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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND
THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Final Report on the Implementation of the Commission's
Action Plan for Skills and Mobility COM(2002) 72 final**

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to give account of progress or shortcomings on the implementation of the Action Plan for skills and mobility¹, which was adopted by the Commission in February 2002 and endorsed by the Barcelona European Council in March 2002. The original objectives against which progress has been measured were threefold:

Firstly, to expand occupational mobility and skills development, by ensuring that education and training systems become more responsive to the labour market. Secondly, to facilitate geographic mobility through the removal of administrative and legal barriers, the development of language and cross-cultural skills, the promotion of cross-border recognition of qualifications, and an EU wide immigration policy. Finally, to promote both occupational and geographic mobility through the provision and dissemination of information about existing opportunities for mobility and the related support mechanisms in the EU, mainly through the setting up of a One-Stop mobility information site and the improvement of the EURES² jobs vacancy system.

The Action Plan was designed as a contribution to achieving the Lisbon objectives of more and better jobs, greater social cohesion and a dynamic knowledge-based society.

The new Integrated economic and employment guidelines 2005 – 2008 attribute a prominent role to labour market mobility by proclaiming it crucial for the success of the Revised Lisbon Strategy. The Guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States which were endorsed by the Council in July 2005 put an even greater emphasis on mobility. Guideline n°20 specifies that mobility is central to allow more people to find better employment and calls for the removal of "obstacles to mobility for workers across Europe within the framework of the treaties." The Commission proposal for a Community Lisbon Programme of July 2005 commits likewise the Community to the removal of obstacles to labour mobility and the opening up of employment opportunities within a pan-European labour market.³

Regarding education, promoting mobility through the development of key competences and the designing of a European Qualifications Framework have been identified as crucial dimensions of the Education & Training 2010 programme.

In addition to the Member States, the European Social Partners have also played an important role in the implementation of the Action Plan with the designation of mobility as one of the key priorities of their joint multi-annual work programme (2003-2005), adopted in November 2002.

In February 2004 the Commission adopted its mid-term report on Skills and Mobility⁴. Building on its findings, the final report provides an assessment of the 4 year implementation period of the Action Plan, from 2002 to 2005. Given that a number of actions have only

¹ COM(2002)72 final

² EUROpean Employment Services, eures.europa.eu

³ COM(2005)330 final

⁴ COM(2004)66 final

recently been implemented, the overall impact of its actions can only be fully measured, however, in the coming months. A detailed progress report together with a statistical annex will be made available on the EURES Job Mobility Portal (eures.europa.eu).

The importance of mobility was also expected to receive considerable momentum in the framework of the 2006 European Year of Workers' Mobility. At the end of the Year, together with a comprehensive evaluation of the actions carried out under its umbrella, the Commission will address the issue on how to further promote mobility in the context of the revised Lisbon strategy and will present concrete follow-up proposals in this area in 2007.

2. PAST AND PRESENT POLICY CONTEXT

The freedom of movement for workers is a right for all EU/EEA citizens⁵ and as such one of the founding principles recognised by the Treaty. Along with other economies, the countries of the European Union are facing increasing pressure to respond adequately to the challenges of globalisation. In this context, overall improvements in productivity and rates of innovation and a well functioning European labour market are essential to enhance the competitiveness of the European economy and improve the living and working conditions of its citizens.

The enlarged European Union continues to experience strong inequalities between regions. Regions with skill shortages and bottlenecks and low unemployment often exist side by side with regions with skill surpluses and high unemployment. Skill shortages in the labour market are likely to grow as a result of the demographic changes in the coming years. The size of the working age population is expected to gradually decline as the retirement of large numbers of baby boomers will only be partially replaced by the accession of new generations of young people to the labour market. This largely explains why, after a projected increase by some 20 million between 2004 and 2017, employment is expected to be reduced by almost 30 million by 2050, i.e. a fall of nearly 10 million over the entire period (2004-2050⁶). The need for skilled mobile workers is therefore likely to increase during the coming years. This evolution has a direct impact on the ongoing debate on the migration into the EU of workers from other parts of the world.

Against this background, it has also to be highlighted that mobility has, on average, remained low in both occupational and geographical terms. With regard to job-to-job mobility, recent figures indicate that 38 % of EU workers have been in the same job for over ten years⁷. And the average duration of employment in the same job is estimated at 10.6 years in Europe against 6.7 years in the US.⁸

Statistical data on geographic mobility are even more difficult to provide due to their heterogeneity. The 2005 Labour Force Survey estimates at less than 2 % the percentage of EU citizens living and working in another Member State – a proportion that has not varied significantly over the past 30 Years. These low overall mobility figures, which suggest the

⁵ The 2003 Accession treaty allows however for the application of transitional measures, limiting the free movement of workers to and from eight of the new Member States for a maximum period of seven years. For more details: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/free_movement/docs_en.htm

⁶ European Economy Special Report N°4, Directorate General for Economic and financial Affairs, http://europa.eu.int/comm/economy_finance/publications/european_economy/2005/eesp405en.pdf

⁷ Eurostat, Labour Force Survey, 2005

⁸ CEPS, Centre for European Policy Studies, A New European Agenda for Labour Mobility, April 2004

absence of a genuine "mobility culture" for workers in the EU, are one of the reasons which led the European Commission to designate 2006 as European Year of Workers' Mobility.

3. TOWARDS A EUROPEAN LABOUR MARKET OPEN AND ACCESSIBLE TO ALL: CONTRIBUTION OF THE SKILLS AND MOBILITY ACTION PLAN

3.1. Expanding occupational mobility and skills

With regard to occupational mobility, one of the main instruments to measure progress was the adoption by the Council of a series of benchmarks to be achieved by 2010.

In relation to the objective of **raising education levels and reducing the numbers of those leaving school without formal qualifications**, the Council adopted three European Benchmarks in May 2003. The first provides that, by 2010, an EU average rate of no more than 10 % early school leavers should be achieved. With an EU-25 average falling from 16.6% in 2002 to 15.6%⁹ in 2004, an initial step forward has been noticed.

The two other benchmarks are designed to improve the situation regarding upper secondary education: at least 85% of 20 to 24 year olds in the EU should have completed upper secondary education by 2010 (the EU-25 average has so far only risen slightly from 76.5% in 2002 to 76.7% in 2004); and the percentage of 15-year olds with reading illiteracy should have decreased by at least 20% by the end of the decade¹⁰.

In connection with the priority of **increasing young people's interest in mathematics, science and technology** the Council adopted in May 2003 a specific benchmark stating that the total number of graduates in these fields should increase by at least 15% by 2010 while at the same time the level of gender imbalance should decrease. Results on this benchmark are positive, as evidenced by the substantial increase in the number of graduates. The Commission, for its part, has taken a number of actions in the area, such as the launch of the **"Researchers in Europe Initiative"** in 2005, with the aim of raising public awareness about the role of researchers in society, attracting more young people into scientific careers and improving the attractiveness of the EU for researchers from all over the world¹¹. "European Researchers' Nights" were organised in 2005 and 2006, involving a broad range of awareness-raising activities. Support for the training of researchers in Europe has also been boosted by a significant increase in the budget of the **Marie Curie Actions** in the 6th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development, i.e. 1,58 billion € for 2000 – 2006, an increase of nearly 70 % as compared to the previous framework programme. **Researcher careers** have also been promoted by the Council's endorsement of the Commission's Recommendation¹² on the **European Charter for Researchers** and a **Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers** in April 2005. So far, over 100 European research

⁹ Eurostat, Labour Force Survey, 14.06.2005

¹⁰ According to the 2004 PISA reading literacy survey, Finland, the Netherlands, Ireland, Austria, Sweden and the UK had less than 15 % of their 15 year olds reported as low-performers, while the proportion remained higher than 20 % in Germany, Greece, Luxembourg and Portugal (2004 PISA reading literacy survey, OJE (2004/C 104/01)

¹¹ <http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/researchersineurope>

¹² OJ L75/67 of 22 March 2005 (2005/251/EC) or <http://europa.eu.int/eracareers/europeancharter>

organisations have committed themselves so far to adhere to the principles of the Charter and Code.

The Copenhagen Declaration of November 2002 set out priorities for improved cooperation in **vocational education and training (VET)**, in order to improve mutual trust, transparency and the recognition of qualifications and competences, as a means to support increased mobility and facilitate life long learning. These priorities are now well anchored within the Education and Training 2010 work programme.

As regards the validation of non-formal, informal and formal learning, a set of common principles was adopted by the European Council in May 2004, and a European Inventory on validation, providing a basis for mutual learning and exchange of experiences between Member States, was finalised¹³ in 2004.

In the area of **transparency and transferability of qualifications**, the single framework for transparency of qualifications and competences - Europass – was launched in February 2005. Through a European Internet portal and a network of National Europass Centres, Europass makes available to citizens a coordinated portfolio of transparency documents. Offering tools that are mostly used by jobseekers, it is closely related to the EURES Job Mobility Portal and synergy is being developed between both instruments.

In response to the request of the Spring European Council of March 2005, a public consultation was held on a proposal for the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), which will assist the **recognition of educational qualifications and competences in non-regulated professions**. The instrument is designed as a common reference point for reducing barriers to co-operation and improving communication between education and training providers in different systems and between authorities in different countries. The transparency and transferability of qualifications has consequently been improved, making it possible to compare the different learning outcomes of individual citizens, and facilitating thereby lifelong learning and occupational mobility. It is anticipated that a Recommendation in this area will be adopted by the Council and Parliament in 2007.

To support the EQF, work on quality assurance is being pursued, for example the Common Quality Assurance framework for VET, and a public consultation on ECVET - a system for the accumulation and transfer of credit in VET - will be launched on 15 September 2006.

In the ICT area, the Commission established the **European e-Skills Forum**¹⁴ in March 2003 to foster dialogue among all relevant stakeholders on the development of **new ICT and e-business skills (e-skills) as well as their qualifications related to the ICT sector**. The Forum produced a synthesis report in September 2004 entitled “**e-Skills in Europe: Towards 2010 and Beyond**”, which identifies concrete actions and calls for the promotion of multi-stakeholder partnerships for their implementation¹⁵. In particular, progress has been made in 2005 towards the development of a **European ICT skills Meta-Framework** to promote better understanding within the European Union about the nature and structure of ICT

¹³ www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory

¹⁴ <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/ict/policy/ict-skills.htm>

¹⁵ www.eskills2004.org

practitioner skills required by employers¹⁶. At a more general level, the digital literacy action of the e-learning programme has specifically addressed issues related to the digital divide. And within the renewed Lisbon Agenda, the i2010 initiative identified Digital Literacy as one of the key areas for policy actions in the field of information society.

Finally, efforts have been pursued to raise **participation in lifelong learning and continuing training**. The joint interim report of the Council and Commission “Education and Training 2010” of March 2004, while evidencing initial progress, called on the Member States to step up their efforts towards developing and implementing comprehensive lifelong learning strategies. This issue has been given high priority in the revised European Employment Strategy, supported by financial assistance from the European Social Fund. The conclusions of the 2004 Spring European Council reiterated the need to have such strategies in place by 2006. So far, progress has essentially been made through the adoption of a benchmark by the Council, stating that the EU average level of participation in lifelong learning schemes should rise to 12.5 % of the adult working population by 2010. In 2004 the EU-25 average participation was measured at 10,3% against 7,9% in 2002¹⁷. The social partners adopted a common framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications in March 2002 and report yearly on actions taken.

3.2. Facilitating geographic mobility

While a number of practical problems still have a considerable impact on the decision of people to engage in a mobility experience in another country or region (housing market regulations, language and cultural barriers, absence of support mechanisms to facilitate the return of mobile people to their home country), one of the most visible achievements during the time span of the Action Plan has been the introduction of the **European Health Insurance Card**. Regulation 631/2004 which aims at facilitating the introduction of the Card by aligning the rights on benefits in kind of all categories of insured persons and by simplifying the procedures was adopted in March 2004. The Card, which is currently used by over 50 million citizens, has been introduced in all countries of the European Economic Area at the latest on 1 January 2006.

The **co-ordination of Social Security Schemes** has been improved through the simplification and modernisation of Regulation 1408/71 by means of the new Regulation 883/2004. The latter contains a number of key provisions for the promotion of mobility and the improvement of protection levels for migrant workers and their families, such as: the possibility of extending the period during which a jobseeker can look for work in another Member State from 3 to 6 months; the possibility of exporting pre-retirement benefits; the possibility for unemployed frontier workers to seek a job in the Member State of former employment by keeping their entitlement to unemployment benefits in the Member State of residence; and significant improvement in health care protection for family members of a frontier worker by granting them not only entitlement to health care in the Member State of residence, but also in the Member State where they work.

The process of improving the **recognition of professional qualifications for regulated professions** produced likewise significant results with the adoption of Directive 2005/36/CE

¹⁶ <http://www.cenorm.be/cenorm/businessdomains/businessdomains/iss/activity/wsict-skills.asp>

¹⁷ Eurostat, Labour Force Survey, 14.06.2005

in September 2005. The new Directive integrates fifteen Directives into a single framework while respecting existing guarantees for migrants. It introduces a number of changes including greater facilitation of cross-border provision of services for regulated professions which is an essential element of the Commission's Services Strategy. It offers also the opportunity to obtain more automatic recognition of qualifications on the basis of common platforms, increased flexibility in procedures and better guidance of citizens concerning the recognition of their professional qualifications.

Promoting **transnational learning in other Member States** is an essential component of the "Education & Training 2010" work programme. After the 2003 set of policy recommendations on access to mobility, quality in mobility and the opening up of Europe to the wider world, the Commission prepared a second recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council in 2005 on transnational mobility within the EU for education and training purposes. The recommendation invites the Member States to adopt the **European Quality Charter for mobility**, which lays down a set of principles in the field of mobility for education and training purposes to be implemented by the Member States on a voluntary basis. The Charter is intended to become a reference instrument to help increase exchanges, develop the recognition of study periods spent in other countries and establish mutual trust between authorities, organisations and all mobility stakeholders concerned.

Concerning the **portability of supplementary pensions**, the Commission adopted on 20 October 2005 a Directive¹⁸ aimed at reducing the obstacles to mobility within and between Member States caused by existing supplementary pension schemes provisions. The obstacles referred in particular to the conditions of acquisition of pension rights, the conditions of preservation of dormant pension rights, as well as the transferability of acquired rights. The proposal complements the Community acquis in the area of supplementary pensions such as Directive 98/49/EC on the safeguarding of supplementary pension rights of employed and self-employed persons moving within the EU, and Directive 2003/41/EC on the activities and supervision of institutions for occupational retirement provision.

In the **research** area, a Directive on a specific procedure for the admission of third-country researchers and two Recommendations concerning the facilitation of admission and the issuing of short-term visas to third country researchers entering the EC were adopted in September and October 2005¹⁹.

Finally, in relation to the priority of developing an **EU-wide immigration policy**, the Commission adopted in June 2003 a Communication on Immigration, Integration and Employment, responding to the Tampere European Council request to develop an integration policy for third country nationals, which would also cover employment-related issues. Regulation 859/2003, which extends the provisions of Regulation 1408/71 to legally resident

¹⁸ Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on improving the portability of supplementary pension rights, COM(2005) 507 final

¹⁹ Council Directive 2005/71/EC of 12 October 2005 on a specific procedure for admitting third-country nationals for the purpose of scientific research; Recommendation 2005/761/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 September 2005 to facilitate the issue by the Member States of uniform short-stay visas for researchers from third countries travelling within the Community for the purpose of carrying out scientific research; Council Recommendation 2005/762/EC of 12 October 2005 to facilitate the admission of third-country nationals to carry out scientific research in the European Community, all published on O.J. 1289 of 3.12.2005.

nationals of third countries, entered into force on 1 June 2003. This instrument was followed on 29 April 2004 by the adoption of Directive 2004/38 on the right of EU citizens and their family members to move and to reside freely within the territory of the Member States. The Directive recasts and simplifies the different existing Community instruments on the right of entry and residence of workers, self-employed persons, students, retired persons and other inactive persons. According to the Directive, EU citizens will no longer need to obtain a residence card (a simple registration with the competent authorities will suffice if the host Member State deems it necessary). EU citizens will also acquire a permanent right of residence in the host Member State after 5 years of continuous residence, which will no longer be subject to conditions. Overall progress on developing a common policy towards economic migration for work purposes was further prompted at the end of 2004, with the adoption of the Hague programme. In this context, the Commission adopted in January 2005²⁰ a Green Paper on an EU approach to manage economic migration and organised a Public Hearing in June 2005 to consult stakeholders. As a follow-up and on request of the Council, the Commission adopted a policy plan on legal migration in December 2005, which covers the issue of economic migration²¹.

3.3. Improving information and transparency of job opportunities

In order to ensure improved information and more transparency of job opportunities in Europe, the Commission launched in September 2003 the **EURES Job Mobility Information Portal** with the objective to provide Europe-wide access to available jobs. EURES links together the Public Employment Services of the Member States with partners such as employers and trade union organisations. The launch of the Portal has substantially improved and simplified the access of workers and employers to practical information on questions related to job mobility. With over 500,000 unique visitors per month, EURES has become one of the most visited Commission websites. By early 2006, further extensions of the Portal enabled all EU citizens to have direct access, through a common IT platform, to all job vacancies published by the Public Employment Services, i.e. in the order of 1 million job vacancies at any given time. The Portal is connected to the PLOTEUS portal on learning opportunities to facilitate mobility for learning purposes²².

EURES has also developed links with other relevant information providers, in particular the ERACAREERS, the **European Researcher's Mobility portal**²³, which aims at creating a more favourable environment for career development opportunities for researchers within the European Research Area. The Portal offers free direct advertisement of job vacancies in the research area and posting of CVs. In addition to the services provided by the Portal, researchers and their families have since 2004 access to a personalised assistance service operated through **ERA-MORE**, a network of 200 mobility centres located in 32 countries.

Another significant development on the information side is the launch, in February 2005, of the **Your Europe Portal**. The portal offers practical information and opportunities to European citizens wishing to work or study in another EU country, or to European businesses

²⁰ Green Paper on an EU Approach to Managing Economic Migration, European Commission, 11.01.2005, COM(2004) 811 final

²¹ COM(2005)669 final of 12 December 2005.

²² <http://europa.eu.int/ploteus>

²³ <http://europa.eu.int/eracareers/>

wanting to move to or open a new branch in another EU Member State. During March 2006, the Portal counted 1,286,301 visits and 189,963 unique visitors.

4. CHALLENGES AHEAD

An overall assessment of the Skills and Mobility Action Plan reveals that a number of significant developments have, on a whole, been initiated as regards the implementation of its 25 priority actions. This impression must be balanced, however, by the fact that **many Europeans remain unaware or unconvinced** of the rights, conditions and opportunities for occupational and geographical changes.

Taking stock of the above-mentioned developments and the expected developments to take place under the 2006 European Year of Workers' mobility, the Commission will prepare new initiatives in 2007. The findings of the present report point out to a number of areas for potential follow up.

- € In the area of **lifelong learning**, efforts need to be stepped up in order to develop coherent and comprehensive strategies open to all in schools, businesses, public authorities and households. As required by Employment Guideline n°23 and the Community Lisbon Programme adopted in July 2005, implementation should be promoted by appropriate incentives and cost-sharing mechanisms. These measures aim to enhance the adaptability and flexibility of the European workforce in order to better respond to the changes of the European labour market and to contribute thereby to the creation of more and better jobs²⁴.
- € On the **ICT skills** front it is important to invest more strongly in EU core comparative and competitive advantages as well as to relate to factual information when debating the issues at stake. Following the recommendations of the European e-Skills Forum, a series of concrete actions have been initiated by the Commission at the end of 2005 to provide a more accurate picture of the supply and demand of e-skills²⁵, develop foresight scenarios (2005-2015) to better anticipate the evolution of demand, benchmark policies and initiatives in support of e-learning for enterprises, and study the possible development of a European ICT skills and career portal in co-operation with industry and the social partners.
- € Intensifying efforts to **remove the legal, administrative and cultural obstacles** to mobility is a more global task where efforts need to be prompted if the overall goal of creating a European labour market is to be attained. The current initiatives in the areas of social security, the portability of pension rights or the transferability of qualifications for non regulated professions need to be fully implemented and, where necessary, completed in order to create an environment where geographic and occupational mobility are considered as a normal component of a career. New areas of investigation need also to be explored : language skills, the need to provide appropriate training prior to mobility and the difficulty of finding employment for partners or spouses of mobile workers have, for example, emerged as some of the major obstacles to occupational and geographic mobility in Europe. These objectives fall in line with the new global approach put forward in the

²⁴ On the future challenges for skills and mobility in the context of the Lisbon Strategy, see the Commission's 2006 Annual Progress Report (COM(2006) 30 final of 25 January 2006, and more particularly Action 3.1. "Investing more in Knowledge and innovation"

²⁵ "The Supply and Demand of e-Skills in Europe", RAND Europe, September 2005

Commission's 2006 Annual Progress Report, which calls for a new partnership between the Commission and the Member States in order to meet the global challenges of more and better jobs²⁶.

- ∅ Finally, **economic migration**, if properly managed, should be regarded as a key asset for the economic and social development of Europe and the competitiveness of EU enterprises. In the light of the expected demographic decline and the projected fall in employment levels, managed migration represents a crucial additional instrument to meet labour market requests and sustain economic growth.

In line with the Community Lisbon Programme and the new Employment Guidelines (2005-2008), a **more integrated approach to mobility** seems therefore necessary in order to fully develop mobility not only as an instrument to create employment, but as a means to foster the personal development of individuals in a lifelong learning perspective.

²⁶ Communication from the Commission to the Spring European Council "Time to move up a gear", COM(2006)30 final.