

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA
STANDING COMMITTEE
OF THE EFTA STATES

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Brussels

WORKING GROUP ON EDUCATION, TRAINING AND YOUTH

Comments by the EEA EFTA States on
“Mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training,
young volunteers, teachers and trainers”

(Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The EEA EFTA States welcome the Recommendation on mobility, which is a follow-up to the Commission's Green Paper on Education - Training - Youth: The obstacles to transnational mobility, to which the EFTA Working Group also presented comments to the Commission. Given the EEA EFTA participation in the education and training programmes and activities of the European Union, it is assumed that they will be involved in all initiatives that will follow from the Commission's proposal.

The EEA EFTA States strongly support the objectives of the proposed Recommendation, and put great emphasis on measures aiming at the elimination of obstacles to mobility in a number of areas. It is, however, important that the Recommendation conforms to the principle of subsidiarity, and allows for maximum flexibility on national level as how to achieve the objectives of the Recommendation.

COMMENTS TO CHAPTER I

(i) Measures which concern all categories of people covered by this Recommendation

1. The mobility of students, persons undergoing training, young volunteers, teachers and trainers is indeed an increasingly important dimension of the development of an integrated Europe, as well as a tool for meeting global challenges to competitiveness and employability. The present initiative should contribute to these goals.
2. An obstacle which concerns all categories of people, and which is correctly recognised in the Recommendation, is language training. To encourage mobility, and especially mobility to countries, in which minor European languages are used, preparatory language courses should be offered.

3. Regarding the recommendation to the Member States to take appropriate measures so that third country nationals who are legally and permanent resident in the Community can also benefit from the provisions in the *acquis communautaire* relating to the free movement of persons and equal treatment and from the provisions in the Recommendation, it must be taken into consideration that the status and rights of such third country nationals are not covered by the EEA Agreement. For practical reasons, however, it may be useful to establish some guidelines on how third country nationals should be treated to ensure a coherent and non-discriminatory practice.

(ii) *Measures which specially concern students*

4. One of the obstacles to mobility for students is recognition, for academic purposes in the country of origin, of the period of study taken abroad. Regarding recognition, the use of a European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is supported by the EEA EFTA States.

5. However, it is suggested that the use of the term *European Supplement* is replaced by *Diploma Supplement*. This is the term used in the UNESCO/Council of Europe Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region (the Lisbon Convention). *Diploma Supplement* as a term is now established and well-known in the higher education system. It might create confusion to introduce a new term on this subject.

(iii) *Measures which specially concern persons undergoing training*

6. It is essential that also persons undergoing vocational training be given the possibility to benefit from mobility, and the European Pathways (Europass) initiative is an important step in this direction. However, some issues related to social security and unemployment benefits must be further examined.

7. The recommendation suggests measures, which are far more comprehensive than existing legislation within the Community, as well as in the EEA EFTA States. The question of the transfer of unemployment benefits to persons undergoing training in another country is currently being discussed by the Administrative Commission for Social Security, whose views should be taken into consideration.

8. It is also necessary to make some clarification on the procedures of how to recognise a training period abroad as a valid step towards employability in the country of origin. There may be a difference of opinion in respect of what is beneficial for the labour market, as the situation and qualifications needed may vary from country to country.

(iv) *Measures which specially concern young volunteers*

9. The creation of a suitable framework for young volunteers is encouraged, and emphasis should be put on securing validation, financing, fair taxation and social security.

(v) *Measures which specially concern teachers and trainers*

10. The introduction of European sabbatical periods for teachers is welcomed, but the organisation and financing of such periods must be further explained before it can be endorsed.

11. The inclusion of "converging training programmes", as one of the measures to encourage the introduction of a European dimension in the training programmes of teachers and trainers (paragraph 5(d)), could be explored, but the principle of subsidiarity must be safeguarded.

COMMENTS TO CHAPTER II

12. In our opinion, the EFTA EAA States should on a voluntary basis take part in the reporting to the Commission on the implementation of the recommendations as envisaged in the document. Reports on progress and remaining obstacles would be useful for the consideration of further actions, as well as for comparison and the exchange of best practices.

COMMENTS TO CHAPTER III

13. In order to actively participate in the endeavours to promote mobility, the EEA EFTA States should also be invited on an equal footing to nominate members to the group of experts proposed to be set up by the Commission.

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