

1. Which is our perception on integration in Cyprus?

Although Cyprus has been receiving migration flows for the last at least two decades, the concept of integration has been a matter for debate only in the last few years. This is closely linked with the fact that Cyprus has never actually drafted a comprehensive immigration policy with a long-term vision, much less a political scheme of integration of immigrants and refugees. Migrants are seen, up to now, as people who come and go with the exclusive goal of working and returning to their home countries. Therefore, the notion of integration is quite new for the Cypriot society and the authorities and is mainly formed by EU Directives in a range of aspects of EU competence.

The Cypriot authorities, mainly the Ministry of Interior, took an important initiative in 2010 and drafted and implemented a National Action Plan for Integration in the years 2010-2012 based on 8 priorities. The Plan was implemented during 2011 and 2012 in a range of areas such as education, health, employment, training and social welfare. The last of the priorities provided for in the National Action Plan was its evaluation at the end of this period. The evaluation of the impact of the Action Plan and its success has not taken place and there has been no other initiative for the drafting of a new Action Plan building on the evaluation and the experiences gained.

2. Which are/should be the strategic aims of the integration policy?

The Ombudsman participated in the drafting of the Action Plan, as a member of the Committee of Experts, and has since its conclusion pushed for an evaluation procedure which would eventually lead to a new Action Plan. The need for a comprehensive integration policy is raising now more than ever due to economic crisis that inevitably affects minorities and other vulnerable groups in a more intense manner.

Despite the positive steps taken through the Action Plan, several important issues remain open.

I refer to the **issue of undocumented immigrants**, who remain stuck in limbo and social marginalization, and the settlement of the status of those in Cyprus for many years who have established an irreversible process of integration, due to permanent and stable biotic relations already developed.

Important issues seek legislative action as they relate to respect for human rights:

I refer to the fact that an important part of the immigrant population **remain absolutely dependent from their employers** especially a large number of women living and working in domestic work under particularly difficult conditions

that make them vulnerable to multiple discrimination and rights violations.

Essential and necessary for integration, is the recognition of **political rights** of migrants and their participation, at least in the elections to local authorities.

The strategic aims of the integration policy should focus on a set of priority areas as mentioned above by providing specific enabling measures to enhance access, participation and belonging. To this end, it should in our view incorporate at least policies regarding **family reunification, the status of long-term residents, conditions of employment, anti-discrimination practices, political rights and active multi-level citizenship.**

3-4. Migrants are not a homogeneous group, which groups are/should be priorities? What measures are promoted?

The measures should be carefully examined and defined taking into account who needs to be integrated, who will be integrated,? And to what they should be integrated? Our integration policy has been mainly based on the assumption that both the "society" and migrants are homogeneous entities. This is definitely not a realistic assumption. Both the society and migrants already contain differences in various aspects. Therefore, it is important to identify the specificities of each group

and to address specific needs and concerns of these groups.

On the side of the migrant population, we face greater challenges for integration regarding **asylum seekers, refugees, women (especially house or agricultural workers), victims of trafficking**. These groups rarely participate in public debate and are generally invisible in public life. Integration policies addressing the specific needs of these groups are not independent from policies regarding social inclusion of vulnerable groups in general. A close and careful evaluation of the different elements of each group affecting their integration should take place in order to point out the areas of greater concern.

To sum up, I would argue that we need a new idea, a new concept of **integration which is not based on the dipole of 'them' and 'us' but roots on the principles of solidarity and equal treatment. We don't have to share the same values or culture but we need to build on a common notion of equal respect and solidarity with a view to a common future. The society's goals and central values should be a result of a two way dialogue** rather than requiring "others" to adopt the values of the 'normal' population.