

COMMON EU PRIORITIES FOR A CROSS-CUTTING INTEGRATION POLICY

Policy context

In October 1999 at the **European Council meeting in Tampere**, the leaders of the European Union called for a common immigration policy which would include more dynamic policies to ensure the integration of third-country nationals residing in the European Union. They agreed that the aim should be to grant third-country nationals rights and obligations comparable to those of citizens of the EU. Integration has therefore become a focal point of the European Union's immigration policy.

The **Hague Programme** adopted by the European Council in November 2004 underlined the need for greater co-ordination of national integration policies and EU initiatives based on common basic principles. As a response to this request, the same month the Justice and Home Affairs Council endorsed the Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union.¹

The **11 Common Basic Principles** underline that integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States. They refer to values of the European Union, employment, acquisition of basic knowledge of the host society's language, history, and institutions, efforts in education, equal access to institutions, goods and services and non discrimination as key parts of the integration process. They recall the importance of interaction between immigrants and Member States' citizens, as well as the practice of diverse cultures and religions and immigrants' participation in the democratic process. Finally, they emphasize the mainstreaming of integration policies and measures and the development of indicators and evaluation mechanisms in order to adjust policy, to evaluate progress on integration and to make the exchange of information more effective.

In September 2005, the Commission put forward '**A Common Agenda for Integration: Framework for the Integration of third-country nationals in the European Union**', providing a set of concrete measures to put the Common Basic Principles into practice and supportive EU mechanisms to facilitate this process.²

To continue the political debate initiated at the first Ministerial Conference on Integration of Groningen in 2004, the Common Agenda foresees regular meetings of the Ministers in charge of integration. A second Ministerial Conference took place in May 2007 in Potsdam and a third one was held in Vichy in November 2008. The next Ministerial Conference will take place in 2010 under the Spanish Presidency.

What has been achieved?

EU mechanisms contributing to put the Common Basic Principles into practice are:

- The network of National Contact Points on Integration, active since 2002. A network of governmental experts in charge of integration policy coordinated by the Commission, created for fostering exchange of information and good practices between Member States and strengthening co-ordination of national and EU integration policies.
- Until 2007 three Annual Reports on Migration and Integration have been produced. Since the establishment of regular Ministerial Conferences on Integration, the Commission produces reports for these high-level meetings. The last report was prepared for the Ministerial Conference of Vichy.³

¹ Council doc. 14615/04

² COM (2005) 389

³ SEC (2008) 2626

- 'Handbooks on integration for policy-makers and practitioners'. These handbooks show good practices on integration gathered with the help of governmental and non-governmental experts. Two editions in all EU languages were published in 2004 and 2007, respectively; the next one will be released in April 2010. They focus on all key issues developed in the Common Basic Principles presenting lessons learned in these areas.
- European Web Site on Integration (www.integration.eu), a one-stop-shop with all type of information on integration that was launched in April 2009.
- European Integration Forum, a platform for dialogue with civil society organised in cooperation with the European Economic and Social Committee. The first meeting was held in April 2009 and the second one takes place in November 2009.

The European Fund for the Integration of third-country nationals (€ 825 m. for 2007-2013) provides financial support for integration.

Mainstreaming integration is an integral part of policy making across a wide range of EU policies, among which employment, social inclusion and education. **Employment** is a key element of the integration process and the effective integration of immigrants into the labour market constitutes an important contribution to reaching the Lisbon targets for jobs and growth. The European Employment Strategy provides initiatives that aim to upgrade and adapt migrant skills and qualifications. Within this context, the European Social Fund foresees specific support to labour market integration. The social inclusion of migrants is an established key priority of EU social inclusion strategy and the 2010 thematic year of the strategy devoted to combating poverty and social exclusion will also cover the social aspects of migration. **Education** and training are essential to empower immigrants to be active participants in society. As immigrant children and youth tend to have lower school results than other pupils, the Commission has explored causes and identified measures to address these educational challenges through a Green paper, followed by the Conference "Migration & Mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems" which took place on 20 October 2009.

Looking ahead: common EU priorities for a cross-cutting integration policy

The **future Stockholm Programme**, to be adopted by the European Council before the end of the year, will be the new framework for action enhancing the European Union as an area of freedom, security and justice for all in the coming five years. In the field of integration of third country nationals, reflections are currently focused on the development of European modules, on the development of common indicators in key policy areas in order to monitor integration and on bridging gaps with other policies, mainstreaming and targeting.

Moreover, according to the **Treaty of Lisbon**, the European Union shall develop a common immigration policy aimed at ensuring, at all stages, the efficient management of migration flows, fair treatment of third-country nationals residing legally in Member States, and the prevention of, and enhanced measures to combat, illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings. The new treaty foresees that the European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, may establish measures to provide incentives and support for the action of Member States with a view to promoting the integration of third-country nationals residing legally in their territories, excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States.⁴

Questions for debate

- In your view which should be the future common priorities for integration?
- How could integration mainstreaming be further enhanced?

⁴ Treaty of Lisbon, art. 79