

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA

STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE EFTA STATES

Ref. 14-132043

Brussels, 6 November 2014

SUBCOMMITTEE III ON THE FREE MOVEMENT OF PERSONS

EEA EFTA Comment

on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a European network of Employment Services, workers' access to mobility services and the further integration of labour markets (EURES) – COM(2014) 6

1. INTRODUCTION

1. On 17 January 2014, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a regulation that would re-establish the EURES network with the aim of making it more efficient, recruitments more transparent and cooperation between Member States stronger. The EEA EFTA States – Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein – are active participants in the EURES network, which plays an important role in facilitating the free movement of workers within the EEA and Switzerland. Labour migration from other EU/EEA countries has generally stimulated economic growth and reduced the cost pressure and skills mismatch in our labour markets. Considering the large amount of labour migration from other EU/EEA countries into our labour markets, cooperation within EURES is of great importance to the EEA EFTA States. The relevant ministries and administrative bodies in the EEA EFTA States have examined the provisions of the proposal in detail and would like to put forward the following comments.

2. ISSUES REQUIRING FURTHER DISCUSSION

2. We believe that the new EURES Regulation will further facilitate the mobility of workers and thus contribute to tackling unemployment in Europe by better matching labour market needs on the one hand with supply on the other. However, in line with the views expressed by various EU delegations, the EEA EFTA States would like to maintain some reservations with respect to the proposal. We support a more in-depth discussion under the current Italian Presidency on several critical issues that were indentified in the progress report of the Greek Council Presidency, published in June 2014. The key issues we believe require further discussion are the following:

- The sharing of any job vacancy at European level that is made available by the employer at national level, without his/her explicit consent.
- The role of the Public Employment Services (PES) – should they be on the same footing as other actors in the network or have a privileged role/membership in the network?
- The opening up of the network to private partners (with respect to ensuring the quality of the input they would provide).
- The system of authorisation, designation or any other system by which partners would participate/be included in the network.
- The modalities for participation of partners (the possibility for applicant organisations to choose which services they would provide).
- The development and costs of the European classification of skills, competences, qualifications and occupations (ESCO) and making cooperation on the development of such a system optional for Member States.
- The possible burden on national administrations in relation to programming and data collection difficulties.

3. FINANCING OF THE NETWORK

3. The proposal contains several items that entail potentially high costs for national administrations. However, in the view of the EEA EFTA States, the financing aspects of the new regulation are not sufficiently elaborated or explained. The intended source of funding for each of the different activities should be made clearer, particularly given that funding will come from different sources at EU level, such as the European Social Fund and the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI). The EEA EFTA States do not have access to the European Social Fund, which will finance national activities. The long-term practical implications of this are still uncertain and should be clarified. Iceland and Norway do contribute to the EURES axis of the EaSI Programme, which supports various horizontal activities, and so any reimbursement arrangements associated with this financing instrument should also apply to them.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

4. As noted, the EURES network has been an important cooperation tool for the EEA EFTA States and we look forward to continuing our participation in an even stronger and more efficient EURES network. We wish the EU decision-making bodies every success in concluding their negotiations on this important file and will of course continue to follow its progress closely.
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