

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the Green Paper 'Migration and Mobility'

(2009/C 120/07)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- believes that addressing at European level common challenges faced by education systems in the Member States gives considerable European added value, which can significantly stimulate the framing of Member States' education policy. Education is the key to integration and effective participation in social and professional life;
- in this connection, refers explicitly to the particular role that will be played in future by the Committee of the Regions, given that European local and regional authorities in certain Member States are responsible for school education;
- points to the crucial role that will be played by pre-school and school education in integrating children and young people from a migrant background, and in particular stresses the importance of proficiency in the languages, or one of the languages of instruction and communication of the country of residence;
- sees increased migration as strengthening not just cultural, but also linguistic, diversity in the European Union, which can be translated into a further locational advantage in the global market through development of available language knowledge, therefore warns against seeing increased migration merely as a burden on the EU Member States, but rather advocates seizing this development as an opportunity in Europe, also in the light of demographic trends;
- urges the European Commission to look at the following issues that are not covered by the Green Paper as part of a detailed examination of the matter at European level:
 - increasing the uptake of education among children and young people from a migrant background;
 - motivating the parents of children with a migrant background to make use of existing education opportunities;
 - vocational training of children and young people from a migrant background (including aspects of careers advice and work-oriented promotion of language skills).

Rapporteur: Ursula Männle (DE/EPP), Member of the Bavarian Parliament

Reference document

Green Paper 'Migration and Mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems'

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Member States are responsible for school education, sometimes exclusively;

1. points to the significance of EU education cooperation for the social and economic development of Europe under the Lisbon strategy and considers further enhancing the educational dimension within the knowledge triangle to be very important in this context;

2. emphasises that EU education cooperation must conform with the provisions of Articles 149 and 150 of the EC Treaty and meet subsidiarity requirements;

3. therefore welcomes the fact that in its Green Paper the European Commission considers education policy to fall squarely within the remit of the Member States;

4. notes with regard to the title of the Green Paper that challenges and opportunities exist above all at the level of education systems in the EU Member States and that the Treaties do not allow us to talk about EU education systems, since policy-making in education takes place at national and, in certain cases, regional and local level;

5. believes despite this observation with regard to the primary level of reference that addressing at European level common challenges faced by education systems in the Member States gives considerable European added value, which can significantly stimulate the framing of Member States' education policy;

6. considers that conducting a detailed exchange of information and experience between the Member States would bring considerable gains, and considers the promotion by the European Commission of procedures that have proved effective in the Member States to be particularly important here;

7. in this connection refers explicitly to the particular role that will be played in future by the Committee of the Regions, given that European local and regional authorities in certain

8. considers the results of cooperation between the Member States under the programme 'Education and Training 2010' to be very important, particularly welcomes the implementation of *peer learning* measures, which allow an intense process of voluntary mutual learning, and thanks the members of the Peer Learning Cluster on Access and Social Inclusion for its work in this area;

9. therefore endorses the initiative of the European Commission, during the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008, of presenting a Green Paper on migration and mobility as a contribution to integrating children and young people from a migrant background and thus to maintaining social cohesion;

10. welcomes the long-term value of the PR effort in conjunction with the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, pointing in particular to the poster for Europe Day 2008;

11. supports the European Commission's intention to open up the issue of the educational situation of children and young people with a migrant background to the broader European public through a consultation exercise, and awaits the results of this exercise with great interest;

12. considers that the period of five months planned for participation in the consultation leaves sufficient time to adopt a detailed position on the issue, and asks its members to support the involvement of anybody interested in the Europe-wide consultation at local and regional level;

13. notes, however, that the Commission will already present proposals on a new framework for the open coordination method in December 2008, i.e. before the end of the consultation period, and given that these proposals may also provide for a policy debate on the integration of children and young people from a migrant background it expects that the Commission will take due account of the CoR opinion;

14. endorses the broad definition of 'migrant background' chosen by the European Commission, which also includes people, or the children of people, who have become nationals of the Member State in which they reside through birth or naturalisation, in line with OECD studies on the International Student Assessment (PISA);

15. welcomes the European Commission's decision to focus its report by limiting the subject matter to children and young people from a migrant background who are also socio-economically disadvantaged, since the Committee of the Regions believes that this social group is most in need of action;

16. in view of the flows of citizens moving between EU Member States, and from third countries into the EU, sees a need for action to support education systems at national level, which can be helped by publishing the findings of the consultation procedure and by then discussing the issue at European level;

17. agrees with the European Commission's position that education is the key to integration and effective participation in social and professional life;

18. points to the crucial role that will be played by pre-school and school education in integrating children and young people from a migrant background, and in particular stresses the importance of proficiency in the languages, or one of the languages of instruction and communication of the country of residence;

19. sees increased migration as strengthening not just cultural, but also linguistic, diversity in the European Union, which can be translated into a further locational advantage in the global market through development of available language knowledge;

20. in this context generally would like to see more attention paid to the cultural, linguistic and intellectual potential of migrants and measures taken to promote the development of legal migrants as mediators of reciprocal exchange between cultures;

21. therefore warns against seeing increased migration merely as a burden on the EU Member States, but rather advocates seizing this development as an opportunity in Europe, also in the light of demographic trends;

22. stresses the importance of the recommendation made by the European Parliament and the Council on key competences for lifelong learning, also with a view to integrating children and young people with a migrant background;

Educational situation of children and young people from a migrant background

23. is concerned about the educational situation of children and young people from a migrant background as presented by the European Commission, sees the integration of children and young people with a migrant background as a major political challenge and points to the consequent urgent need for action;

24. agrees with the European Commission's view that inability to integrate children and young people from migrant backgrounds at school level can be the first link in a chain of failures that may culminate in social exclusion following drop-out from school and unemployment owing to lack of qualifications;

25. attributes attainment differences among children and young people from a migrant background to a chain of factors, which include lack of or inadequate knowledge of the language of instruction, which makes it impossible to follow lessons and produces demotivation; lack of flexibility in education systems in terms of offering programmes adapted to the needs of children and young people from a migrant background; poor access to education in the home and insufficient attention and extra-curricular supervision provided for children and young people by their parents;

26. explicitly shares the view of the European Commission set out in its Communication *Improving competences for the 21st Century: An Agenda for European Cooperation on Schools* that school alone cannot make up for social disadvantages experienced by schoolchildren;

27. emphasises its conviction that successful integration of people from a migrant background requires a considerable degree of will, time, effort and openness on all sides;

28. consequently regrets that the Green Paper does not refer to the personal responsibility of parents and, to a certain extent, the age-appropriate responsibility of children and young people also, to demonstrate a willingness to integrate despite their specific situation and to take the initiative within the framework provided to try and mitigate or overcome existing socio-economic disadvantages, for example by taking part in education activities offered or obtaining further qualifications;

29. sees compulsory schooling as an essential guarantee of successful integration of children and young people from a migrant background, and explicitly favours close cooperation between schools and the parental home with a view to ensuring that children attend school. This also applies to allowing children and young people to take part in sports and swimming classes, as well as class trips;

30. agrees with the European Commission that important problem-solving approaches can be found through strengthening partnerships with a range of actors in the education and youth sphere (pre-school, school, youth work), but believes that the family plays a particularly important role in forming general expectations of life and thus individual educational achievement;

31. believes it is very important that children from a migrant background should as far as possible have early access to educational support for young children, given the absolute need for them to speak the languages, or one of the languages of their country of residence correctly and fluently in order to benefit from the facilities provided by the education system, since this already addresses or resolves language difficulties before entry into primary school and thus lays an important foundation for equal participation in school instruction;

32. therefore calls on national governments, as well as local and regional authorities, to place greater emphasis on integrating children and young people from a migrant background;

33. encourages local and regional authorities in particular to take whatever measures they can here within their remit;

Concrete measures proposed that can be taken by policy-makers to improve the educational situation of children and young people from a migrant background

34. explicitly welcomes the fact that in drawing up this Green Paper the European Commission has not simply described the situation of children and young people from a migrant background, but has also given an overview of the different policy options for addressing the problems that exist;

35. also welcomes, in the Commission working document accompanying the Green Paper (SEC(2009) 2173), the relatively comprehensive list of additional education policy initiatives for integrating children and young people with a migrant background, including references to documentation available on the internet, which gives a broad view of efforts by the individual Member States as well as countries outside Europe;

36. emphasises the role of local and regional authorities in seeking practicable solutions to achieve better integration of children and young people from a migrant background;

37. considers education efforts in early learning establishments and instruction during the first years of school to

be particularly decisive for the success at school of children and young people from a migrant background, since this period has a critical impact on the whole of a child's later educational path;

38. calls in this connection for more cooperation to be developed between schools and public libraries, in order to make children and young people more familiar with the world of reading and so support their linguistic development, as well as their feeling of involvement in society;

39. in this context advocates that nursery schools and schools place particular emphasis on providing early support for individual children and developing their self-esteem and autonomy through early childhood intercultural value guidance, where confidence-building experiences, forms of expression and ways of seeing are extremely important in processing the whole spectrum of possible experiences, so that as early as possible a basic system of meanings and values is fixed in children which enables them to find their way in a complex world and to deal with crises, change and transitions;

40. recommends to include the learning goal 'empathy', in the sense of social learning, in their teaching plans for nursery schools and primary schools, so as to enable children to easily identify with other people's ways of thinking and feeling and to show respect and openness towards the beliefs of others;

41. calls for particular attention to be paid to the gender perspective;

42. believes that the best way of resolving the existing problems of attainment differences among girls and boys from a migrant background is to implement a package of measures in which language learning is a horizontal activity across all educational stages;

43. also recommends that a positive image of 'migrant background' as a cross-disciplinary teaching concept be established in schools, so that schoolchildren can accept the migrant background of their own family or other classmates as something good and enriching;

44. stresses the need to provide advice to young people without a school-leaving qualification and their parents about educational and career options that are open to them so that they can later obtain a professional qualification;

45. draws attention to the fact that the relevant authorities at national, regional and local level could continue to set aside for education new funding that becomes available owing to the falling birth rate in the Member States, for improving the quality of education and equipping educational establishments;

46. recommends that an opinion-forming effort be mounted based on organising media campaigns with a view to integrating children, young people and adults from a migrant background, for example presenting the successful integration of public figures who are from a migrant background;

47. highlights migrants' right to cultivate their mother tongue and recommends that multilingualism to be promoted;

48. calls on local and regional authorities in their capacity as employers to train staff in intercultural skills and if necessary to increase the number of staff from a migrant background, taking into account their suitability, aptitude and performance and appropriately rewarding their linguistic and intercultural expertise;

Consideration of the issue at European level

49. concurs with the European Commission that responding to the interest of the Member States in European cooperation on integrating children and young people from a migrant background by presenting procedures which have proved effective at national, regional and municipal level could produce European added value;

50. notes in this connection, however, that the associated problems cannot be overcome at European level, as the Green Paper states, but can only be discussed there, since national, regional and local authorities are exclusively responsible for deciding whether to implement any policy measures;

51. calls on European local and regional authorities to consider carefully the extent to which actions under Community programmes, such as the Lifelong Learning programme (2007-2013) or the Structural Funds can be used to integrate children and young people from a migrant background or to promote intercultural dialogue, or how projects that are already in the planning stage can be adapted to relevant existing Community directives so that they have a real chance of being funded;

52. points here to the value of the European Fund for the Integration of Third-country Nationals and asks its members to lobby for this fund to be used at local and regional level to finance integration measures targeted at children and young people from a migration background;

53. expects adequate consideration to be given to the integration of children and young people with a migrant background in the draft strategic framework for European cooperation in the fields of education and training, announced by the European Commission for 2008, which is planned to replace the current work programme 'Education and Training 2010';

54. urges the European Commission to look at the following issues that are not covered by the Green Paper as part of a detailed examination of the matter at European level:

- increasing the uptake of education among children and young people from a migrant background;

- motivating the parents of children with a migrant background to make use of existing education opportunities;

- vocational training of children and young people from a migrant background (including aspects of careers advice and work-oriented promotion of language skills);

55. notes that the European Commission advocates the use of indicators and European benchmarks of educational attainment and school attendance of children and young people from a migrant background;

56. points out in relation to approving European benchmarks for education and training that the Presidency Conclusions of 5 May 2003 underlined the fact that European benchmarks are not the targets of individual countries and do not fix the decisions to be taken by individual governments, although national measures based on national priorities will contribute to achieving the benchmarks;

57. notes that in May 2007, under the German presidency, a coherent framework was recognised for indicators and benchmarks to monitor progress made towards achieving the Lisbon objectives in the sphere of education and training, and the fact that the Member States have not fallen in line with the European Commission's proposal to adopt new indicators for schools, for reasons of principle but also because of the administrative and financial costs associated with adopting new indicators;

58. stresses that as part of EU education cooperation setting European benchmarks should still be the exception and that the scope should not be extended beyond the existing five benchmarks, especially since it is becoming increasingly clear that in four out of five cases it will not be possible to achieve objectives set on a voluntary basis at European level by the year 2010;

59. insists that developing new indicators can create considerable additional administrative costs for national, regional and local authorities, and that in view of the Commission's efforts to reduce red tape this should only be envisaged if there is an exhaustive and favourable cost-benefit analysis;

60. in this context recommends that efforts be concentrated on existing indicators and European benchmarks;

61. therefore believes that European added value will result not from adoption of new indicators and benchmarks, but rather from drawing up a compendium of approaches that have proved effective in addressing educational attainment and school attendance of children and young people from a migrant background;

62. is convinced that such a compendium could be a key component of an intense exchange of information and experience on the shape of future EU education cooperation, and will strongly encourage autonomous framing of integration policy at the national, regional and local levels;

63. therefore calls on the Commission to draw up such a compendium — after evaluating the results of the consultation and discussing the matter with the relevant bodies at European level — with the involvement of local and regional authorities and if appropriate the Peer Learning Cluster on Access and Social Inclusion, containing concrete, practicable approaches to solving problems existing in the sphere of educational attainment and school attendance of children and young people from a migrant background;

64. also believes that the Commission must subsequently make the compendium available to the competent national, regional and local authorities; such a compendium could contain tried-and-tested approaches relating to the following areas:

- Children: earliest possible inclusion in early learning activities with comprehensive promotion of language skills and diagnosis of language problems, adapted to individual needs, as well participation in speech therapy programmes if necessary.
- Children and young people: language support measures during compulsory schooling at all levels of school, if necessary providing temporary language classes for children and young people with serious deficits in the language of instruction until they have caught up; setting up of networks of unpaid assistants to support children and young people in school and training situations.
- Parents: provision of systematic and targeted information about the opportunities of the education system through

multilingual information brochures issued by the relevant education authorities; expansion of language learning opportunities for migrant parents, in particular, given their crucial role, creating opportunities for mothers who do not have adequate knowledge of their children's language of instruction to improve their language skills; considering the possibility of employing and training multilingual volunteers to help parents overcome linguistic, cultural and social disadvantages.

- Teachers: detailed consideration of issues relevant to migration in teacher training programmes (basic and further training); encouraging people from a migrant background to take up teacher training so that they can provide an example to children and young people from a migrant background of the opportunities provided by education.
- Schools: provision of targeted support for schools with a high proportion of migrants, especially by allowing smaller class sizes, providing support to teachers through youth workers, organisation of after-school homework supervision, and creation of tutoring systems using older schoolchildren and students who may or may not come from a migrant background; where appropriate, development of school-specific intercultural profiles and demonstration of these in school life, with a particular focus on activity groups based on migrant languages.
- Youth and social workers: these should develop a stronger connection with schools in order to look after children and young people from families with a migrant background who are also socio-economically disadvantaged.

65. points to the increasing importance of e-learning, which is independent of time and space, offers new language learning opportunities and provides the opportunity to get to know people and cultures from very distant places; calls on the Commission to identify ways in which e-learning methods can be used to integrate children and young people from a migrant background;

66. attaches great importance to cooperation with international organisations (OECD, UNESCO) and calls for synergies to be strengthened in this sphere, especially with the Council of Europe;

The role of Directive 77/486/EEC on the education of the children of migrant workers

67. notes that the scope of Directive 77/486/EEC on the education of the children of migrant workers is limited to EU citizens and that according to the European Commission its implementation to date has been patchy;

68. notes that the Directive does not apply to third-country nationals and that the possibility exists for the Member States to manage certain issues that they consider to be particularly important with regard to integrating children and young people from a migrant background via bilateral agreements with other Member States or with third countries, and considers these factors to be important signs that neither the content of the Directive nor the instrument itself provide a convincing solution to trends in the current situation of migration in Europe;

69. notes that in its Green Paper the European Commission shows considerable doubts as to the appropriateness of maintaining the Directive;

70. in these circumstances, recommends to the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee that Directive 77/486/EEC on the education of the children of migrant workers be repealed.

Brussels, 13 February 2009.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Luc VAN DEN BRANDE
