



## European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL)

### PUBLIC HEARING

*«Access, equity and diversity in lifelong learning:*

*How to successfully integrate populations of migration background in Europe?»*

**18 December 2008, Brussels (9h30-12h30)**

EUCIS-LLL organised a public hearing on *«Access, equity and diversity in lifelong learning: how to successfully integrate populations of migration background in Europe?»* in partnership with the European Economic and Social Committee, on 18 December 2008, in Brussels. This document is a brief summary of the rich discussions that took place.

**Patrick FEVE**, Head of unit at the EESC opened the meeting by reminding that the successful integration of populations with migrant background within our education and training systems was linked to human rights and that civil society organisations acting in this field should be recognised for their specific added value. The actual economic crisis could exacerbate the tensions between communities in Europe. It is thus very important to give access to education and training to persons from migrant background but also to teach the rest of the population against prejudices.

**Conny REUTER**, Secretary General of SOLIDAR, mentioned the fact that the 18<sup>th</sup> December was the International Day of Migration and 2008 the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Human Rights Convention. Access to education and training should be a right for all and be at the heart of all public policies. It is about living together and equal opportunities.

**Albert SCHMELZER and Mrs Christiane HEMMER-SCHANZE**, from the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education (ECSWE) presented the innovative school of Freie Interkulturelle Waldorfschule funded in 2003 in Mannheim, Germany. One of the key results of this school is that all the pupils acquire good German linguistic skills as a basis to their successful social and cultural integration. The educational concept of this school is based on a certain number of principles: a good balance of pupils, here 50:50 between German pupils and pupils from a migrant background; an international teaching staff; an all day schooling offer; a comprehensive school.

Some other important elements are: learning the German language with alive activities; lessons on “cultural encounters” or the organisation of Festivities that take place on the school grounds, integrating the parents and families (for example after the Ramadan). During the test period, the linguistic level of the pupils was evaluated. It showed that significant differences of levels between pupils from migrant backgrounds and the others disappeared after two years of school attendance. Furthermore, the two groups benefited from the cultural and social encounters that were encouraged by the school.

*More information:* see PowerPoint presentation and paper.

**Stefano TIRATI**, Managing Director GRUPPO CSCS, member of the EfVET network, presented some barriers to the successful integration of migrants within education and training systems. First of all, one requires identity documentation in order to have access to education and training which is a problem for children of irregular migrants. These children suffer from their insecure situation and cannot complete

the school year they have started in the case of expulsion. Schools are more and more confronted to dramatic situations.

The integration of new migrants requires access to education in the destination country. But studying has a cost and this cost can prevent some families, parents and children, to access education and training systems. Families' expectancies do also play an important role.

Access to mobility is also a key issue for persons from migrant background. Most of the time, only a privileged few benefits from the European programmes supporting mobility. For instance, there is a limited number of Erasmus or Leonardo grants and these grants are quite small and require a complementary help from the parents. Besides this economic limitation, there is the problem of accessing the information about the opportunities and the complementary subsidies that could be offered by local councils for instance.

Finally, the segregation of schools is a major challenge to address in Europe.

*More information:* see PowerPoint presentation.

**Sarah AVCI**, KAV-Intercultureel Brussel, member of the European Association for the Education of Adults, presented her association for migrant women, based in Brussels. More than 500 women participate in their activities which are very diverse as they are adapted to women's needs (ICT, language, cooking classes, etc.).

Women are coming from various countries, Morocco, Turkey, Romania, etc. Most of them want to find information on how to raise their children and want to learn Dutch. They can discuss with Dutch women who also take part in the activities of the local associations. KAV- Intercultureel also propose trips, as mobility is a very important element for the social and cultural integration of migrant women.

Women from migrant background and the Dutch women really want their children to mingle.

*More information:* [www.kav.be](http://www.kav.be).

**Matthias MAUCHER**, from SOLIDAR, presented SOLIDAR's contribution to the EC's consultation. Solidar defines education as a fundamental human right which has the potential to empower people to exercise their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Ensuring equal opportunities to access formal and informal education for all members of society is therefore crucial.

As there is a close correlation between poverty, social exclusion and low levels of education, secondary and tertiary education, training and life-long learning are important tools in the fight to alleviate poverty and discriminations, and to build democracy and social cohesion, particularly in the developing world.

*More information:* Solidar's contribution to the EC consultation.

**Laura CASIO**, from the European Commission, presented the EU legislation linked to the integration of pupils from migrant background.

The issues of diversity and polarisation emerged as important issues in this debate. The problem is to answer the families' expectations. For instance, middle class families prefer to change their children's school if they feel there are too many pupils from migrant backgrounds (the "white flight"). This is not because they are racists but because they fear that the quality of the school will lower. We thus have to answer both the questions of equity and of quality. Even if it is difficult to act on individual choices, policies can have an impact. Some studies have shown for example that the same minority group is more or less successful in different EU countries. Segregation is a major challenge to address in the EU.

*More information:* see PowerPoint presentation.

**ROUND TABLE.** Some participants added that it was very important to encourage innovation and to support pilot projects. A lot more could be done also by Member states by sharing their experiences and good practices at EU level with the support of the European Commission. The different actors of education and training should also work together to mutualise their efforts. Finally, teacher training is also very important in this context, more information could be shared on this topic at EU level.

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