

EUROPEAN BACKGROUND INFORMATION COMMUNITY

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY INFORMATION SERVICE

2100 M Street NW, Washington DC 20037 Telephone (202) 872-8350
New York Office: 277 Park Avenue, New York NY 10017 Telephone (212) 371-3804

BACKGROUND NOTE

No. 4/1975

January 23, 1975

EC ACTION PROGRAM FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

Washington D.C. -- The European Community has begun to zero in on the plight of its 6.2 million migrant workers and their families. Last month the EC commission sent the Council of Ministers a set of guidelines for an action program to provide social and political equality to all migrants, including non-EC workers.

The Council requested such a program in its January 21, 1974 resolution to set up an EC social action program. In June, it adopted a Commission proposal to open the European Social Fund to migrant worker assistance programs, such as reception facilities, vocational training, and language training in the home country.

Including families, there are over ten million migrants in the Common Market, 4 per cent of the EC population. Nearly three quarters come from countries outside the Community.

EC Migrants have benefited from Community measures which give them equal social rights with natives, automatically transfer their social security contribution credits to any EC country where they work, and guarantee family allowance and medical benefits even to families staying in the country of origin. They still suffer specific disadvantages, however. They are, for instance, often excluded from social benefits not directly linked with the job, such as cheap transport fares for children and certain family allowances which are non-exportable.

Third country migrants have no such EC protection. They are subject to bilateral agreements and often restrictive national laws which, for instance, may dictate what kind of job they can take, where they may live, and the right to be joined by their families.

The main goals of the Commission's action program are: adequate social security protection from non-EC migrants; political rights at the local level for all migrants, and establishment of migrant assistance programs eligible for Social Fund monies.

Living and Working Conditions

To remove the existing social disparities regarding EC migrants, the program calls for action to:

- extend to migrants social benefits not directly related to paid employment (reduced transport fares, aid to large families and the handicapped, etc.)
- ensure entry into the host country of all members of a migrant's family
- eliminate obstacles denying migrants trade union rights, including the right to be a union representative in public employer-worker legal bodies
- adopt EC legislation to coordinate and allow the export of member state social benefit schemes outside the realm of social security (old age revenue, non-contributory pensions, unemployment compensation, etc.)
- adopt an EC regulation granting self employed migrants the same insurance aggregate benefit export rights as wage earning migrants.

Non-EC migrants should be treated on a par with EC workers, whether or not their status is governed by association or bilateral agreements, the Commission said. Therefore, the program outlines measures to gradually extend EC social benefits to these workers. They include:

- elimination of nationality as a condition for social benefit eligibility
- allowing pensions accruing from working in the member states to be exported to the country of origin
- eligibility for EC social security provisions while working in the Community
- aggregation of insurance benefits both in the home and Community countries
- harmonized application of family allowance guarantees set by national bilateral agreements.

Vocational and Language training

The vast majority of unskilled migrants do not become skilled workers during their stay in the host country. Therefore, the Commission said the member states should introduce a system allowing proper vocational and language training for migrants. Crash training courses should be held before migrants leave home and vocational training centers should be set up in the host country to improve worker qualifications. The program also calls for introducing pilot projects to train and exchange language specialists and to ready migrants professionally for their return home.

Social Services

The Commission underlines the need to improve and broaden the scope of member state social services to provide the fullest information about the host country and all necessary help regarding reception, language training, and accommodation facilities. Accordingly, the action program calls for integrated member state programs for migrants; projects to train social workers and teachers working with migrants, and pilot projects geared to gain maximum effectiveness from migrant social services.

Housing

In principle, EC migrants have the same rights as nationals with regard to housing. In practice, low cost housing is hard to find and discrimination by nationals forces most of these workers to live in shanty towns or ghettos. The needs of migrants should be accounted for in member state efforts to improve low-cost housing facilities for the poor, the Commission said. On the Community level, it called for studying government and employer financing schemes and improving ways of judging housing requirements and public financing needs. The Community should also come up with model programs for modernized accommodation for migrants on favorable terms, similar to those set up for EC coal and steel workers.

Education of Children

The Commission notes a dearth of bicultural programs geared to integrating the Community's two million school age migrant children into the life and culture of the host countries while also preserving their native culture and language. Having no legislation targeted at migrant children, the member states have made little effort to recruit teachers from countries of origin or to set up teacher and information exchanges.

Therefore, the Commission called for the following:

- development of reception and accelerated training classes to help children adapt to their new environment
- provision of cultural and native language classes in host country schools
- recruitment and adequate training of teachers from emigration countries
- information exchanges, instructional aids, and teaching method research and pilot schemes
- social worker assistance after school hours
- equal treatment for migrant children regarding study grant and similar awards.

Health

Migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to illness, disease, and psychological disorders, following the sudden change of climate, environment, and eating habits. Their problems are aggravated by linguistic barriers in communication with medical personnel. The medical tests they undergo on entry or taking a job in the host country are rarely geared to promoting industrial health and safety as well as preventive medicine. Therefore, the Commission recommended amplification of studies and research into means for improving effectiveness of medical exams on recruitment, preventive medicine, and socio-medical services, as well as teaching workers how to avoid industrial accidents and illnesses.

Information Services and Statistics

The Commission pointed out the need for employment services to apprise new recruits of the working and living conditions they will find and on their rights under EC legislation. The media should also be used to convey such information. To better assess the needs and problems of migrant population, the Commission also called for a Community wide data system whereby the member states would supply accurate and detailed statistics on migrant workers and their families.

Political rights

With the exception of Britain, EC and third country migrants are excluded from exercising civic and political rights in the host country. Britain extends such rights to Commonwealth country and Irish migrants.

To give migrants a voice in public decisions affecting their lives, the Commission has proposed granting them full participation in local elections by 1980. Minimum residency requirements would have to be met. Before 1980, member states should set up local advisory bodies to promote migrant participation in municipal, educational, social, and cultural affairs, the Commission said.

Illegal Immigration

There are about 600,000 illegal migrant workers in the Community, one tenth the size of the legal migrant population. To reduce exploitation of these people by "manpower traffickers," the Commission said it would hold expert-level talks to begin formulating proposals for imposing harmonized safeguards against illegal immigration and for penalizing exploiters.

In the near future, the Commission will start submitting proposals for carrying out its proposed action program. They include setting up a uniform system for payment of family benefits to EC migrants: extending the exercise of trade union rights; and a new proposal for settling conflicts in national laws. Additionally, the Commission will prepare a Charter for Migrants,(as requested by the European Parliament,) and will begin putting the new EC job information network (SEDOC) into operation.