

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Immigration in the EU and integration policies: cooperation between regional and local governments and civil society organisations

(2006/C 318/24)

On 14 July 2005 the European Economic and Social Committee, acting under Rule 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an opinion on *Immigration in the EU and integration policies: cooperation between regional and local governments and civil society organisations*.

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 13 July 2006. The rapporteur was Mr Pariza Castaños.

At its 429th plenary session, held on 13 and 14 September 2006 (meeting of 13 September), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 181 votes to 7 with 8 abstentions.

1. Introduction

1.1 In 2002, the EESC drew up an own-initiative opinion on *Immigration, integration and the role of civil society* ⁽¹⁾ with the purpose of stimulating a political and social debate at Community level aimed at ensuring that integration policies are included as a basic component of common immigration and asylum policies.

1.2 One of the opinion's proposals was that the European Union should draw up a Community programme to promote the social integration of immigrants. The EESC believes that programmes need to be set up to promote the integration of new immigrants and of people arriving on the grounds of family reunification. The same also applies to refugees and asylum-seekers who, as well as having European status, are protected by international law.

1.3 The EESC held a conference for this same purpose on 9 and 10 September 2002, in cooperation with the Commission. It was attended by more than 200 representatives of the social partners and the most representative NGOs of the 25 Member States and of European networks. The aim of the conference was to involve civil society in promoting European integration policies.

1.4 The conclusions of the conference stated that 'the social partners and civil society organisations have a key role to play in integration', and that 'The European Union and its Member States should **foster the integration** of immigrants, minorities and refugees, **particularly at regional and local level**. A **European programme** to advance integration is needed' ⁽²⁾.

1.5 In 2003 the European Council set up the National Contact Points for integration, and instructed the Commission to present an annual report on migration and integration ⁽³⁾. The Commission also drew up a *Communication on immigration, integration and employment* ⁽⁴⁾ adopting a holistic approach to integration, which was endorsed by the EESC in its opinion at that time ⁽⁵⁾. In November 2004 the Commission published a *Handbook on Integration for policy-makers and practitioners* ⁽⁶⁾.

1.6 The Hague Programme, adopted by the European Council of 4 and 5 November 2004, underlines the need for greater coordination of national integration policies and EU initiatives in this field, and declares that EU policies should be based on common principles and clear means of evaluation.

1.7 A more developed policy and legislative environment for immigration policies is now in place. The present opinion represents a fresh contribution from the EESC, which focuses on the social and political players at regional and local level, since this is where challenges can most effectively be met and where policies can achieve the best results.

1.8 In conjunction with the drawing up of the opinion, the EESC held a hearing in Barcelona in order to exchange local and regional authorities best practice (a report on the hearing is in Appendix 2) and another in Dublin, in cooperation with the ILO and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working conditions, to analyse best practice on integration and anti-discrimination measures at the workplace (Appendix 3 contains a report on the hearing).

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 125 of 27.5.2002 (rapporteur: Mr Pariza Castaños; co-rapporteur: Mr Melícias).

⁽²⁾ See the conference General Conclusions.

⁽³⁾ COM(2004) 508 final.

⁽⁴⁾ COM(2003) 336 final.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ C 80 of 30.3.2004 (rapporteur: Mr Pariza Castaños).

⁽⁶⁾ http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/doc_centre/immigration/integration/doc/handbook_en.pdf.

2. The Common Agenda for Integration

2.1 On 1 September 2005, the Commission published a Communication on *A Common Agenda for Integration — Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union* ⁽⁷⁾, which the EESC welcomes and supports, as it sets out to flesh out the proposal made by the Committee in the 2002 opinion and conference.

2.2 The communication calls upon the Member States to step up their efforts concerning national strategies to integrate immigrants, and seeks *greater consistency* between these strategies and actions taken at EU level.

2.3 The present opinion is at the EESC's own initiative, and is therefore not specifically on the Commission's communication. It does, however, also incorporate the EESC's views on COM(2005) 389 final.

2.4 The Justice and Home Affairs Council of 19 November 2004 adopted a set of **Common Basic Principles** to underpin a coherent European framework for integration policies. The Commission is putting these principles into practice in the form of actions which 'should be seen as main elements of all national and EU integration policies' ⁽⁸⁾. The actions are organised around eleven principles ⁽⁹⁾. The EESC views these principles, fleshed out in the Common Agenda, as a proper basis for balanced and coherent integration policies at European and national levels.

2.5 The establishment of a **European Fund for the Integration of Third-country Nationals** ⁽¹⁰⁾ is proposed under the 2007-2013 financial perspectives, to be based on these common principles. The EESC supports the proposal ⁽¹¹⁾ and hopes it will be included in the future EU budget.

2.6 The Agenda suggests actions to be carried out at national level and others at Community level. The Commission wants to carry out continuous assessment of the programmes.

2.7 The Commission argues that 'with due consideration to the competence of Member States and of **their local and regional authorities**, it is essential to foster a more coherent EU approach to integration' ⁽¹²⁾.

2.8 The Commission had proposed an open method of coordination ⁽¹³⁾ for immigration policies, which was not accepted by the Council. The EESC ⁽¹⁴⁾, which supported the Commission's proposal, sees the network of national contact points, the common principles and the evaluation procedure for integration policies as a step forward in coordinating national policies, and as part of a common approach. The EESC proposes that the Commission and the Council adopt the open method of coordination, on the basis on these encouraging experiences.

2.9 Development must continue of a legal framework (common policy) governing the conditions of admission and stay for third-country nationals at European level. The Member States must properly transpose the directives on long-term residents and family reunification ⁽¹⁵⁾ which were adopted in 2003.

2.10 The close connection between a common 'immigration' policy and a common integration strategy is highlighted by the Commission. However, the directive on the admission of economic migrants has still not been adopted. The EESC ⁽¹⁶⁾ agrees with the European Commission's view that 'any future migration instruments should take into account equality of treatment and rights for migrants' ⁽¹⁷⁾. The Commission has announced a second edition of the Handbook on Integration, an integration website, the creation of a European Integration Forum, and the reinforcement of the annual reports on migration and integration. The EESC supports these aims, and is willing to cooperate with the Commission.

2.11 The EESC firmly supports the implementation of the Agenda, and recalls its views as stated in an earlier opinion: 'The EESC proposes that the Commission could manage a European integration programme, equipped with sufficient economic resources and within the framework of coordination of national policies, and stresses how important it is that the Council grant the Commission the political, legislative and budgetary means needed to promote the integration of immigrants. The EESC highlights the importance of establishing positive and effective immigrant arrival programmes in cooperation with civil society organisations' ⁽¹⁸⁾.

2.12 In addition, the EESC also proposes that the EU dedicate adequate funds to humanitarian conditions for the many undocumented migrants arriving in the countries of southern Europe. The EU Member States must display a sense of solidarity and responsibility if Europe is to act with a common policy.

⁽⁷⁾ COM(2005) 389 final.

⁽⁸⁾ See COM(2005) 389 final, point 2.

⁽⁹⁾ Appendix 1.

⁽¹⁰⁾ See COM(2005) 123 final.

⁽¹¹⁾ See EESC opinion on management of migration flows, OJ C 88 of 11.4.2006 (rapporteur: Ms Le Nouail-Marlière).

⁽¹²⁾ See COM(2005) 389 final, point 3.

⁽¹³⁾ COM(2001) 387 final.

⁽¹⁴⁾ OJ C 221 of 17.9.2002 (rapporteur: Ms zu Eulenburg).

⁽¹⁵⁾ Directives 2003/109/EC and 2003/86/EC.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Opinion on the Green Paper on an EU approach to managing economic migration (rapporteur: Mr Pariza Castaños), OJ C 286 of 17.11.2005.

⁽¹⁷⁾ See COM(2005) 389 final, point 3.2.

⁽¹⁸⁾ OJ C 80 of 30.3.2004, point 1.10 (rapporteur: Mr Pariza Castaños).

3. Integration policies

3.1 Integration is a two-way process, founded on the rights and obligations of third country nationals and the host society, enabling immigrants to participate fully. In another opinion, the EESC defined integration as 'bringing immigrants' rights and duties, as well as access to goods, services and means of civic participation progressively into line with those of the rest of the population, under conditions of equal opportunities and treatment' ⁽¹⁹⁾.

3.2 This two-way approach means that integration applies not only to immigrants, but also to the host society. It is not so much a question of the integration of immigrants into the host society, but rather with the host society: in other words, both sides must integrate. Integration policies must shape both sides, the purpose being to achieve a society in which all citizens have the same rights and obligations, and share the values of a democratic, open and pluralist society.

3.3 Immigrants have a duty to understand and respect the cultural values of the host society, which in turn has a duty to understand and respect the cultural values of immigrants. Cultural issues are often manipulated for discriminatory purposes. Integration does not mean the cultural adjustment of immigrants to the host society. This mistaken attitude has led to a number of failures. European societies are pluralist from the cultural point of view, and this trend is set to be further reinforced in the future as a result of increasing and more widespread immigration.

3.4 It should not be forgotten that several Member States have sizeable minority populations of various national or cultural origins, whose rights must also be upheld and guaranteed.

3.5 The EESC is convinced that cultural diversity is a feature of a pluralist and democratic Europe, as is the principle of religious neutrality on the part of the State. Immigration from non-EU countries contributes new ingredients to our diversity, enriching our societies socially and culturally. Culture in human societies cannot be understood as a fixed entity, but rather as a process in permanent flux which is enriched by the most diverse contributions. An administration that applies the principles of independence and neutrality towards religions helps to create a good relationship between immigrants and the host society. European societies need to promote intercultural training programmes. The UNESCO convention on cultural diversity ⁽²⁰⁾ is a crucial tool for European policies.

⁽¹⁹⁾ OJ C 125 of 27.5.2002, point 1.4 (rapporteur: Mr Pariza Castaños).

⁽²⁰⁾ Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. See http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=11281&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.

3.6 The social integration of immigrants also means a process of putting their rights and duties on an equal footing, and is closely linked with the fight against discrimination. Discrimination is an illegal means of undermining personal rights. The right to family life is not sufficiently guaranteed in some Member States due to highly restrictive laws on family reunification. Neither is the directive adopted by the Council appropriate ⁽²¹⁾.

3.7 The principle of subsidiarity indicates that integration policies, within a coherent European framework, are not the sole responsibility of the Member State governments. Such policies will be more fruitful if regional and local authorities are involved in them, and if they cooperate actively with civil society organisations. The EESC proposes that local and regional authorities step up their efforts and promote new integration policies.

3.8 In keeping with the powers which they have in the various Member States, local and regional authorities possess political, legislative and budgetary instruments which they must put to good use in integration policies.

3.9 Both immigrants and host societies must display an integration-friendly attitude. The social partners and civil society organisations must be actively involved in integration policies and anti-discrimination measures.

3.10 The fundamental challenge facing civil society organisations is to foster an integration-friendly attitude among European host societies. The social partners, human rights organisations, cultural and sports associations, faith communities, neighbourhood associations, educational communities, the media and so on must be at the forefront of integration. To do this, they must open their own doors and seek to get immigrants involved.

3.11 Discrimination, racism and xenophobia are on the rise in some small sectors of European societies, fuelled by some irresponsible politicians, and by elements in the media which amplify the social impact of such behaviour. However, many of Europe's civil society organisations are engaged in the social and political struggle against such behaviour.

⁽²¹⁾ See Directive 2003/86/EC and the EESC opinions in OJ C 204 of 18.7.2000 (rapporteur: Ms Cassina) and OJ C 241 of 7.10.2002 (rapporteur: Mr Mengozzi).

3.12 Together with civil society organisations, local and regional authorities bear a responsibility to inform immigrants and the host society about their rights and duties.

3.13 Immigrant organisations and communities are playing a key role in integration. These bodies must also generate an impetus for integration among their members and step up their links with host society organisations.

3.14 Local and regional authorities must support the work of these organisations and consult them before taking policy decisions.

3.15 Anti-discrimination directives⁽²²⁾ have been adopted and transposed into national law. The Committee hopes it will be informed about the reports evaluating their impact and results.

3.16 However, many immigrants and their descendants, or people belonging to ethnic or cultural minorities, suffer from workplace discrimination (with equal vocational qualifications): greater difficulty in gaining employment, low-quality jobs and more frequent dismissal.

3.17 It is essential that the social partners at local and regional level combat these discriminatory practices, which infringe European legislation and are obstacles to integration. Discrimination at work is also an obstacle to successful businesses. Workplace integration, ensuring equal treatment free of work-related discrimination vis-à-vis national workers, is a prerequisite for business success and social integration⁽²³⁾. Appendix 3 contains a report on the hearing held in Dublin to examine best practice in employment integration.

4. Regional and local integration programmes

4.1 It was, in the past, believed in some Member States that there was no need for integration policies, since they considered immigrants to be no more than 'guests' who would return to their countries of origin when they finished working. This mistaken approach has caused numerous problems of segregation and social marginalisation, which present policies are attempting to resolve.

4.2 The thinking in other Member States was for years that immigrant integration would happen easily and automatically, without active policies. However, segregation and marginalisation have solidified with time, triggering serious social conflicts. New policies are now setting out to put right the problems of the past.

4.3 It must be remembered that immigration through irregular channels is an obstacle to integration policies, since undocumented immigrants are in an insecure, highly vulnerable position. Procedures have been introduced in some Member States to regularise the residency status of such people, thereby promoting their integration.

4.4 Although some doubts about subsidiarity persist in the Council of the European Union, most leaders believe that coherent integration policies need to be promoted at all levels: Community, national, regional and local.

4.5 The EESC considers that if such policies are to be effective, they must be proactive and be pursued as part of a coherent and holistic approach. Authorities often work only reactively, once problems have appeared and are difficult to resolve.

4.6 Integration is a process with many dimensions, and must draw in all the different public administrations and social players. European, national, regional and local authorities should draw up programmes reflecting the scope of their respective powers. In order to guarantee the efficacy and overall consistency of the programmes and actions, they must be properly backed and coordinated.

4.7 The general public and local authorities suffer the consequences of mistaken government policies. Urban authorities are the first to bear the consequences of these policies' failures. As a result, numerous local and regional governments have long been pursuing their own introduction and integration policies. Their experiences vary widely: some offer examples of best practice, while others have failed.

4.8 The scale of the problems, and of present and future migration flows, suggest that the challenges are great — but the economic means and political work of local and regional authorities are not enough.

4.9 The EESC believes that local and regional governments should, in cooperation with civil society organisations, draw up integration plans and programmes which lay down the objectives and allocate the necessary resources. 'Paper policies' — programmes without funding — are ineffective.

4.10 In the EESC's view, it is reasonable to earmark a part of the economic benefits generated by immigration for introduction and integration policies.

4.11 It is highly important that the most representative immigrant associations are consulted when integration programmes and plans are being drafted.

⁽²²⁾ Directives 2000/43/EC and 2000/78/EC.

⁽²³⁾ Cf the positive work of the social partners in Ireland, as referred to in Appendix 3.

4.12 A number of municipalities and regions in Europe have participatory and advisory bodies which bring civil society organisations together with the authorities in framing and implementing integration policies.

5. Instruments, budgets and evaluation

5.1 Adequate budgets must be allocated to local and regional integration plans and programmes, and they must be equipped with their own management and evaluation instruments.

5.2 There are many examples of European cities and regions which have dedicated bodies and services, with wide-ranging policy and technical content.

5.3 Many cities also have advisory and participatory bodies for civil society organisations. A number of forums and consultative committees have been set up, in which civil society organisations and immigrant associations take part.

5.4 The EESC sees these as examples of best practice which should be extended across the EU.

5.5 Some cities also provide examples of specialist services for immigrants, which implement practical aspects of integration plans.

5.6 There is an on-going debate about the risk of segregation arising from immigrants being dealt with by specialist services set up for them. The EESC believed that segregation in the use of public services is to be avoided, although dedicated services may sometimes be necessary, especially for the initial reception of immigrants on arrival.

5.7 The EESC is convinced of the necessity of involving the social partners and other civil society organisations in drawing up and operating regional and local integration plans and programmes.

5.8 Encouraging cooperation between the local and regional authorities of European host societies and their counterparts in the countries of origin is also helpful. There are examples of good practice which should be replicated.

5.9 Some authorities only allocate funds to reduce conflict once it has broken out. Integration policies must be proactive if they are to be effective.

5.10 Integration poses a challenge to European societies. Recent events in a number of countries have highlighted that

the aims are not being met. Although circumstances vary between Member States and some problems are country-specific, policies for equal treatment, integration and combating discrimination need to be improved throughout Europe.

5.11 The EESC proposes that the various public administrations, at European, national, regional and municipal level — in keeping with each country's particular practices — prepare integration programmes, with adequate funding, which have a proactive approach.

5.12 These programmes need to possess evaluation systems, with accurate indicators and transparent procedures. Civil society must be involved in evaluation procedures.

6. Objectives

6.1 The issues and approaches which must be covered by regional and local integration programmes are highly diverse; the most important are as follows:

6.2 *Observing the actual situation.* The reality of immigration and the position of minorities in a given territory must be analysed by the institutions in order to devise appropriate future actions.

6.3 *Initial arrival.* Establishment of reception centres; health care and legal assistance; temporary accommodation for specific cases; introductory language courses; information on the laws and customs of the host society; help in gaining initial employment, etc. Particular attention needs to be given to minors and other vulnerable persons under this action.

6.4 *Language teaching.* Local and regional authorities must pursue active language learning policies, since adequate knowledge of the host society language is necessary for integration. Language courses should be held in locations close to the places of residence, and with highly flexible timetables. It is incumbent upon the authorities to ensure that all immigrants have the opportunity to attend courses.

6.5 *Access to employment.* Work is certainly a priority aspect of integration. Public employment services should operate appropriate programmes: vocational training courses, careers advice, etc.

6.6 Workplace discrimination is a major obstacle in the path of integration. Partners at local and regional level should be active players in opposing discrimination.

6.7 *Access to housing.* Discrimination-free access to decent housing is one of the greatest challenges for local and regional policy. Authorities must prevent the formation of run-down urban ghettos in which large numbers of immigrants are concentrated. To this end, urban planning policies must be adjusted in good time. Improving the quality of life in such areas must be a priority.

6.8 *Education.* Education systems should ensure that the children of immigrants have access to high-quality schools. Over-concentration of these pupils in poor quality 'ghetto-schools' — as frequently occurs — must be prevented. School education, at all stages, lays down the foundations for the integration of new generations.

6.9 Education should reflect the internal diversity of European societies. Intercultural mediators should be available and teaching resources should be boosted in order to resolve linguistic and cultural difficulties.

6.10 Adult education programmes should draw in the immigrant population, especially women. Training for employment is vital to facilitating access to employment for immigrants.

6.11 *Access to health.* Access to health and health care for immigrants should be promoted. The help of intercultural mediator services may be necessary in some circumstances.

6.12 *Adjustment of social services.* Immigration often places demands on social services for which they are not prepared. Adjustments must be made in line with the new state of diversity.

6.13 *Training for the professionals.* Those working in social services, education, police forces, health services and all other public services should receive new training courses so that they can deal appropriately with immigrant and minority populations.

6.14 *Diversity is a good thing.* Cultural programmes ought to recognise cultural diversity. Diversity is a typical feature of present-day European cities. Religious beliefs are also diverse.

6.15 There is also a need for local authorities to promote *learning to coexist*, and encourage everyone, of whatever origin, to adjust to the lifestyles of the cities in which they live. Both immigrant and host society populations must play a part in this process of learning, in order to increase understanding between cultures and foster social integration.

6.16 Everyone should be able to exercise the right to live with their family: this is one of the fundamental rights recognised at international level by human rights conventions. In spite of this, many national laws — and even the European family reunification directive ⁽²⁴⁾ — fail to provide sufficient guarantees for many immigrants that they can exercise the right to family life, although this is a very beneficial factor for integration policies.

6.17 *The gender dimension.* The gender dimension must also be mainstreamed in all integration policies. Policies on training for employment, aimed at facilitating access to employment, are of especial importance.

6.18 *Public participation.* Access to means of civic participation is one of the key components of integration. Citizenship rights and the right to vote in municipal elections must be guaranteed for third-country nationals who are stable or long-term residents, as the EESC has proposed in several opinions ⁽²⁵⁾.

7. New strategies for local and regional authorities (some conclusions from the Barcelona hearing)

7.1 *The need for networking and coordination between different institutions*

7.1.1 Networking and inter-institutional coordination is crucial, and takes two forms: horizontal, between local authorities; and vertical, between the local, regional and state levels of government. The challenges of immigration and integration cannot be met by individual authorities in isolation. The EESC proposes that the public authorities improve coordination arrangements and that evaluation procedures should be introduced for networking. The EESC would also like to forge closer cooperation links with the Committee of the Regions to promote integration policies.

7.1.2 Some regions, such as Catalonia and Schleswig-Holstein, reported that one of the central planks of their approach has been to involve local authorities in planning their initiatives. The Campania region also pointed to its decision to forge networks with trade unions, church bodies, etc. Local authorities, for their part, emphasised the importance of networking with specialist bodies in areas such as initial reception.

⁽²⁴⁾ See Directive 2003/86/EC and the EESC opinions in OJ C 204 of 18.7.2000 (rapporteur: Ms Cassina) and OJ C 241 of 7.10.2002 (rapporteur: Mr Mengozzi).

⁽²⁵⁾ See EESC opinion on Access to European Union citizenship, OJ C 208 of 3.9.2003 (rapporteur: Mr Pariza Castaños).

7.1.3 Experience with networking between local government and the European level is growing. *Eurocities* was set up in 1986, and now has a membership of 123 European cities. It is organised into working groups, one of which deals with immigration and integration. A number of the cities present at the hearing, such as Rotterdam and Leeds, belong to this working group. As well as exchanging experience and best practices, the working groups promote European projects involving a number of cities.

7.1.4 Another more recent network, ERLAI, is specifically geared to immigration and integration. 26 local and regional authorities have already joined the network. It also sets out to swap information and experience, and to carry out joint actions and projects.

7.1.5 Other ventures are also being promoted by a range of bodies. The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions also works through a network of cities to coordinate integration policies.

7.1.6 At European level, the purpose of the network of National Contact Points for integration, coordinated by the European Commission, is also to exchange experience. It helped to draw up the Handbook on Integration ⁽²⁶⁾ and the annual report on migration and integration ⁽²⁷⁾.

7.2 Integration plans and civil society participation

7.2.1 Those local and regional authorities which have drawn up comprehensive plans, and which have integration management services, obtain better results than those which only mount one-off actions. Planning, provision of resources and management instruments are necessary if immigration and integration are to be addressed.

7.2.2 The EESC believes it is of great importance that civil society organisations play a part in drawing up policies and implementing actions. If an integration plan is to succeed, it is important for civil society to be involved. The Schleswig-Holstein region has understood this, and brought in social players and a range of bodies in a broad debate on integration before adopting its project. As a result, society was alerted to the need for integration policies. Other cities and regions (including Copenhagen, Barcelona and Helsinki) also offer examples of participatory processes.

7.3 European Fund for Integration

7.3.1 The effectiveness of local and regional authorities is enhanced when they can rely on economic support from Member State governments: integration policies require economic resources and the Member States should make a greater commitment. The Schleswig-Holstein region mentioned this aspect, indicating that much of its work has been directed to confronting the German federal government with the need to

respond to this requirement, having achieved encouraging results in this regard.

7.3.2 Other local authorities, as in the cases of Ljubljana and Brescia, have pointed out that the scant support they receive from their respective governments prevents them from implementing more wide-reaching policies in this sphere. The problem is worse still where regional governments have few own resources. This was mentioned by the French Midi-Pyrénées region.

7.3.3 The European Fund for Integration, approved by the Council and Parliament for the 2007-2013 period, is essential, since it will mobilise significant economic resources for integration policies and help to ensure that policies are carried out within a coherent and comprehensive EU framework, which respects subsidiarity. The new Member States have voiced particular interest in this fund. The EESC again expresses its support for the establishment of the fund, and urges the Commission to consult the Committee when preparing the relevant regulation.

7.4 Specialist services must not generate segregation

7.4.1 The creation of dedicated services for immigrants must not be allowed to breed segregation. The Budapest representative, for example, reported that in Hungary, local authorities have family support, early childhood, employment etc. services, which immigrants — along with all other citizens — must use. In general, however, all cities and regions which have drawn up integration policies have done so by developing specific plans and providing dedicated resources and services. The Helsinki representative argued that 'specialist services for immigrants should not be necessary — but they are', showing that support from general services alone cannot cope with the shortcomings, disadvantages, difficulties and special needs experienced by immigrants.

7.4.2 Specific plans, projects and resources are needed for immigration and integration. The problem of how to move forward from this point towards a more normal situation continues to give cause for concern: how to prevent specificity generating segregation? The Brescia representative pointed out that the immigration-related services that had been set up 'are not parallel, but complementary, services'. They do not replace the other ordinary services, to which immigrants must apply for all the matters for which such services are responsible.

7.4.3 Copenhagen also emphasised that one of the concerns of its Integration Council is that its work should not legitimise any form of segregation of immigrant or minority populations. The aim is for its actions to be inclusive, encouraging a closer relationship and integration between all sectors of the population.

⁽²⁶⁾ http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/doc_centre/immigration/integration/doc/handbook_en.pdf.

⁽²⁷⁾ COM(2004) 508 final.

7.4.4 It is important, in this regard, that the local population should not see initiatives geared to immigrants as a form of privilege, which could accentuate prejudice and foster segregation. Catalonia is aware of this, indicating that when implementing tailor-made actions for the immigration population, great care must be taken regarding the possible feelings of rejection this may trigger among the local population. The steps taken by local and regional governments concerning immigrants must be clearly and carefully explained.

7.5 *Integration objectives*

7.5.1 A number of cities and regions contributed their ideas regarding integration as a concept, demonstrating that this is an on-going debate in Europe, since it contains differing political and legal cultures, as well as differing models for integration.

7.5.2 Following a major debate, the Schleswig-Holstein region argued that integration should focus on three central aspects: equal participation, equal rights and duties, and inclusive, anti-discriminatory measures involving both immigrants and the host society.

7.5.3 This inclusive line is followed by the *Misericórdia* church-based social work organisation in Portugal, which directs integration policies in the country. The emphasis is mainly on equality policies and on facilitating access to Portuguese nationality.

7.5.4 Barcelona identified three areas of action: promoting equality (recognition of rights, promotion of equal opportunities and treatment); recognising cultural diversity; and promoting coexistence (facilitating initiatives for social cohesion and preventing the growth of parallel societies between the local population and immigrant groups).

7.5.5 A major debate was launched in Rotterdam in 2004, challenging the integration model so far followed. The need for the debate arose from the observation that although active integration policies had been implemented for years, society was becoming fragmented and a process of segregation was under way (particularly concerning the Muslim population). The most intensive discussions centred on the 'us and them' attitude which had permeated society.

7.5.6 The *European Liaison Committee for Social Housing* couched the debate on integration in terms of removing inequalities and equal opportunities. Their work focused on housing, and they explained that discrimination in this area was one of the main causes factors in the segregation of immigrant populations.

7.5.7 The EESC is convinced that the 11 common basic principles (set out in Appendix 1) governing the European integration programme have a proper and balanced focus. The majority of participants at the Barcelona hearing agreed with this view.

8. **New challenges for employment integration** (some of the conclusions of the Dublin hearing)

8.1 Through their work, immigrants make a positive contribution to Europe's economic development and social well-being. The EESC considers that immigration in Europe can provide new opportunities for company competitiveness, working conditions and social well-being.

8.2 Employment is a key part of the integration process, because decent jobs are vital to immigrants' self-sufficiency, and they enhance social relations and mutual understanding with the host society. The EESC proposes that integration into the labour market should take place on a level playing field, without discrimination between workers from the host country and immigrants, taking the necessary professional requirements into account.

8.3 Europe's migrant workers must be treated fairly, because they are protected by international human rights conventions and the principles and laws enshrined in the ILO conventions. The EESC reiterates its proposal that EU Member States sign up to the UN's 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

8.4 The EU directives on equal treatment in employment and equal treatment irrespective of racial or ethnic origin are essential legal instruments in shaping legislation and practice in the Member States in combating discrimination and fostering employment integration.

8.5 In the field of employment, legislation and public policies must complement one another through cooperation with the social partners, because integration into the labour market is also an issue of society's attitudes and of commitment on the part of trade unions and employers.

8.6 Public employment services must boost programmes to help immigrants find work and these programmes might include: helping with the recognition of professional qualifications, improving language learning and occupational training, and providing adequate information on employment systems in the host country.

8.7 At grass-roots level, unions, employers' organisations, immigrant associations and other civil society organisations play a key role in conveying information and in helping immigrants to find employment. Social organisations are actively involved across Europe in helping immigrants and their children to find employment by means of vocational training courses, employment advice, support for small business start-ups, etc.

8.8 Companies are increasingly benefiting from the opportunities and growing diversity brought by the integration of immigrants into the labour market. The EESC considers that companies could help to raise awareness within the host society against discrimination, and provide employment contracts that are not xenophobic and do not encourage exclusion.

8.9 Procedures must be set up based on the planning of migratory flows, which should be carried out in the source countries and should reflect the real possibilities for labour integration and, therefore, of social integration.

8.10 Poor quality employment is also a factor for discrimination, when immigrants are used as the 'most vulnerable' workforce available.

8.11 Trade unions sometimes demonstrate corporatist tendencies, only defending a few vested interests and excluding immigrants. The EESC considers that trade unions must welcome immigrant workers into their ranks and help them to attain representative and management positions. Numerous trade unions implement best practices which guarantee that workers enjoy equal rights, regardless of their origin or nationality.

8.12 Employers' associations face a major challenge in terms of ensuring transparency in the labour markets. The EESC considers that, together with the trade unions, they must cooperate with regional and local public authorities to avoid situations of discrimination and to foster attitudes that favour integration.

8.13 The social partners, who are key players in the operation of the labour markets, and who are cornerstones of Europe's economic and social life, have an important role to play in integration. In the context of collective bargaining, they must accept their share of the responsibility for integrating immigrants, eliminating any direct or indirect discrimination

from collective agreements and from employment laws and practices.

8.14 There are many examples of good practice amongst the social partners and civil society organisations in Europe, which the EESC would like to see more widely adopted. At the Dublin hearing, positive experiences in businesses, trade unions, employers' associations and social organisations were looked at, and some that the Committee wishes to highlight are: the commitments given by the social partners in Ireland to manage diversity within companies and to combat discrimination, and the agreement reached by the social partners in Spain to legalise irregular employment and immigration and to manage labour migration through cooperation and social dialogue.

8.15 The EESC believes that active policies and new commitments on the part of the social partners are needed, in order to foster social attitudes that encourage integration, equal treatment and the efforts to combat discrimination in the workplace. European social dialogue can provide an appropriate framework enabling the social partners to give new commitments as they see fit.

8.16 European social dialogue is the exclusive responsibility of the social partners; the ETUC and UNICE have drafted the agenda for European social dialogue and the EESC hopes that the objectives it sets out will be attained.

8.17 The EESC can form a permanent forum for dialogue on good practices in the areas of integration and immigration is set to continue working in cooperation with the Dublin Foundation and the ILO to foster the development in Europe of integration-friendly policies and practices. It will organise further meetings and forums bringing together the social partners and other civil society organisations with the aim of examining and exchanging instances of current best integration practice in Europe.

Brussels, 13 September 2006.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Anne-Marie Sigmund
