

IV

(Notices)

NOTICES FROM EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS AND BODIES

COUNCIL

Council conclusions of 26 November 2009 on the education of children with a migrant background

(2009/C 301/07)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

HAVING REGARD TO

Council Directive 77/486/EEC on the education of the children of migrant workers from EU countries, which requires Member States to offer such children free tuition, including the teaching of the official language or one of the official languages of the host State, as well as to take appropriate measures to promote, in cooperation with States of origin, the teaching of the mother tongue and culture of the country of origin ⁽¹⁾;

the conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States on the establishment of common basic principles for immigrant integration policy in the European Union ⁽²⁾, one of which is that efforts in education are critical to preparing immigrants, and particularly their descendants, to be more successful and more active participants in society;

Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning, which includes support for projects relating to intercultural education and the integration of migrant pupils;

the conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on efficiency and equity in education and training ⁽³⁾, which invited Member States to ensure equitable education and training systems that are aimed at providing opportunities, access, treatment and outcomes that are independent of socio-economic background and other factors which may lead to educational disadvantage;

the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning, which highlights the importance of social and civic competences and of cultural awareness, as well as recommends that appropriate provision is made for those who due to educational disadvantages need particular support to fulfil their educational potential ⁽⁴⁾;

the European Council conclusions of 13 and 14 March 2008, which urged Member States to take concrete action to improve the achievement levels of learners with a migrant background ⁽⁵⁾;

the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum, which invited Member States to establish ambitious policies to promote the harmonious integration into their countries of immigrants, including specific measures to promote language learning ⁽⁶⁾;

the conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States on integration policies in the European Union ⁽⁷⁾, which included a call for the development of educational measures adapted to the needs of children with a migrant background and aimed at preventing school failure;

the conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 21 November 2008 on preparing young people for the 21st century: an agenda for European cooperation on schools ⁽⁸⁾, which invited Member States to ensure access to high quality educational opportunities and services, particularly for children and young people who may be disadvantaged by personal, social, cultural and/or economic circumstances,

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 199, 6.8.1977, p. 32.

⁽²⁾ Doc. 16238/1/04 REV 1.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 298, 8.12.2006, p. 3.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.

⁽⁵⁾ 7652/08, paragraph 15, p. 10.

⁽⁶⁾ Doc. 13440/08.

⁽⁷⁾ Doc. 15251/08.

⁽⁸⁾ OJ C 319, 13.12.2008, p. 20.

WELCOMING

the European Commission's Green Paper entitled 'Migration and Mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems', and its associated report on the consultation process conducted during the second half of 2008 ⁽¹⁾,

and NOTING that

for the purpose of these conclusions — the primary focus of which is on schools — the term 'with a migrant background' will be used particularly to describe the children of all persons living in an EU country where they were not born, irrespective of whether they are third-country nationals, citizens of another EU Member State or subsequently became nationals of the host Member State,

RECOGNISES that:

1. For generations migration has made a considerable contribution to European socio-economic development, and will continue to do so in the future. In today's context of increasing globalisation and demographic change, the successful integration of migrants into society remains a precondition for Europe's economic competitiveness and for social stability and cohesion.
2. Education has a key role to play not only in ensuring that children with a migrant background can fulfil their potential to become well-integrated and successful citizens, but also in creating a society which is equitable, inclusive and respectful of diversity. Yet many such children continue to fare less well in terms of educational outcomes, and issues relating to racial and ethnic discrimination and to social exclusion are to be found in all parts of the European Union. The presence of significant numbers of learners with migrant backgrounds in many Member States thus presents a number of challenges — but also valuable opportunities — for their education systems.
3. Integrating migrants is a collective endeavour requiring efforts on the part of the migrants themselves, and involving many different sectors of society in addition to the education sector. Cross-sectoral policy cooperation between, amongst others, relevant government departments, educational authorities, social services, healthcare services, housing authorities and asylum and immigration services, as well as dialogue with civil society, are essential to ensure an adequate level of support for children with a migrant background and their families.
4. While large numbers of children with a migrant background succeed in education, and indeed some are amongst the

highest achievers, there is clear and consistent evidence from both national indicators and international studies such as PISA ⁽²⁾ that the educational attainment of most migrant pupils tends to be significantly lower than that of their peers. This results in a greater incidence among such pupils of early school-leaving, lower levels of qualification and smaller numbers in higher education. Offering children with a migrant background a better chance of educational success can reduce marginalisation, exclusion and alienation.

5. Of particular concern is the situation of those for whom linguistic and cultural differences between home and school are combined with poor socio-economic circumstances. In such cases, the difficulties associated with low socio-economic status can be compounded by factors such as language barriers, low expectations, insufficient family and community support and a lack of suitable role models.
6. Such disadvantages — coupled with a lack of permeability within school systems and with quality differences between schools — may lead to a situation in which large numbers of children with a migrant background are clustered together in underperforming schools. Trends of this kind present school systems in the European Union with serious challenges, making it harder to attain high levels of achievement for all and a high degree of social cohesion.
7. Whilst the responsibility for setting education policies remains firmly a matter for individual Member States, the issues raised and challenges outlined in these conclusions are increasingly widely shared. There is thus clear potential for further support, research and cooperation at European level, using relevant Community programmes such as the Lifelong Learning Programme and the European Integration Fund, and using tools such as the open method of coordination in order to exchange good practice and promote mutual learning about policies and measures aimed at addressing educational disadvantage among children with a migrant background,

CONSIDERS that:

1. Education has an important contribution to make to the successful integration of migrants into European societies. Starting with early childhood education and basic schooling, but continuing throughout all levels of lifelong learning, targeted measures and greater flexibility are needed to cater for learners with a migrant background, whatever their age, and to provide them with the support and opportunities they need to become active and successful citizens, and empower them to develop their full potential. These measures should be delivered in a coordinated manner with policies in other fields addressing the needs of children with a migrant background and their families.

⁽¹⁾ Respectively doc. 11631/09 + ADD 1, and doc. 12594/09.

⁽²⁾ The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment.

2. Education systems which place a strong emphasis on both equity and quality, which work towards clear and common objectives and which favour inclusive approaches at all levels are likely to prove the most effective in responding to the particular needs of pupils with a migrant background, improving their educational performance whilst at the same time fostering social ties between them and their peers.
3. Cultural diversity in our societies should be welcomed as a source of vitality and enrichment. Whilst in no way weakening the primary focus on the cultural identity, core values and fundamental rights of the host country, promoting intercultural education in Europe's schools with a view to exchanging knowledge and deepening understanding of one another's cultures, as well as building mutual respect and combating prejudice will provide lasting benefits for all.
4. Approaches such as setting up or strengthening anti-discrimination mechanisms, increasing the permeability of pathways within school systems and removing barriers to individual progression through the system can help to combat segregation and contribute to higher achievement levels for migrant learners. Offering more personalised learning and individual support can benefit all pupils in the system and lead to higher quality for all. Raising the quality of provision in underperforming schools can improve opportunities for all pupils, including migrants.
5. Specialised training in managing linguistic and cultural diversity, and the development of intercultural competences, should be encouraged in order to support school authorities, school leaders, teachers and administrative staff in adapting to the needs, and realising the full potential, of schools or classes containing pupils with a migrant background. Consideration should also be given to issues such as how to make teaching methods, materials and curricula relevant to all pupils, irrespective of their origins, how to continue to attract and keep the best teachers in underperforming schools, how to strengthen the leadership function in such contexts, as well as how — in accordance with national procedures — to increase the number of teachers who themselves have migrant backgrounds.
6. The process of integration can be facilitated through the development of partnerships with local communities, including the families of pupils with a migrant background and migrant associations, thereby contributing to the development of schools as learning communities. By building a climate of mutual understanding, trust and cooperation, partnerships of this kind can contribute in a variety of ways, such as providing assistance with interpretation, serving as an interface — in some cases mediating — between schools and the community concerned, and developing positive links with the heritage culture and language. In this context, the provision of instruction in the host-country language(s) for the parents of pupils with a migrant background, as well as information sessions, can make a significant contribution to improving communication between schools and families and thus enhancing the conditions for successful social integration.
7. Proficiency in the official language (or one of the official languages) of the host country is a prerequisite for educational success and is key to both social and professional integration. Member States should consider developing specific provisions to support this, such as intensive language tuition for newly arrived pupils with a migrant background, additional support for those experiencing difficulties, and special courses to equip all teachers with the competence to teach children whose mother tongue is different to the language of instruction. Adapted provision within the curriculum — for instance, reinforced teaching of the host country language for pupils whose mother tongue is different — should also be supported.
8. Although the primary focus should remain on the host language(s), encouraging pupils to acquire or maintain knowledge of their heritage language can bring benefits at several levels: socially in terms of cultural identity and personal self-confidence, professionally in terms of future employability, but also educationally in terms of future learning. While resources for such learning may be limited, scope for it may be increased in various ways, for instance by means of bilateral agreements with the countries concerned and collaborative partnerships with the relevant local communities, or by making use of new technologies, for instance, to establish internet contacts or develop *e-twinning* initiatives.
9. As well as laying the foundations for later schooling, early childhood education can play a crucial role in integrating children with a migrant background, particularly by placing a strong focus on language development. Efforts should therefore be stepped up to ensure that socially disadvantaged families have adequate access to quality childcare and pre-school facilities.
10. Targeted support — such as extra teaching resources for schools in disadvantaged areas and the provision of more personalised instruction — can be used to counterbalance educational disadvantage and the negative effects of insufficient integration. Consideration should also be given to ways of providing additional educational support, for instance in the form of mentoring and tutoring, the provision of guidance to both pupils and parents on the opportunities available to them within the education system, or the organisation of learning and homework centres after regular classes in partnership with parent and community associations. Flexible arrangements are required for newly arrived migrants, particularly with regard to language learning. In this respect, there is a need not only for rapid and targeted intervention shortly after arrival in the host country, but also for sustained programmes of language support,

ACCORDINGLY INVITES THE MEMBER STATES to:

1. Take appropriate measures at their required level of responsibility — local, regional or national with a view to ensuring that all children are offered fair and equal opportunities, as well as the necessary support to develop their full potential, irrespective of background. In particular, these measures may include:

- developing an integrated policy approach for the achievement of these objectives,
- setting up, or strengthening, anti-discrimination mechanisms, with the aim of promoting social integration and active citizenship,
- increasing the permeability of education pathways and removing barriers within school systems,
- improving the quality of provision in schools and reducing differences between them, including through efforts to attract and keep the best teachers and to strengthen the leadership function in underperforming schools,
- increasing access to high quality early childhood education and care,
- offering more personalised learning and individual support, particularly for the children of migrants who have low educational attainment levels,
- providing specialised training in managing linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as in intercultural competences, for school leaders, teachers and administrative staff,
- developing adequate policies for teaching the host country language, as well as considering possibilities for pupils with a migrant background to maintain and develop their mother tongue,
- ensuring that curricula are of high quality and relevant to all pupils, irrespective of their origins, and taking into account the needs of children with a migrant background in teaching methods and materials,
- developing partnerships with migrant communities and stepping up efforts aimed at improving communication with parents with a migrant background,
- providing targeted support for pupils with a migrant background who also have special needs,

— collecting and analysing data in this area, with a view to informing policy-making,

— exchanging good practice in this field, with a view to improving policies and measures at the appropriate level.

2. Develop, within the context of the new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020'), and using the open method of coordination, mutual learning on best practices for the education of learners with a migrant background.

3. Make targeted use of the Lifelong Learning Programme, the European Social Fund and other resources such as the European Integration Fund, in order to develop and support projects relating to intercultural education and the education of learners with a migrant background,

INVITES THE COMMISSION to:

1. Facilitate and support cooperation among the Member States on the issues raised in these conclusions, including by identifying, exchanging, compiling and ensuring the effective dissemination of experience and good practice in the areas outlined above, and through the use of existing Community programmes.

2. Consider how, and by what means, the objectives of Council Directive 77/486/EEC can best be achieved in a context of migration which has changed significantly since its adoption.

3. Monitor the achievement gap between native learners and learners with a migrant background, using existing data and indicators.

4. Cooperate closely with other international organisations working on issues relating to education and migration, such as the Council of Europe, UNESCO and the OECD ⁽¹⁾.

5. Ensure that migration-related issues are adequately reflected in the Lifelong Learning Programme and other relevant Community programmes, the adult learning action plan and the Copenhagen process, as well as in other initiatives in the field of education and training, including higher education.

6. Ensure that issues relating to the education of children with a migrant background are adequately reflected in the social protection and social inclusion process.

⁽¹⁾ The right of participation of all Member States in such work should be ensured.