



COMMISSION EUROPÉENNE

DG Emploi, affaires sociales et égalité des chances

Dialogue social, Droits sociaux, Conditions de travail, Adaptation au changement
Dialogue social, Relations industrielles

European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee on Local and Regional Government Workshop on “*Integration of Migrants and implementing diversity policies in local and regional administration*”

31 January 2008, Brussels

1. Introduction:

Joelle Bernard, from EPSU, and *Jorma Palola*, from CEMR, co-chaired the working group meeting. After the tour de table inviting participants to introduce themselves, the meeting started with Hubert Krieger’s presentation on the work of the CLIP network. *Hubert Krieger*, from the Dublin Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, explained the aim of the CLIP (Cities for Local Integration Policies for Migrants) network, which is running since January 2006, is to facilitate the exchange of experiences and mutual learning between local authorities on various aspects related to the integration of migrants. The learning progress between the CLIP cities is organised by themes. The first module looked at housing policies and integration of migrants, the development and implementation of diversity policies being the thematic focus of the second module of the network.

He noted the CLIP report on diversity distributed to participants was a draft and therefore, there was still room for modifications and additions. The outcomes of the discussions within the working group meeting will be fed into the final version of the report, expected to be available by the end of April.

2. Diversity and employment in local administration:

In the CLIP report, the issue of diversity is addressed in relation to two aspects:

- Diversity and personnel/employment policy within the local administration;
- Diversity in services provision at local level.

Hubert Krieger stressed the link between diversity of staff, reflecting the diversity of the local population, and quality of services. There are a variety of reasons that may lead a local authority to promote diversity as part of its personnel policy (legal compliance, quality of services, city marketing, etc.). Beyond the differences in the motivation to improve diversity, a number of common barriers have been identified by the partner cities of the CLIP network:

- Lack of data: this is probably one of the most controversial issues since legislation and traditions vary largely from one country to another. In some countries, ethnic monitoring is legally required while in others, this is regarded as a discriminatory practice. The lack of data constitutes a major barrier to measure progress in terms of diversity;
- Slow recognition of qualifications was a recurrent problem identified by CLIP partners: slow and bureaucratic procedures are major barriers for migrant workers to access jobs that match their qualifications;
- Legal restrictions (access to public service status restricted to nationals);
- Lack of consistency across departments in the local administration: a common framework and strong political backing to diversity is often missing;

- Recruitment criteria are not always adjusted to the jobs: language requirements are often too high and do not correspond with the language skills that are needed for a given position.

In order to address these barriers, measures taken by local authorities range from purely anti-discrimination measures (ex: complaints mechanisms, non discrimination in recruitment) to a more equal opportunities approach (reviewing selection procedures, including language tests, promoting education and training, translating documents into other languages (a key issue here is the translation of health and safety information into other languages), etc.).

Some cities have also done some work in adapting working conditions to cultural diversity, although the question of how far the local authority has to go in recognising cultural needs is still an issue.

During the discussion, the language barrier came up as one of the main obstacles to integrate migrants into employment. Other points made by participants included:

- The CLIP report puts the accent on what local authorities should do to integrate migrants but it should also consider what cities expect from migrants;
- The report could give more details on the role of social partners in promoting equal treatment and diversity;
- Need to bear in mind migrants is not an homogenous group but they have different profiles and qualifications;
- Importance of internal communication within the organization in order to ensure consistency.

Inge Van Nieuwenhuyze, from the city of Antwerp, presented the city's approach to diversity (presentation attached). As the largest employer in the region, Antwerp's administration has developed a diversity policy ('the city belongs to everyone'). She referred to the efforts to promote more flexible and tailor-made recruitment procedures as a way to improve diversity. In doing this, there are often clashes and conflicting approaches between the Human Resources department and the Diversity office within the city administration. The city has put in place a number of measures to improve diversity in their recruitment campaigns:

- Adaptation of selection procedures: greater focus on competences rather than on formal qualifications and knowledge, changes in language tests, etc.
- Diversifying channels of communication;
- Providing greater information to people with migrant backgrounds through information evenings.

These measures proved to be successful in increasing the rate of employment among workers with migrant background within the city administration, at least in lower skilled/paid jobs. However, over time it became clear that a more structured approach was needed in order to sustain the positive results in the long term. For this reason, they are currently working in developing a new general procedure to improve diversity management. To this end, a working group (official level) and a steering committee (political and senior level), bringing together representatives from different departments, were set up in June 2006. They have allowed for better cooperation between different services. In response to questions, Inge Van Nieuwenhuyze and Els De Wacker:

- mentioned legal barriers are still present: in Belgium, legislation only allows EU nationals to access public service status;
- clarified that in terms of adaptation of working conditions, Antwerp's approach is not favourable to reflect cultural differences in the workplace;
- stressed the importance of involving politicians. A new Alderman for diversity has been recently nominated;

- recognised cooperation with trade unions could be improved in the future.

3. Diversity in service provision at local level:

The afternoon session was devoted to the issue of how diversity is managed and promoted in service delivery. Most of the barriers identified in the area of diversity and employment policy also apply when it comes to promote diversity in the provision of services.

A majority of cities combine measures to adapt mainstream services to an ever more diverse population with the provision of services specifically targeted to the migrant population. In trying to make services more responsive, local authorities often lack information about migrants' needs and expectations. In addition, only few cities have developed mechanisms to monitor users' satisfaction.

Other issues raised in relation to diversity in the provision of services were the following:

- The financial cost of adapting services and providing tailored services (ex: translation of documents, language courses, etc.) is a key issue to be born in mind when promoting diversity: who pays for it?
- Importance of improving consultation with migrants but not always easy to identify the right representatives within the migrant community;
- Need to raise awareness and inform both migrants and the local community about the rationale behind the diversity policies in order to prevent community tensions;
- Irregular migrants and their access to local services is a extremely sensitive issue dealt differently by Member States and cities;
- In some cities, diversity is also included in their public procurement policy ensuring diversity objectives are also implemented by their contractors.

During the discussion, members commented on the situation in their countries:

- They stressed the importance of political leadership in moving forward the diversity agenda. This is even truer in the case of small municipalities;
- The services which are most often offered to migrants are language training (including, in some cases, not only the langue of the host country but also migrants' mother tongue), translation services and access to housing;
- It was stressed the challenge of illegal migration;
- Some examples of concrete initiatives aimed to improve access to services were mentioned: employment of foreigners in the health sector, training of teachers about Roma culture and provision of additional support to Roma pupils, etc.
- Financial constraints and insufficient subsidies from the national level limit the capacity of local authorities to response to diversity needs;
- Importance of identifying common principles and a set of services that should be guaranteed to migrants.

4. Next steps:

Members were invited to reflect on a possible theme within the integration agenda for further work of the social dialogue committee in the future. Suggestions included looking at welcome packs offered to migrants at local level and exploring good practices and successful stories regarding the role of social dialogue in promoting diversity at local level (ex: collective agreements in local and regional administration including diversity objectives).