

CITIZEN'S SUMMARY

Common principles for an EU immigration policy

What is the problem?

Immigration is high on the international agenda and has become one of the strategic priorities of the EU. Countries of origin of immigrants, especially in Africa, turn to the European Union to discuss development and migration, expecting the EU to fully assume its role as key actor on these issues.

Heads of State and Government, meeting in the European Council, have therefore repeatedly called on the EU to respond to immigration challenges and opportunities with a common voice and a common set of instruments. In December 2007, they explicitly requested a renewed political commitment in order to continue to develop *a comprehensive European migration policy* complementing those of the Member States and based on common political principles and on a genuine partnership with countries of origin and transit of immigrants.

With rapidly ageing societies Europe has reached a point where it has to take bold decisions, including on immigration, to ensure economic growth and wealth also for future generations. Demographic forecasts foresee that the size of the working-age population in the EU will decrease by 48 million by 2050 and that the dependency ratio (the proportion of the non-working part of the population) is set to double and to reach 51% by 2050; even though not all Member States will be affected to the same degree. To ease this situation and to better cope with the challenges of demographic ageing, the EU will have to attract more immigrants in the future, at all levels of skills and qualifications.

In this Communication to Member States and the European Parliament the Commission proposes a set of basic common principles and measures, organised around three policy pillars: *prosperity, solidarity and security*. The full text of the proposal is on the Internet: http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/news/intro/news_intro_en.htm

What are the benefits of the Communication?

These proposed common principles should serve as the platform to continue building a comprehensive EU migration policy. This will also guarantee that actions will be based on full respect for the rights, freedoms and principles that are enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Member States and the European institutions must work in partnership and transparency, as well as in coherence and solidarity. The common principles on migration policy will then form the basis for closer cooperation both internally in the EU and vis-à-vis partner countries.

Why was this action taken at EU level?

The experience and the challenges of the last decade have clearly demonstrated that immigration can only be efficiently governed in the context of a truly cooperative and comprehensive EU policy. Since 1999 - when for the first time the Treaty of Amsterdam conferred powers to the European Community in the area of immigration - the EU and its Member States have gradually established the foundation for a common policy addressing different aspects of immigration. These efforts must continue to develop in the best interest of all EU citizens.

Due to the fact that the EU today is an area without internal border controls, national immigration policies have indeed become strictly interrelated; a very restrictive migratory policy in one Member State may deviate migration flows to its neighbours and a regularisation procedure may attract illegal immigration into a Member State, from which regularised migrants easily move afterwards to other Member States.

This EU action is only meant to complement, not to replace, national policies in this field; Member State competences – for example in determining the numbers of immigrant workers to be admitted – will remain unaffected.

How will this work?

This Communication addresses legal immigration, integration, visas, border control and management, illegal immigration, trafficking of human beings, undeclared work and relationship with third-countries. The Communication also deals with cross-cutting issues such as the need for increased political, operational and financial solidarity and burden-sharing among Member States, as well as the necessity to increase coordination between different levels of governance (EU, Member States and local level) and between different policy areas involved in migration management.

For each common principle, a series of measures, to be implemented at EU and/or Member State level, are proposed for discussion. These – together with the Policy Plan on Asylum, presented in parallel – will be further developed and rendered more operational during the course of next year's debate on a new 5-year Programme in the Justice, Freedom and Security area. They will thereby also contribute to the definition and implementation of other policy areas, such as the renewed EU Social Agenda.

When is the Communication foreseen to come into effect?

The Communication is a non binding instrument. It lists a number of common principles to guide EC and Member State migration policies and proposes a first indicative list of more operational measures.

It should stimulate an open EU debate, involving national governments, other stakeholders and the public at large, on the foundations and future of the common policy on immigration.