

PRESS RELEASE

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The Standing Committee on Employment held its 43rd meeting in Brussels on Thursday 14 May 1992 under the chairmanship of Mr José da SILVA PENEDA, Minister for Employment and Social Security of the Portuguese Republic and President-in-Office of the Council; the Commission was represented by Mr DEGIMBE, Director-General, and the meeting was attended by representatives of the Member States and of workers' and employers' organizations.

At the meeting the Committee examined a Commission staff paper entitled "Immigration and Employment".

At the end of the meeting, the Chairman drew the following conclusions:

1. The Standing Committee on Employment, meeting on 14 May 1992, noted with interest the Commission paper on "Immigration and Employment".

The Committee pointed out that the problems connected with immigration are manifold. However, in the Committee framework, the present conclusions are concerned only with labour market aspects.

2. The Committee noted that there are currently at least 8 million non-Community nationals in the Community, of whom 3,5 million belong to the labour force. In addition to these figures there are illegal immigrants, whose numbers are hard to gauge, and a growing number of asylum-seekers.

Although it was originally the industrialized countries' need for unskilled labour that first gave rise to migration movements, this need has been falling over recent years. By contrast, the factors that encourage emigration from non-Community countries, such as population pressure, political change and the economic crisis have become more acute. All the Member States except Ireland are currently affected by immigration; this includes the southern Community countries, which used to be countries of emigration only.

Net migration into the Community has been rising since 1983, and migrant labour has given way to permanent settlement.

Given this context, efforts should be made to help improve the economic and social situation of the countries from which the migrants come, thus perhaps reducing migratory pressure.

14.V.92
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3. The Committee pointed out that the position of immigrants in the labour market is continuing to cause many problems which make it difficult to secure the desired aim of integration. It emphasized that inequalities vis-à-vis nationals seem to stem not so much from legislation as from de facto situations such as lack of qualifications, the uncertain nature of the employment sectors involved and inadequate schooling or language knowledge.

The fact that a large part of the immigrant labour force is employed in sectors which are susceptible to the economic crisis and the attendant restructuring has helped to make the unemployment rate for immigrant workers higher than that for nationals. Unfortunately, where there is a tendency for unemployment to fall, that tendency is less pronounced amongst foreigners.

The problems which immigrants encounter on the labour market vary according to age group and sex. Thus, while the youngest age group lends itself more easily to training measures, the other groups benefit less from such measures and are therefore more vulnerable. These difficulties are particularly acute for women and young girls.

4. However, the Committee found that it would be wrong to dismiss all migrants as a problem group, and categorically opposed any idea of trying to exclude them, such as by expelling them from Community territory in order to cope with the general unemployment problem.

This is because in general, immigrants make a genuine contribution to the economy of the host country.

14.V.92
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In the Committee's view,

- they take up jobs which national workers often do not want, but which are necessary to society;
- they also create jobs, especially as the heads of small and medium-sized businesses;
- lastly, they play an important role in the economy as consumers, and also as tax-payers and contributors to social security schemes.

An approach designed to integrate legal immigrants fully by improving their access to training and employment, especially with regard to the long-term unemployed and first employment for young people, will yield more satisfactory results in human, social, economic and political terms than a policy of exclusion.

On the other hand, the Committee noted with regret the continuing phenomenon of illicit labour, which disrupts the official labour market and is detrimental to all workers, especially immigrant workers in authorized employment.

5. The Committee conceded that there would inevitably be migratory flows, in particular with the right of family reunion and the right of asylum, and also through "regularization" or seasonal or frontier movements.

It considered that the approach to be taken should take account of the problems of integrating immigrants of different generations and should therefore contain specific solutions.

14.V.92
dey/PT/ac

In this connection, it noted that it was easier for immigrants to integrate, and that they integrated better, if they were able to live in a family environment.

6. Within the Community, the free movement of persons and services requires the problems of immigration and employment to be given special importance.

In particular, both sides of industry wanted the removal of certain obstacles to be considered, in particular those relating to:

- access to employment in another Member State for third-country nationals permanently resident in one Member State, once nationals of the twelve Member States enjoy the same conditions of access;
- full use of the possibilities for movement by third-country nationals in situations where an undertaking in one Member State exercises its freedom to provide services in another Member State.

7. Lastly, the Committee noted with interest the agreement reached at the European Council in Maastricht regarding provisions on co-operation between Member States in the fields of justice and home affairs. It welcomed the fact that conditions of residence by nationals of third countries on the territory of Member States, including family reunion and access to employment, as well as combating unauthorized immigration, are now to be regarded as matters of common interest.

Both sides of industry wanted this first stage to lead to a Community policy on the immigration of third-country nationals.