

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

### **Minutes of the preparatory work of Working Group ‘A’ “The role of public services’ staff in direct contact with migrants”**

This document was written up by a small group of CESI participants representing various trade unions, countries and sectors. The aim is for this document to act as a base for the exchange which will take place at the Vienna Symposium.

Reminder: in this particular case, CESI wishes to focus on the integration of legal/documented migrants as users of public services in their respective host countries.

The decent reception and the full integration of legal migrants in our European societies are both a duty and a necessity for European societies. For migrants, integration is a right and a duty which must be supported by the host countries’ policies and public services.

Public service staff responsible for issues linked to migration is the first to deal with migrants’ reception. However, nowadays, most public service staff is in contact with the migrant public, whether only occasionally or on a daily basis. Therefore, this staff plays a crucial role in the integration of migrants. But only few of the staff has been specifically trained to deal with this public, whose needs, expectations and cultures can be quite different to those of the host countries.

On the basis of these aspects, and with the aim of improving both the employees’ working conditions and the migrants’ reception, the participants of the first Working Group focusing on *Public services’ staff in direct contact with migrants* have selected the following issues to be discussed with CESI representatives:

- In addition to the staff directly in charge of the reception of migrants, the numerous employees whose daily tasks involve interaction with other cultures (e.g. teachers, nurses, police officers, educational staff...) should receive intercultural training. This would improve both the level of quality of the services provided to migrants and the well-being of the employees concerned. The participants of this Working Group are of the opinion that it is the employer’s responsibility to set up such a training scheme. The trade unions, however, must also play their part in the definition of the needs of

such training and of the contents of this type of scheme, as well as in raising awareness amongst staff about its importance.

- Interculturality could be strengthened by the presence of migrant employees or employees from migrant backgrounds, especially in services responsible for the reception of the migrant public. These would lead to the improvement of the entire services' understanding of the problems faced by migrants in general and of the culture of their countries of origin thanks to informal or structured exchanges with colleagues. These employees could also be important contact persons for migrants, and they could send out positive examples of integration to their countries of origin.
- The participants of this Working Group have noted that many initiatives for migrants have been launched by the public services' staff itself. Such individual and team commitment in this kind of initiative should be recognised. The creation of an individual or collective prize could give value to staff commitment.
- The participants wish to highlight the need to cooperate with the countries of origin, with whom the responsibility of integration of their citizens in the host countries is shared. On one hand, the aim would be a better upstream preparation of future migrants (e.g. language courses or explanations in their mother tongues about procedures, rights and duties; the culture of the host country). On the other hand, an increased number of trips made by the host countries' staff to the migrants' countries of origin could be considered. This would enable the staff to understand the migrants' local cultures and the migrants' reactions better. The creation of a European network for the reception and integration of migrants could be useful.
- Overall, the reception of migrants must be improved. The participants believe that the improvement of the migrants' reception would increase their wish to integrate. This could include concrete measures (e.g. the creation of single offices) or symbolic ones (e.g. when first meeting the migrants, the first words uttered by the public service staff could be in the migrants' language, for instance; or the usage of the words "migration/migrants" as opposed to "immigration/immigrants" in official terminology could be promoted).
- On a national level, a better coordination of the levels responsible for defining and/or applying integration policies is necessary in order to ensure that both the policies and resources meet needs more adequately. The participants of this Working Group believe that the autonomy of the levels working closely with the field must be increased within the framework of more global policies, in order to promote local solutions, which often prove to be more efficient.
- The participants of the Working Group believe that integration requires a multidisciplinary approach. Consequently, cooperation and the exchange of information between services and staff must be promoted. This would provide support

to public services' staff that sometimes lacks power and it would improve the quality of the public services provided. Furthermore, the work of charities should be promoted. They are often precious sources of information and could make access to migrants easier, as well as improve levels of understanding and mutual trust. This is an aspect which has not been developed much yet. The participants are also of the opinion that this could limit the migrants' usage of expensive – and sometimes dishonest – intermediaries for their relations with the administrative powers in the host countries.

The participants of the Working Group are aware that in times of fiscal austerity, public funds are limited. Many projects in favour of the integration of migrants are currently being called into question. However, in this context, the return on investment for the State is great, both in economic terms (namely through the migrants' better integration in the labour market, at a time when there is a great shortage of labour force in certain sectors in Europe) and in terms of social cohesion.