

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on 'European and international mobility for local and regional authority staff'

(2012/C 9/13)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- observes that, given local and regional authority staff's close day-to-day contact with both the public and elected representatives, their role in putting across the European message could be boosted by making mobility part of their continuous training via temporary secondments to other local authorities;
- notes that European and international mobility for local and regional authority staff can help countries across the European Union develop modern and efficient administrations, with the structures, human resources and management skills needed to implement the EU *acquis*;
- points out that mobility will help reduce linguistic barriers in Europe by encouraging civil servants and other staff to learn additional languages;
- draws attention to the latest ruling by the Court of Justice of the EU, which stipulates that those employed by a public authority of a Member State and transferred to another public authority, should not suffer 'a substantial reduction in salary by reason only of the transfer'.

Rapporteur Ms Mireille LACOMBE (FR/PES), Member of the General Council of Puy-de-Dôme

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

1. General comments

Why the Committee of the Regions has decided to issue an own-initiative opinion on this topic

1. points out that the Treaty of Lisbon strengthens the territorial dimension of European integration and provides a legal basis for implementing multi-level governance, in relation to which the Committee of the Regions' White Paper on Multi-Level Governance proposes a number of actions ⁽¹⁾;

2. notes that, if the Europe 2020 Strategy is to become fully operational, local and regional authorities must be involved in its design and implementation, including the flagship initiatives 'An Agenda for new skills and jobs' ⁽²⁾ and 'Youth on the Move' ⁽³⁾;

3. considers that strengthening the role of local and regional authorities in EU enlargement, the neighbourhood policy and external relations, including development aid, through decentralised cooperation (as stipulated in the Committee of the Regions' opinion on Local authorities: actors for development ⁽⁴⁾) will require introducing appropriate changes in human resources, to enable staff to grasp and anticipate European policies;

4. observes that, given local and regional authority staff's close day-to-day contact with both the public and elected representatives, their role in putting across the European message could be boosted by making mobility part of their continuous training via temporary secondments to other local authorities;

5. notes that the public sector represents around 20,3 % of the labour market within the European Union ⁽⁵⁾. Mobility of local and regional authority staff to promote the sharing of experience and professional skills is a dimension of the free movement of workers within the EU, as provided for in Article 45 of the TFEU, and is an essential element of EU citizenship;

6. draws attention to the CoR's commitment to mobility, be it educational or professional, since – aside from its important contribution to personal and professional development – mobility helps strengthen European identity, thereby enhancing economic, social and territorial cohesion within the European Union ⁽⁶⁾;

7. points out that, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, in most Member States, local and regional authorities have direct responsibility for the provision and delivery of public services and making sure the administration operates with maximum efficiency. A wealth of knowledge and experience exists at local and regional level and this is the level where the exchange of best practice will help to identify the majority of innovative and creative approaches;

8. notes the dearth of information on European and international mobility opportunities for local and regional authority staff, which is an obstacle to exchanges between local and regional authorities;

What positive effects might stem from European and international mobility for local and regional authority staff?

9. notes that European and international mobility for local and regional authority staff can help countries across the European Union develop modern and efficient administrations, with the structures, human resources and management skills needed to implement the EU *acquis*;

10. contends that cross-border mobility contributes to cohesion. Staff engaged in mobility programmes are working directly or indirectly to improve society for all at a local, regional and national level. Research shows that there is a direct and positive correlation between social capital and levels of growth in European regions ⁽⁷⁾;

11. stresses that alongside democratic governance encouraging public participation, cooperation between local and regional authorities is a powerful factor for local development by virtue of the variety of its areas of activity and of the public and private actors on which it can call. It can also stimulate the organisation of production and commercial and economic activity which benefits local people and the environment;

12. points out that mobility will help reduce linguistic barriers in Europe by encouraging civil servants and other staff to learn additional languages;

13. stresses the role of local and regional authorities in promoting cross-border mobility and the contribution this mobility makes both in terms of strengthening European integration and familiarising applicant countries with the Community *acquis*. Since local and regional authorities possess a great deal of administrative knowledge and experience, this is the level where the best solutions are usually found and where important partnerships are entered into;

⁽¹⁾ CdR 89/2009 fin.

⁽²⁾ COM(2010) 682 final.

⁽³⁾ COM(2010) 477 final.

⁽⁴⁾ CdR 312/2008 fin.

⁽⁵⁾ SEC(2010) 1609 final.

⁽⁶⁾ CdR 292/2010 fin.

⁽⁷⁾ Beugelsdijk and van Schaik, *Social Capital and Regional Economic Growth*, 2003.

2. Measures to consider

14. urges the Commission to support the development of European and international mobility for local and regional authority staff so as to improve cooperation between cities and regions, by creating a database in the form of an Internet portal bringing together best practice, projects, opportunities for mobility and information on the legal and economic conditions for mobility. The European Commission could make use of information that already exists at national, regional and local level and make it available to local and regional authority staff;

15. stresses that the growing role played by local and regional authorities in development aid and international cooperation programmes with developing countries should be further acknowledged ⁽⁸⁾;

16. calls for more account to be taken of the role played by local and regional authorities in cooperation, given their close involvement in this sphere. In compliance with the principle of subsidiarity, they would seem best placed to help facilitate access to mobility. Indeed, local and regional authorities should be involved in developing cooperation programmes, designed with the local and regional authority staff responsible for managing local and European public policies;

17. proposes that EU officials also be given the possibility to be seconded to local and regional authorities;

18. points out that the civil servants and other staff working for European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) should also fall within the scope of this opinion. Cross-border areas are particularly appropriate for testing European and international mobility for European civil servants and can serve as Europe's laboratories in this context. Accordingly, the EU should support the development of information services for cross-border workers, as a key factor in mobility;

19. calls on Member States which have not yet done so to introduce, after consultation with the social partners, legal provisions providing for European and international mobility for their own permanent and temporary local and regional authority staff, also enabling them to receive staff from local and regional authorities in other Member States. Putting legal provisions of this kind in place is useful so that the rights and obligations of seconded staff are properly defined. Framework provisions are also essential in defining the criteria for mobility, including the professional and language skills required, the

duration of the secondment, the consonance between the sending and receiving authority and the added value the secondment will bring to the authorities concerned;

20. draws attention to the latest ruling by the Court of Justice of the EU ⁽⁹⁾, which stipulates that those employed by a public authority of a Member State and transferred to another public authority, should not suffer 'a substantial reduction in salary by reason only of the transfer';

21. underlines that, given the high number of female employees in the public sector, all measures should take into account the importance of strengthening equal opportunities for women and men, not least through access to adequate care for adult dependent persons and children, so as to enable more women to participate in mobility programmes;

22. stresses that it would be useful for the European Commission to work with the European associations concerned to draw up a picture of the mobility of local and regional authority staff over the past five years, including an assessment of the added value for the authority and the new skills staff acquired in terms of managing complex projects;

23. proposes that the European Commission, in cooperation with the Committee of the Regions, organise 'mobility meetings' bringing the European institutions and local and regional authorities together so that local and regional authority staff engaged in mobility schemes can share experiences with staff wishing to work abroad. A mobility prize ('Mobilis') could be established and awarded to authorities wishing to be involved in mobility;

24. proposes that the European Commission conduct a feasibility study with a view to setting up a European exchange programme for civil servants and other staff working for local and regional authorities;

25. calls for financial support for local and regional authority staff mobility (currently funded through programmes such as Interreg IVC, Urbact and Cards) to be maintained in the EU's new financial perspectives;

26. proposes that the European Commission conduct an information campaign on the added value of mobility for local and regional authority staff so as to encourage exchanges of good practice between local and regional authorities, not only within the EU but also in the applicant states and non-EU countries.

Brussels, 12 October 2011.

*The President
of the Committee of the Regions*
Mercedes BRESSO

⁽⁸⁾ CdR 408/2010 fin.

⁽⁹⁾ Scattolon Case C-108/10.