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Extracts from a speech to be given by Mr. Vredeling, Vice-President of the Commission of the European Communities, to the European Conference on "Migrant workers' children", organised by the Council of the European Municipalities in Rotterdam

... The foreign workers we are concerned with here are largely characterised by the fact that from a socio-economic point of view they have a great deal of ground to make up. In the 'sixties the high level of economic activity, the high rate of economic growth and a shortage of labour brought a large influx of migrant workers.....

... Most of these migrant workers came to take up unskilled jobs - although, contrary to popular belief, many of them could have occupied skilled jobs at home, and indeed often did. I am well aware that it may be a simplification, but in terms of future developments it is significant that the "guest workers" - if I may use that unpleasant expression - came here for purely material reasons and took up, or were given, jobs at the bottom end of the social scale. The socio-economic situation in the countries of origin is often very precarious. We may well ask ourselves whether the migrant workers really left their own countries of their own free will - in actual fact, he or she did not have much choice. At the same time, it must be admitted that the departure of skilled workers from these countries resulted in a loss of investments and reduced their development prospects.....

... The migrant workers do the dirty jobs. Consequently, one cannot claim that there is equality of opportunity on the labour market. I have the strong impression that the majority of Europeans are quite happy with the situation as it is, since it means that their jobs are not threatened. I would like to see these dirty jobs, which at present are looked down upon, rather more highly. I am sure that this would greatly foster integration although it would also create tensions.

The continuing high level of unemployment in our countries does not make integration any easier. The realities of economic life and the housing situation tend to encourage the separation of the groups. In the towns people have moved out of the older districts with the result that many of them are now populated by migrant workers. Although I am strongly in favour of a policy of bringing families together, I have to admit that even this does not reduce the isolation of the migrant workers. The isolation of the wife who stays at home and often speaks only her own language is great enough as it is. The children act as a link with society.

The overall picture is one of isolation, but socio-economic and cultural. There is a considerable danger that such a minority, turned in upon itself by isolation, will eventually come into collision with the outside world.....

... Participation in local elections is an important factor. The EEC Commission has frequently stated that it would like to see migrant workers from other Member States granted both the right to vote and the right to stand as candidates in local elections. I was therefore pleased to hear that the Rotterdam Municipal Council intends to give foreign workers the franchise in borough and parish council elections. In my view, this does not go far enough, but at least it is a step in the right direction.....

... It is quite clear that the children of migrant workers will not accept the isolation and resignation of their parents. This goes beyond the normal healthy scepticism of children towards their parents. These children do not want to return to the country their parents came from, as their future prospects there would be even worse. But their background makes it difficult for them to secure a place in the society in which they are growing up. Their situation might be described as having one foot planted in the host country, while searching for a toe-hold with the other.....

The difficulty of integrating this second generation into the educational systems of the host countries is enormous. As I have just indicated, the child feels more acutely than his parents the conflict between the culture of his home country and that of the host country. Too few young immigrants successfully complete any form of vocational training. The number of those who reach the higher level of secondary education is negligible. More effort must be made in kindergartens, where a start could be made in teaching them the language of the host country. It is essential, because ignorance or poor knowledge of the working language at school is the greatest obstacle to normal educational development. Numerous special schooling schemes are being tried out and some of them are proving successful.....

... Instruction in the child's native language is also important, not only for relations between him and his parents but also for his balanced intellectual development. Special attention must also be given to the development of teaching material and the training of teachers.....

... Very often the school books in use in the child's own country are suitable only to a limited extent or even not at all. From the cultural, material and linguistic point of view the world depicted in these books is too sharply at variance with the world in which the child lives. New methods using printed and audio-visual teaching material are still applied far too infrequently.

The teachers in charge of special classes must be properly trained to give intensive instruction in their own language. Foreign teachers must also be specially trained to teach the children the language and culture of their home country, for the children very often have only a poor command of their own language or sometimes even only of their parents' dialect.

The first and most important step towards creating school structures suited to the needs of these migrant workers' children, who because of their situation have encountered psychological and linguistic problems, is to ensure the initial and further training of teachers. This will remain one of the European Social Fund's priority tasks.

The EEC Commission included language teaching for school-leavers and adults on the list of priorities which it drew up last summer. Priority was also given to training and programmes and refresher courses for social workers and teachers. ./. .

Poor school results and the ground which they need to make up means that many young immigrants are unable to gain access to vocational training. Those who arrive here between the ages of fourteen and eighteen very rarely get a chance to complete training which they may have begun in their own country, to attend a vocational school or be trained in a firm. Without adequate special measures the language barrier cannot be overcome and the child's theoretical knowledge cannot be brought up to the level required by the existing institutions. Full-time courses to prepare these young people for vocational training, combined with intensive courses in the language of the host country, are probably the only way to give them a chance to improve their lot. Even then the level they reach may well fall short of their aspirations. Many of these young second-generation immigrants, who have grown up in the host country, feel disillusioned. There should be a careers advice service to give them individual advice and equipped to provide them with effective help in finding a way into working life. Otherwise we shall end up with thousands of maladjusted, dissatisfied immigrants living on the edge of society.

In mid-1977 the Council of Ministers approved a set of guidelines on the basis of which the Member States undertook to provide special courses, (and in particular language courses), free of charge for the children of migrant workers from other Member States. The Member States also undertook to provide training or further training for the teaching staff involved. The Commission will take care to ensure that these undertakings are kept.

The Community has taken its first modest steps along the difficult road towards solving the problem of these second-generation immigrants.