network.org

- The necessity to adapt the educational systems to the presence of an important number of migrant students/apprentices for the school system;
- The necessity for the teachers/trainers to deal with the increased diversity of mother tongues and cultural perspectives. This is even more difficult in those schools where a large concentration of migrant students can intensify the above mentioned trends;
- Education should act as a force to include migrant and therefore prevent social exclusion and segregation;
- It is therefore important to prevent early school leaving, as well as low rates of school completion and consider the educational challenge in the broader social inclusion context.

The general direction of EU educational policies is determined by the targets laid down in the Lisbon Goals which aim at turning the European Union into the most competitive economic area and a leader in the knowledge based global economy. While the social partners of the commerce sector generally agree with the over-all ambition of the Lisbon Goal it too clearly shines through in the Green Paper that that also is the ambition entailed here.

But as significant numbers of people employed in the commerce sector often have a weaker educational level compared to the figures described in the Green Paper, the Social partners of the commerce sector therefore are concerned that despite the intentions in the Green Paper resources will benefit mostly those that seems best to promise a positive return. It is therefore also a policy challenge to create an awareness that secures real equal treatment in all levels of education.

The social partners of the commerce sector are concerned that the ambition of the European Union runs the risk of creating cleavages in the European member states as the people who will not be able to meet the demands of the knowledge based economy will be looked "down upon".

For this reason, the social partners of the sector would like to avoid that employment in the sector will be perceived as less worthy, especially since the work performed is absolutely critical to the functioning of modern societies and also in the future should be perceived that way.

Therefore, the social partners of the commerce sector call upon the European Commission to counter this challenge by formulating policies that will secure that no sector is perceived to be less worthy than others.

3. The policy responses

As far as the policy response aimed to improve the provision of good education for young people is concerned, Uni-Europa Commerce and EuroCommerce would like to remind that educational strategies being national competences, the strategies need to be defined and implemented at this level.

However, the social partners of the commerce sector are convinced that some existing tools at EU level can help in a relevant way a better integration of the young migrants. The most relevant and useful ones in this respect are the following:

- The lifelong learning programme
- Cohesion policy via the structural funds (and in particular the European Social Fund)
- The 2007 European Year on Equal Opportunities for all and the 2008 European Year on Intercultural dialogue provided a good framework for the promotion of the European debate regarding inclusion of migrant youth

Moreover, it would also be relevant to guarantee good education to migrant youth not only through the provision of a good school system, but also to efficient systems of vocational

education and training, which is a more relevant type of secondary education in view to acquire the skills to be able to work in some sectors such as the commerce.

4. The role of the European Union

4.1. An example of an educational project implemented with the support of the EU

The social partners of the commerce sector are currently working on an educational project (already mentioned in the introduction), which is based on the translation and further dissemination of the results of an educational project (implemented under the LLP Programme- former Leonardo).

The first project (2004) was about the preparation of interactive educational modules in German, in cooperation with a professional school, aimed to provide young people with basic skills for the commerce sector with basic skills to enable them to work overall in Europe (the modules also provide for certification and accreditation). This modules were also adapted to allow migrant students to learn the German language.

The modules have been translated in English in 2006. In March 2008, the social partners of the commerce sectors have applied for EU funding in order to implement a new project aimed to the translation of the training modules in Turkish, Polish and Romanian.

These modules will offer flexible training possibilities for young people in Turkey, Poland and Romania (the training systems for the commerce sector are not yet well-adapted in these countries), but also for the young migrants having one of these languages as mother tongue.

It is intended to monitor the implementation in close cooperation also with a network of professional schools in various countries.

4.2. Actions to be undertaken at EU level

It would be adequate to provide the various stakeholders (schools and educational bodies, social partners, specialized NGOs, etc.) with diversified supporting instruments such as tailor-made programmes and relevant EU budget heading to support actions of various kinds aimed to improve the integration of the young migrants. DG Education and DG EMPL could also contribute to spread adequate information, especially among the social partners.

The social partners of the commerce sector also welcome the strengthening of the cooperation between the European Commission and the international organisations which also address education and migration as part of their work, such as the OECD and the Council of Europe.

European Union is giving universities a leading role in its efforts to achieve the Lisbon Goals i.e. the globally leading competitive knowledge based economy. The social partners of the commerce sector notice that still there are many differences between the various systems of vocational training in the Member states, as well as in its quality.

The social partners of the commerce sector regard as important that vocational training is offered to all on an equal basis and that the general quality of the education is raised in all member states.

4.3. The role of the open method of coordination for education and training in dealing with these issues

The social partners of the commerce sectors are aware of the Open Method of coordination which provides a forum for exchange and cooperation between the Member states and are waiting for the new proposals to be published by the Commission in December 2008.

5. Conclusions

Uni Europa Commerce and EuroCommerce regard the issue of improving education and training for the young persons with a migrant background as a priority. Actually, they are committed to work on this issue in the framework of their Sectoral social dialogue committee mainly through the implementation of the above mentioned educational project, but also by providing their member organisations with advice and support to deal with issue.

Commerce plays a unique role in the European economy, acting as the link between manufacturers and the nearly 500 million consumers across Europe over a billion times a day. It is a dynamic and labour-intensive sector, generating 11% of the EU's GDP. One company out of three in Europe is active in the commerce sector. Over 95% of the 6 million companies in commerce are small and medium-sized enterprises. It also includes some of Europe's most successful companies. The sector is a major source of employment creation: 31 million Europeans work in commerce, which is one of the few remaining job-creating activities in Europe.

The social partners of the commerce sector are also of the opinion that adequately educated and trained young migrant can also be part of the solution to the ongoing demographic challenge faced by our modern societies.