

## THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

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### Recommendation 347 (2013)<sup>1</sup> Migrants' access to regional labour markets

1. The rapidly growing cultural diversity of European societies has brought to the forefront the questions of both integration of migrants into the host community and their participation in economic development, in particular at regional and local levels. The migrant population in Europe is becoming more diverse not only in terms of ethnic or national origin, but also length of stay, educational achievements and socio-economic position, meaning that migrants today have better opportunities to make a meaningful contribution to the regional and local economy, which is especially important in the current economic crisis.

2. In 2011, 33.3 million foreigners were living in the European Union alone (6.6% of the total population). The majority (20.5 million) were third-country nationals (4.4% of the total population). About 80% of third-country nationals in the EU are of working age (15-64 years) and constitute a significant pool of the labour force. In the period prior to the economic crisis, from 2000 to 2007, third-country nationals contributed to a quarter of the overall rise in employment.<sup>2</sup> Yet this migrant human capital remains widely underused, to a large extent due to the lack of recognition of foreign qualifications and complexity of procedures for obtaining work authorisation, as well as a range of discriminatory practices. During the economic crisis, the employment situation of migrant workers has deteriorated more rapidly than that of natives.

3. Migrants' access to the labour market or to creating their own businesses is of utmost importance for successful integration processes because gainful activities – as employee in the labour market or as entrepreneur – constitute a central dimension of both the structural and social integration of migrants. Many opportunities for their participation in society and economic processes become available through employment or self-employment, influencing their social status as individuals. Successful integration through employment contributes to better social cohesion at the local and regional levels and renders a wide range of benefits for the communities and regional population, including by reducing costs associated with social assistance and conflict resolution.

4. Thus, employment and self-employment have been widely recognised as a crucial step in the process of migrants' integration: they are an integral part of building intercultural relations and improving social cohesion of regional and local communities. Although the regulatory framework for integration is set mostly at the national or European level, regional and local authorities have considerable leeway in

implementing related regulations and in moderating their impact and outcome at the grassroots level. Since integration always takes place in a concrete local context, regional and local authorities share the responsibility for the inclusion of migrants in regional and local economic processes,<sup>3</sup> and play a crucial role in creating specific conditions of access to regional and local labour markets or to entrepreneurial activity. This has also been emphasised in the European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals.<sup>4</sup>

5. The challenge of integrating migrants in regional and local communities as a major factor for better social cohesion and intercultural harmony, and the crucial role of regional and local authorities in this process, were also highlighted in the report on "Living together – Combining diversity and freedom in 21st-century Europe", commissioned by the Council of Europe and prepared by its Group of Eminent Persons in 2011.

6. Over recent years, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe has addressed to the Committee of Ministers a number of recommendations on various aspects of the integration of migrants at local level, in particular Recommendation 115 (2002) on the participation of foreign residents in local public life: consultative bodies; Recommendation 153 (2004) on a pact for the integration and participation of people of immigrant origin in Europe's towns, cities and regions; Recommendation 252 (2008) on improving the integration of migrants through local housing policies; Recommendation 261 (2009) on intercultural cities; Recommendation 262 (2009) on equality and diversity in local authority employment and service provision; Recommendation 304 (2011) on meeting the challenge of inter-faith and intercultural tensions at local level; and Recommendation 343 (2013) on integration through self-employment: promoting migrant entrepreneurship in European municipalities. Improving migrants' access to regional labour markets is another crucial aspect for their integration at local level.

7. Regional policy can directly influence the conditions of migrants' employment, even if it has to operate in a framework of national and federal State regulations and legislations. In many countries, regional authorities have significant competences in regulating employment and access to labour markets, for instance in terms of evaluation of skills and qualifications, issuing work permits, and provision of proper education and training, as well as financial assistance. Yet, in many regions, even highly skilled migrant workers are unable to work and integrate professionally, which is often due to the complexity of procedures and discriminatory attitudes and prejudice towards hiring migrants.

8. The Congress is convinced that promoting migrants' access to regional labour markets and business activities requires a broad range of actions and measures, which must be part of the general economic development and social policy, and which must be guided by the principles of equality, non-discrimination and respect for human rights. Such actions and measures must be based on an integrated approach encompassing most aspects of traditional integration policy, improvement of intercultural relations and diversity management. The challenge of supporting the integration of

migrants into increasingly diverse societies calls indeed for innovative measures in all relevant institutions of the host society, and the regional level offers unique opportunities for a bottom-up development of such innovation.

9. In the light of the above, the Congress asks the Committee of Ministers to invite member States of the Council of Europe to review national regulatory frameworks for the employment of migrants with a view to improving and facilitating their access to labour markets, as well as to promote and support regional action and measures aimed at facilitating migrants' access to employment, and in particular to:

*a.* encourage regional authorities to mainstream migrant employment policies and strategies into regional economic development plans;

*b.* adopt and enforce non-discrimination legislative measures with regard to employment;

*c.* consider lifting or shortening the duration of work restrictions for certain categories of migrants (such as refugees and asylum seekers);

*d.* review, where applicable, procedures for the evaluation of skills and qualifications, in particular for semi- and highly-skilled migrants, in order to facilitate their obtaining of work authorisation without undue delay;

*e.* review and facilitate, where applicable, general procedures for obtaining work authorisation by migrants;

*f.* review and facilitate employment procedures in order to reduce bureaucratic hurdles and to remove excessive requirements for certain categories of jobs, in particular language requirements where applicable;

*g.* support the development of regional intercultural policies aimed at fostering dialogue and interaction between

migrants and the host community, in order to change the prejudiced attitudes of the local population (in particular employers) towards hiring migrants;

*h.* support training for regional staff to improve their intercultural competences and promote respect for diversity and non-discriminatory attitudes and practices;

*i.* support the development of intra- and inter-regional co-operation aimed at facilitating labour mobility, which would be beneficial also to the migrant population;

*j.* promote migrant entrepreneurship as a measure to increase job creation and expand regional labour markets, which would be beneficial also to migrant employment;

*k.* improve training opportunities for migrants and their access to educational institutions, including by providing financial assistance as necessary.

10. The Congress further reaffirms the continued relevance of its proposals for the integration of migrants contained in its recommendations referred to in paragraph 6 above, and asks the Committee of Ministers to invite member States of the Council of Europe to ensure their full implementation.

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1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Regions on 30 October 2013, and adopted by the Congress on 31 October 2013, 3rd Sitting (see Document CPR(25)3, explanatory memorandum), presented by Inger Linge, Sweden (R, EPP/CCE) on behalf of Deirdre McGowan, Ireland (R, ILDG), rapporteur.

2. European Commission (EC) report, Employment in Europe 2008, Luxembourg 2009.

3. CdR 212/2009 fin – Own-initiative opinion of the Committee of the Regions on Local and regional authorities at the forefront of integration policies, p. 4f, Brussels 2009.

4. COM(2011) 455 final – Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals, p. 8-9, Brussels 2011.