

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0778/07

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to the Council

Subject: Situation of immigrant workers in the EU

Many immigrant workers from various EU Member States (including a significant number from Portugal) are currently experiencing difficulties - an example being the precarious living conditions which have come to light in Vilvoorde (Belgium). Another case where workers' rights are being infringed has been discovered in Arendonk, involving Portuguese workers living in the Belgian border district and working in the Netherlands. In this latter case there are intermediary bodies which try to control every aspect of workers' lives, with manifest disregard for their rights.

More recently, in factories run by the Bernard Matthews company in the United Kingdom, a serious risk to public health came to light in a case in which company managers had disregarded the workers' right to be kept informed.

Frequently caught up in the webs of 'intermediate organisations' in their countries of origin, many of the workers affected fail to lodge a complaint out of fear of reprisals. This circumstance is aggravated by the fact that the workers in question often do not speak the language of the host country, which makes it difficult for them to determine their rights (despite the efforts made by trade-union and community leaders, community counsellors and certain political leaders).

Action is being taken in this area, such as the Portuguese Government's recent initiative to provide Portuguese workers exploited in the Netherlands with legal and social support. There is also a need for greater convergence amongst the Member States (to be achieved through joint measures) in order to combat this particular social scourge.

In view of the fact that we are dealing with an issue which is not restricted to each Member State's domestic sphere, and since the right of workers and their representatives to be informed and consulted must be upheld at the appropriate levels and at the right time in the cases and under the terms and conditions laid down in EU law and in accordance with the Member States' domestic laws and practices, will the Council explain what joint action it intends to take in the short term in order to address these matters?