

## HOW TO IMPROVE INTRA-EUROPEAN MOBILITY AND CIRCULAR MIGRATION? FOSTERING DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT

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### CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS

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## **Introduction**

Since its introduction in the EEC Treaty of 1957 as one of the four fundamental freedoms, the right of freedom of movement and residence has demonstrated its value as one of the pillars for the creation of an internal market for the benefit of Member States' economies and of individual European Union (EU) citizens.

The right to move and reside freely across the territory of the Member States is the most highly valued core individual right linked to the European citizenship by the European citizens. As such, it demonstrates and promotes a better understanding of the value of European integration, as well as citizens' participation in shaping the EU.

Mobility is expected to grow quite significantly in the foreseeable future given the growing availability of cheap travel. People living abroad can bring economic gains to both receiving and sending countries if well-tailored policies are put in place to tackle the risks stemming from free movement of people across borders.

The amount of mobile EU citizens is permanently growing. The post-2004 enlargements of the EU have provided a significant boost to mobility. There is ample evidence that the EU has been benefiting from free movement of people, however, a number of bottlenecks have been identified, too, which inhibit full utilisation of the efficiency gains from better allocation of human capital. Despite the fact that the right of freedom of movement and residence is firmly anchored in primary EU law and substantially developed in secondary EU law, a gap still remains between the applicable legal rules and the reality confronting citizens when they seek to exercise those rights in practice.

For example, it is a huge problem that most of European expatriate citizens are losing many of their most important democratic rights when they move to another EU country. Another major problem is related to accumulation of economic costs in certain geographical areas because of brain-drain, brain-waste, and loss of young people. Besides democratic and economic issues, access to the culture from back home, including native language training, is yet another major source of concern. Finally, access to social security and medical services for those on the move, especially if they have lived for a long time outside the EU and want to return, is a challenge, too.

It is essential that the EU lays the foundations for a consistent and comprehensive European policy integrating all aspects related to European citizens' mobility and migration, including also economic, social, political, and cultural implications. Moreover, the establishment of adequate administrative structures in each Member State dealing with issues related to Europeans living abroad is indispensable in this respect, too.

## Recommendations

*The first area of action concerns the quality of data on intra-EU migration flows.* Without timely, regular, and precise data the true impact of migration will not be possible to determine making any forecasting close to impossible. It is strongly advised to establish common standards for probing the relevant data across the EU. More attention is to be devoted to concerns of mobile people, not only in respect to social and economic, but also to cultural and family aspects of their life abroad. Moreover, more studies on main barriers to mobility and the role of return migration and skills acquired abroad have to be carried out.

More statistical evidence, particularly at a local level, is warranted. This is where free movement of people has an impact. It is essential not only to explain and involve people in the local community, but also make it possible to design policies in response. More use of EU cohesion funds would have to be based on sound statistical evidence of outflows or inflows of people and their impact on services.

*The second area of actions should involve combating scaremongering about free movement and migration.* The national debate in many countries has increasingly focussed on the negative rather than the positive prospects of intra-EU mobility. In this debate, the macro-economic and fiscal effects of intra-EU labour migration for both sending and receiving countries, and the barriers to intra-EU mobility, are ignored as well as the fact that the benefits of labour mobility may outweigh the costs. A public campaign on benefits from mobility has to be launched by countries with the support of European institutions. This campaign should aim at making a clear distinction between illegal immigrants and asylum seekers on one hand and European citizens circulating freely in the European Union on the other hand. The next European Citizenship Report, due in 2016, and the next proposals and reports on the European Strategy for growth and jobs (Europe 2020) should have more focus on mobile EU citizens.

European institutions are invited to designate year 2017 as the **European Year of Mobile Citizens**. The overall purpose of the Year of Mobile Citizens should be, i.a., to defend the right to free movement for all EU citizens and to address the genuine concerns related to free movement by getting the facts right, to address existing legal, social, cultural, and democratic impediments to greater mobility of citizens, to lay the foundations for a consistent and comprehensive European policy integrating all aspects related to EU citizens' mobility and migration, and to build bridges between the European diaspora inside and outside the European Union. In this context it will be appropriate to organise, at the approach of the Year of Mobile Citizens, an exercise of consultation followed by a first-ever Convention for Europeans Living Abroad. Moreover, macro-economic aspects and better monitoring of intra-European labour, social and cultural aspects, as well as democratic aspects and return migration, and working with diaspora communities could be themes addressed during such a European Year of Mobile Citizens.

***The third area of action is related to mitigating negative externalities of migration.*** Free movement of people, although apparently the EU's most popular achievement, is being contested to an increasing extent. Whilst overall free movement is a win-win situation for countries of origin, host countries, and European migrants themselves, there are inevitable failures and local problems because of its uneven spread. There should now be emphasis on giving cities and local authorities more power and resources to manage effectively the impact of free movement of people, where there is an impact in selective regions. Evidence suggests that although messages about the overall benefits of intra-EU migration and progress towards a European labour market should be part of the response to scaremongering about free movement, they are not enough. The message has to address local communities and the facts on the ground. Besides, the forthcoming immigration policies, labour mobility initiatives, and EU structural funds' programming should be more attentive to challenges linked to intra-EU mobility.

The European institutions are working on dismantling the restrictions on skills transferability among the EU Member States. However, the process for recognition of skills and qualifications should be hurried up, simplified, and made more visible for citizens. More emphasis on prevention is better than cure. Moreover, a fast-track enforcement procedure should be introduced. It is relatively easy to send a complaint, but unless there is an immediate solution, it can take at least two years before the Commission appeals to the European Court of Justice, and a further 18 months at least for judicial procedures. In the meantime, the Member State(s) concerned can maintain the barrier to the exercise of European rights. The Commission should apply to the European Court of Justice to demand a Member State lift immediately any barrier to the exercise of European rights which prima facie violates European law and affects a large number of people, pending full examination.

***The fourth area of action should deal with foreign language proficiency and information asymmetry on employment opportunities in other EU Member States.*** Foreign (and also native) language proficiency by mobile people and members of their families is an area which has not received proper attention so far, although it has been identified as a major obstacle to greater mobility. Circulation of mobile people, including return migration, is slowed down by a lack of language skills by children necessary for quick and successful integration in the destination country's schooling system. A wider network of European Schools could be part of the solution. The European Job Mobility Portal (EURES) does a great job; however, yet its wider use has to be promoted.

***The fifth area of action comes to more solidarity among the EU Member States.*** The skilled and talented European citizens are a common asset, therefore the costs of nurturing the next generation of skilled and talented labour has to be treated among the EU Member States as a shared responsibility. The less populous countries from the Central and Eastern Europe cannot subsidise for long their richest Western partners in terms of supply of human resources. A European approach should be advanced for a better development of relevant skills, in particular for innovation and the digital society, for better anticipation of the labour market needs, and for a better sharing of the burden and of the benefits from mobility between Member States.

Because free movement is so unevenly spread the real issues are exceptional instances of brain-drain in countries of origin or strains on local services in host countries. EU cohesion policy provides the right context, combining a European framework with a strong emphasis on local community development and partnership with all actors. This would be the right context to consider a **European free movement solidarity fund**. The fund could serve a dual purpose of supporting emergency help to vulnerable EU citizens, mentoring language teaching and guidance for job seekers, whilst providing additional resources for local health, educational, and housing services. There should be appropriate contributions to such a fund from the country of origin, the host country, and the EU budget.