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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

Subject: Preparation of the EYCS (Education) Council policy debate on 20 February 2020 on 'Brain circulation – a driving force for the European Education Area'
– Presidency discussion paper

Following consultation of the Education Committee, the Presidency has prepared the attached discussion paper, which is submitted as the basis for the policy debate to take place at the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting on 20 February 2020.

Brain circulation – a driving force for the European Education Area*Presidency discussion paper*

Learning and labour mobility, as well as transnational movement of citizens, have many benefits such as development of generic, transversal, intercultural and linguistic skills, higher employability, better understanding of one's own identity, personal growth and maturity and the development of European identity and values. 'Learning mobility is associated with future mobility, higher earnings, and lower unemployment. It also correlates with improved mutual understanding, openness and citizenship skills'.¹ Moreover, free circulation and diffusion of knowledge and ideas across the EU is beneficial to the development of the economy and of society, as well as strengthening European integration and keeping the European spirit alive.

Balanced brain circulation is understood as 'the possibility for developing countries to draw on skills, know-how and other forms of experience gained by their migrants and members of their diaspora'². It is a precondition for the balanced development and cohesion of different EU regions and countries and thus of the Union itself.

Imbalances in brain flow, one-way migration of people with skills levels ranging from low to high across Europe may, on the other hand, cause great losses of human capital in a form of brain waste or brain drain³. These phenomena are the possible consequence of a number of factors, in particular social and economic disparities across the EU, and the cause of de-population of some regions or countries and with an uneven mix of skills levels across Europe. In the long run, such disparities may endanger cohesion and pose a risk to the long-term sustainability of the European project.⁴

¹ Education and Training Monitor 2019. European Commission (2019)

² European Migration Network Glossary. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary_search/brain-circulation_en

³ *Brain waste* is the non-recognition of skills and qualifications acquired by a migrant outside the EU, which prevents them from fully using their potential. *Brain drain* is the loss suffered by a country as a result of the emigration of highly qualified persons. European Migration Network Glossary. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary_search/brain-circulation_en

⁴ Brain drain in the EU: addressing the challenge at all levels, Emil Boc, European Committee of the Regions, Draft opinion for the 138th plenary session (2020)

Growing competition for highly skilled people is linked to a significant rate of out-migration from certain countries or regions to others. Economic conditions, labour market potential and perception about the quality of education institutions are among the factors that attract foreign talents, including students, graduates, researchers and young professionals. ‘Inward student mobility⁵ is one of the most important channels driving migration of global talent. It has significant potential benefits for the destination countries, in terms of the stock of human capital available.’⁶ Some systems and some countries are more attractive than others, due to a variety of reasons related to overall economic, labour market, social and living conditions.⁷ The overall pattern of labour mobility in the EU has shown that 98 % of mobile workers⁸ live in EU-15 and EFTA countries and only 2 % in EU-13 countries⁹. More recent figures show that 74 % of all EU-28 movers are hosted by Germany, United Kingdom, Italy, France and Spain. In addition to that, the statistics reveal that recent movers are more highly educated than nationals of their host country¹⁰.

⁵ The phenomenon is much more pronounced for degree mobility than for credit mobility, such as under Erasmus+.

⁶ Due to the lack or incompleteness of inward degree-mobility data for some destination Member States, the calculation of this benchmark remains underestimated. Education and Training Monitor 2019. European Commission (2019)

⁷ According to the OECD, *Indicators of Talent Attractiveness* score seven dimensions: quality of opportunities; income and tax; future prospects; family environment; skills environment; inclusiveness; and quality of life. This indicator captures capacity of a country to attract and retain three specific categories of talented migrants: highly qualified workers (those with master and doctoral degrees), university students and foreign entrepreneurs. OECD. Migration Policy Debates (2019)

⁸ In the European Commission Annual Reports on Intra-EU Labour Mobility *mobile workers* are defined as active EU 28 citizens who reside in a Member State or EFTA country other than their country of citizenship.

⁹ 2016 Annual Report on Intra-EU Labour Mobility. European Commission (2017)

¹⁰ 2017 Annual Report on Intra-EU Labour Mobility. European Commission (2018)

Moreover, according to a recent study on the movement of skilled labour¹¹, such imbalances in brain flow reveal that investments in education and training from sending countries support labour market and economic development in destination countries while, at the same time, human capital may be reduced in sending countries when the remaining population has a lower skills composition than that of those who leave¹². The consequences for sending countries include the loss of returns on public investment in education, labour shortages and brain drain¹³.

Nevertheless, reverse migration (return to the country of origin) can bring positive gains to sending countries and these are associated with remittances¹⁴, creation of networks that facilitate trade, capital flows and knowledge diffusion, transfer of skills and know-how¹⁵, investment and expertise from migrants back to the sending country¹⁶ and newly acquired knowledge of return movers allowing them to foster entrepreneurship and innovation¹⁷. It is therefore essential that increased skills acquisition (gained abroad) can benefit the sending countries when movers return back to them. Recognition of qualifications and validation of skills can support this process.

To support the positive effects of brain circulation, policy makers have the responsibility to create measures and policies that support balanced migration flows, which contribute to the development of the economy and of society in general, enhance the social dimension of education and foster European integration and cohesion. These policy developments need to be supported by a solid evidence base, by developing comprehensive tracking systems for tertiary and VET graduates at national level, and by improving the availability of comparable EU data to allow more in-depth comparative analyses of graduate outcomes. Furthermore, it is essential that successful policies feed into a wider discussion and understanding of the costs and benefits of free movement¹⁸.

¹¹ Study carried out in the context of the New Skills Agenda for Europa. European Commission. Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223>

¹² Study on the movement of skilled labour. European Commission. ICF (2018)

¹³ Hasselbalch, Jacob. The European Politics of Brain Drain: A Fast or Slow-Burning Crisis? Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation (2017)

¹⁴ Albert Bollard, David McKenzie, Melanie Morten, Hillel Rapoport. Remittances and the Brain Drain Revisited: The Microdata Show That More Educated Migrants Remit More (2009)

¹⁵ European Commission Communication on Migration and Development (2005)

¹⁶ Gibson, McKenzie: Eight Questions about Brain Drain. The World Bank (2011)

¹⁷ Study on the movement of skilled labour, European Commission. ICF (2018)

¹⁸ Study on the movement of skilled labour. European Commission. ICF (2018)

In that sense, increased strategic investments in education, research and innovation, as well as the creation of appropriate instruments and allocations under the European and national funds and programmes, may increase the quality and attractiveness of education, create favourable conditions for research and consequently attract and retain more talent. In particular, the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund are key tools geared towards reducing regional disparities in income, wealth and opportunities. Moreover, ‘two of the key Europe 2020 objectives - increasing the percentage of employed people and improving social inclusion - are directly relevant to creating favourable conditions which will diminish brain drain’¹⁹.

It is important that the issues of balancing transnational mobility and brain flow across the EU through the creation of measures that will contribute to a more even development of education and research systems, economies and societies, as well as measures that will prevent brain waste, should be taken into account while developing and fostering the European Education Area. The Erasmus+ programme and its successor aim at stimulating brain circulation and balanced mobility.²⁰ Besides, its flagship initiative, the European Universities, with its wide geographical balance, will contribute to more balanced mobility (be it physical, blended or virtual) and may serve as a model for the structural, systemic and sustainable transformation of higher education institutions into the universities of the future.

¹⁹ Brain drain in the EU: addressing the challenge at all levels, Emil Boc, European Committee of the Regions, Draft opinion for the 138th plenary session, 11-12 February 2020

²⁰ The Erasmus+ Annual Report 2017 provides an analysis of Erasmus+ mobility trends at European level which reveals that student and staff mobility in Europe is rather balanced albeit with variations in some countries.

Recognising education and culture as a ‘key to building inclusive and cohesive societies, and to sustaining our competitiveness’²¹, and taking into account steps recently taken towards the creation of the European Education Area²², ministers are invited to reflect on the topic of brain circulation as a driving force for the European Education Area, in particular in relation to the following questions.

1. What mix of policies is necessary to ensure balanced brain circulation in the European Education Area and how can relevant players at local, regional and national level be mobilised to achieve this aim?
2. What can be done at national and European levels to further support the European Universities initiative’s strong potential to contribute towards balanced brain circulation in the European Education Area?
3. How can European funds, programmes and funding instruments be used to develop and implement policies that would, consequently, enhance balanced brain circulation? Do you have any national examples of measures that you implement?

²¹ European Council Conclusions of 14 December 2017. EUCO 19/1/18 REV 1

²² Communication on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture. COM(2017) 673 final. Communication on Building a stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies. COM(2018) 268 final. Conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area. OJ C 195, 7.6.2018. Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad. OJ C 444/1, 10.12.2018. Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages. OJ C 189/15, 5.6.2019. Resolution on further developing the European Education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems. OJ C 389/1, 18.11.2019