

## PUBLIC SERVICE AND INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

### **Report on the preparations of working group ‘B’**

#### **‘Promoting the integration of migrants through local administration public services’**

This paper has been drafted by a small group of participants - Gema GARCIA de CELIS (SPAIN, CSI-F), Lajos MAYER (HUNGARY, MKKSZ), Erny REUTER (LUXEMBOURG, FGFC) and Urs STAUFFER (SWITZERLAND, ZV) - all of whom come from several of CESI's affiliates. It is intended to serve as the basis for debates in workshop B organised by CESI – Europe Academy in Vienna.

*The goal of the working group and the workshop is to carve out the role and needs of local public service providers in promoting integration. At a preparatory meeting, held in July 2011, participants in the working group debated the core aspects of promoting the integration of migrants through the public service at local administration level and, through the exchange of national experiences and measures, drafted the following questions and observations to serve as an introductory framework to the debate in workshop B, to take place at the symposium held by CESI-Europe Academy.*

#### **What does integration policy aim to achieve?**

Integration policies aim, in many cases, to solve social problems, such as high unemployment, a low level of academic success, insufficient knowledge of the national language and discrimination. A lack of integration is not just costly; it also harbours the potential to cause social tensions leading to the danger of social divisions. Integration policies therefore correspond to the fundamental interest of the host society and do not amount to an altruistic measure on its part.

#### **How are local public services connected to the notion of integration?**

The public service at local administrative level plays a central role in community life. Migrants enjoying an equal share in community life and being able to participate in this life on an equal footing remain the key characteristic of successful integration. At the same time,

public services at local level encompass a broad spectrum of tasks, although structural integration policies focus chiefly on services related to the labour market, services related to education and social services, particularly those pertaining to the housing market and health services. A particular challenge for integration policies is, in many cases, posed by the need to fashion public services to meet the needs of their users, if migrants are to enjoy an equal share in the services and the services are to promote integration at all.

The concept of equal opportunities is an integral part of integration. Equal access to public services must therefore be guaranteed. Communication and comprehension are key conditions for people to avail themselves of the services in question – both of which can already become apparently insurmountable hurdles to migrants. State-provided interpretation provides a temporary solution, but, in the long term, learning the national language, which is in itself an important indicator of successful integration, is something to be aimed for. The national language has a key role to play in helping migrants integrate and learning it should therefore not be merely an option. Moreover, language skills serve as a springboard into education, which is primarily initiated at local level at various stages in life. Integrating into the labour market in the host country is also often conditional upon the migrant being able to demonstrate a command of the national language. Being part of the local labour market strengthens the migrant's chances of being accepted into the local society and promotes integration. Offers of support, both in the field of further education and job placement, are offered at local level through public administration.

For migrants to be able to avail themselves of all that the public service provides requires these services to be provided in a way which takes sufficient account of the users and their needs.

### **What challenges are posed by the need to provide customised public services?**

Providing customised public services calls for the analysis of potential users and their needs. A challenge lies in the heterogeneity of migrants. The commonality conjured up in the uniform term *migrants* is, for the most part, reduced to the aspect of immigration. What is more, migrants are not a group with uniform structures and needs. Their cultural background, the societal systems in their countries of origin and mother tongues all differ. Equally, personal characteristics, such as level of education and training, age and family status, in particular, should be taken into account as differentiating criteria.

In contrast, when one considers geographical aspects, one can observe that migrants from the same countries of origin choose to settle in large numbers both in specific Member States as well as in specific areas and municipalities within these countries. This makes it possible for local service providers to define user groups and analyse the related needs.

The range of services offered must then also be used by its target group, i.e. the target group must be informed of the services on offer and things must be presented in such a way as to ensure that the migrants accept to use the services. Here, the inclusion or rather the cooperation of public administration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which

advocate the interests of migrants makes sense. Collaboration can take place both at the stage of planning the provision of the service as well as when it comes to implementing the range of services offered. Ideally, the range of services offered by NGOs would therefore add to those provided by the public authorities.

### **What challenges arise for public authorities employees?**

Tailor-made services calls for motivated and well-trained public service employees, who can adapt in a flexible way to new situations and procure tailored solutions. Language barriers and cultural differences need to be overcome as part of this process. This doesn't necessarily have to happen through the development of distinct skills, such as specific cultural or language knowledge. Rather, what is called for is for structures to be created which assist these aims. Central interpretation and translation services, as well as mediators with cultural training, for example in cooperating with NGOs, could be sensible facilities here. At any rate, it is essential to continually provide further training for public service workers, in order for existing structures also to be used in a sensible fashion.

The acceptance of structures and further training measures through public service workers and the ability of these workers to tailor the aforementioned structures and measures to meet specific needs are core conditions for their efficient and effective implementation. To guarantee they are accepted and meet specific needs, those targeted must already be included at the planning stage when it comes to creating structures and devising the range of further training to be provided.

Increasing austerity budgets pose a particular challenge to the implementation of appropriately tailored services, with the result that there is scarcely any room for manoeuvre when it comes to new services or reorganising existing services, when this reorganisation generates added costs. Even necessary further training measures for public service workers are falling victim to austerity measures due to increasing cost pressure. At the same time, people often fail to take account of long-term costs, which are occasioned by a lack of integration.

Promoting integration through local services cannot be accomplished without the corresponding budget funds.

In order to promote integration, what is called for, alongside the willingness to integrate and the corresponding supportive offer of assistance from the public authorities, is the readiness of the host society to help migrants to integrate. In this respect, too, local authorities can be the point of departure for the acceptance of cumulative measures in the field of educational, social and cultural local facilities.