

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Better promoting the mobility of young people in Europe: practicalities and timetable

(2008/C 224/23)

In a letter dated 25 October 2007, Mr Jouyet, French Minister of State with responsibility for European affairs, asked the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to draw up an exploratory opinion on:

Better promoting the mobility of young people in Europe: practicalities and timetable.

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 7 May 2008. The rapporteur was Mr Rodríguez García-Caro.

At its 445th plenary session, held on 28 and 29 May 2008 (meeting of 29 May), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 117 votes to four with one abstention.

1. Conclusions

1.1 The European Economic and Social Committee welcomes the interest and support shown by the future French presidency of the Council towards the mobility of young Europeans. In December 2000, a resolution was adopted by the European Council of Nice listing 42 measures to boost and encourage the mobility of young people. Some years later, with France's new presidency, there is once again a clear interest in solving the problems affecting the mobility of Europe's younger citizens.

1.2 The EESC believes that the main problem faced by the EU in terms of young people's cross-border mobility is the clear lack of solutions to the problems that have already been described on numerous occasions, and the difficulty in applying the measures adopted to solve these problems. The list of problems identified is as long as the catalogue of measures that must be adopted to resolve them. Therefore, the EESC considers that the issue is not to look for further barriers to mobility and list actions to promote it but, rather, to address the basic question of what has been achieved, what remains to be achieved, and how can the results be assessed?

1.3 Thus, the EESC considers that there is no need to set up further expert or high-level groups which are likely to revisit issues that have already been addressed in the past. What is necessary, in the EESC's opinion, is to set up a working group representing the different Commission DGs with responsibilities in the area of mobility, which would conduct an analysis of the situation and address the following points in a methodical manner:

- determine the obstacles that have already been identified and described previously;
- identify effective measures approved at EU level in order to overcome these (regulations, directives, decisions, resolutions, recommendations, etc.);

- identify as yet unsolved problems which have been defined and are in the process of being resolved by means of legislation;

- identify problems which have been defined but for which there are no pending solutions;

- identify measures which have been proposed but not taken into account, or not implemented by the Member States.

1.4 Likewise, the situation of young people should be methodically defined, dividing them into different target groups with comparable circumstances and subject to similar issues. This would make it possible to find out what affects different groups of young people and thus selectively adopt specific measures targeted at these groups, with a view to improving effectiveness and efficiency, and avoiding 'one-size-fits-all' decisions.

1.5 The target groups for this analysis should include:

- university students;

- young people who have finished their university education or vocational training and are starting work for the first time;

- students on work-linked training schemes;

- artists;

- young volunteers;

- young entrepreneurs;

- young people without financial means;

- young couples trying to reconcile family life and work or education;

- young people in situations of social exclusion;
- young people looking for work and in their first years of employment.

1.6 The EESC considers that what is needed is not so much to continue to identify obstacles and solutions but, rather, to implement the right measures in a reasonably short time so that all that has already been said about mobility can be legitimised as solutions to the mobility problems faced by young people in Europe.

1.7 By involving all stakeholders in making mobility a reality for young people and taking a more proactive approach to the different EU policies in the field, it could be possible to bring about a fundamental change to the status quo.

2. Introduction

2.1 Reason for the exploratory opinion

2.1.1 This document has been drawn up in response to the request made to the European Economic and Social Committee by the French Minister of State with responsibility for European affairs. On 25 October 2007, the Minister of State asked the Committee to draw up an exploratory opinion on **Better promoting the mobility of young people in Europe: practicalities and timetable**. The opinion has been requested in the light of France's presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2008.

2.1.2 Meanwhile, the European Commissioner responsible for education and training has promoted the creation of a high-level expert group on improving mobility among Europeans. The high-level group held its first meeting on 24 January 2008, and has the aim of identifying the measures that could be introduced to increase exchanges among young people, improve assistance for mobility in vocational training and adult education, and increase the mobility of young artists, business managers and volunteers. It intends to complete its work by the middle of the year, when it will produce a strategic report.

2.2 Mobility in the European Union: more than a right to free movement

2.2.1 Mobility is a right which is enshrined in Article 18 of the Treaty establishing the European Community. This right is further defined with regard to education and training in the provisions of Articles 149(4) and 150(4) TEC. Therefore, from this perspective, both the EU and the individual Member States must take the necessary steps to guarantee this right to mobility, whether for work, training, volunteering or simply leisure purposes.

2.2.2 Initially, the free movement of workers was, as one of the four basic freedoms of the European Economic Community along with free movement of goods, capital and services, the basis for the mobility of EU nationals. In order to guarantee the free movement of workers, significant advances in Community legislation were made (particularly with regard to social services) which also affected the movement of family members within the EU. Subsequently, as Community programmes were implemented in the fields of education, training and research, many other obstacles to cross-border mobility began to emerge.

2.2.3 Over the years, numerous documents in various fields have pointed out the obstacles to mobility, and effective solutions have been proposed, described and sometimes implemented, making it possible to remove the impediments to the movement and residency of EU citizens outside their countries of origin.

2.2.4 However, time has also shown that identifying the obstacles and putting forward proposals have not always been enough to bring down these barriers or definitively eliminate the problems hindering free movement and mobility. In the various documents issued by the European institutions, the same problems have been reiterated, and corrective measures have even been proposed despite already having been put forward — but often not implemented — in the past.

2.2.5 The EESC is aware that it can be tricky to solve certain problems affecting mobility. However, it has also noted on occasion that the willingness to solve these problems does not always match up to the importance for citizens of removing administrative or legal barriers to mobility.

2.2.6 From a legal point of view, the likelihood of adopted measures solving mobility problems depends directly on the form of legislation used. The more recommendations or resolutions are used, the more likely it is that the measures proposed will not be carried through in all the Member States. While the Commission must sometimes appeal to the Court of Justice in order to ensure the content of a directive is transposed to the national law of a Member State, more importantly, simple recommendations may not be applied, thus rendering the recommended measures ineffective.

2.2.7 While it is true that, over time, the legal obstacles have given way to more practical ones relating to language knowledge, the availability of financial resources making mobility possible, information and the interest of young people, etc., it is also true that other aspects which are both legal and practical in nature, such as the recognition of qualifications, continue to be an ongoing issue in the EU.

2.2.8 On a number of occasions, the EESC has, at the request of the European institutions and on its own initiative, expressed its opinion on this important subject which directly affects the lives of EU citizens. In its opinions, the EESC has identified or confirmed the existence of all kinds of barriers, and has supported or proposed various solutions. As the representative of organised civil society, the EESC will continue to work actively to resolve any problems affecting EU citizens when it comes to exercising the right to mobility in the EU.

3. Obstacles to mobility in the European Union: analysis

3.1 The *Green Paper on education, training and research: obstacles to cross-frontier mobility* ⁽¹⁾ brings together antecedents, obstacles and potential solutions for the mobility of persons travelling within the EU for educational reasons. The EESC issued an opinion on the subject ⁽²⁾ in which it provided various additional solutions to those posited by the Green Paper, and in which it stated that: *'The more material provisions of the Treaties have been implemented more effectively than its human aspects. As a result goods move more easily within the Community than people. What is needed is a move towards political agreement that paves the way for a more genuine Citizens' Europe'*.

3.2 Some of the obstacles described therein have been removed, others are still being resolved, while others still remain just as problematic as ever, if not more so. These obstacles relate to issues such as the right to residence, recognition of qualifications, the lack of portability of scholarships, tax systems in each Member State, social protection, etc. In addition to these legal problems are obstacles concerning linguistic and cultural difficulties, the lack of available information on the place of destination, daily life at the destination, etc. These are problems which, in many cases, are still encountered today.

3.3 On 14 December 2000, the Nice Council adopted a resolution on the Action Plan for Mobility ⁽³⁾. The resolution follows on from the conclusions of the European Council held in Lisbon in March 2000, which recognised the urgent need to overcome the mobility obstacles faced by citizens within the EU in order to create a true European area of knowledge. The resolution listed 42 measures designed to overcome the obstacles to mobility.

⁽¹⁾ COM(96) 462 final.

⁽²⁾ See the EESC opinion of 29.2.1997 on the Green Paper on education, training and research — the obstacles to transnational mobility, rapporteur: Mr Rodríguez García-Caro (OJ C 133, 28.4.1997), point 3.1.2.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 371 of 23.12.2000.

3.3.1 These measures were grouped according to the following objectives:

- adopt a European mobility strategy;
- train people to act as contacts for mobility;
- development of multilingualism;
- make it easier to find information on mobility;
- draw up a mobility chart;
- look into the financing of mobility;
- democratise mobility by making it financially and socially accessible to all;
- introduce new forms of mobility;
- improve reception facilities for people;
- simplify the mobility calendar;
- provide a proper status for people opting for mobility;
- develop the system of recognition and equivalence of diplomas and training;
- recognise the experience acquired;
- gain more from periods of mobility.

3.3.2 The measures defined as priorities by the resolution include the following:

- development of multilingualism;
- establishment of a portal giving access to the different sources of information on mobility;
- recognition of periods of mobility, especially in diploma courses;
- training of mobility organisers able to provide advice and guidance and draft mobility projects;
- definition and adoption of a mobility quality charter;
- drawing up of an inventory of existing mobility circuits and good practices in exchanges;
- creation of linkage between mobility funding from the various stakeholders.

3.4 The first recommendation adopted by the European Parliament and the Council with a view to facilitating Community action to promote mobility was Recommendation No 2001/613/EC on mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, volunteers, teachers and trainers ⁽⁴⁾. The EESC issued an opinion ⁽⁵⁾ on this recommendation, in which it observed that: *'Virtually unimpeded mobility is a prerequisite for achieving European integration — a Citizens' Europe — and for strengthening international competitiveness'*.

3.4.1 The recommendation calls on Member States to:

- remove the legal and administrative obstacles to mobility;
- reduce linguistic and cultural obstacles by encouraging the learning of at least two languages;
- promote the various arrangements for financial support, by facilitating the portability of scholarships;
- promote a European qualification area;
- promote access to any useful information.

3.4.2 Moreover, a series of specific measures are proposed for students, persons undergoing training, young volunteers, teachers and trainers.

3.5 In its own-initiative opinion ⁽⁶⁾ on the *White paper: youth policy*, the EESC stated, with regard to mobility, that: *'Currently this right remains theoretical for most young people. The reasons can be found in the lack of opportunities and resources, lack of recognition of the value of mobility as such and the skills acquired through mobility, uneven distribution of opportunities, social and cultural resistance to the idea of mobility, legal and administrative barriers. Particular attention should therefore be paid to administrative obstacles, which exist in the Member States in regard to social security (unemployment insurance in particular), taxation, residence rights and the recognition of skills acquired both formally as well as through means of non-formal and informal education'*.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 215 of 9.8.2001.

⁽⁵⁾ See the EESC opinion of 27.04.2000 on the Proposal for a recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, young volunteers, teachers and trainers, rapporteur: Ms Hornung-Draus (OJ C 168, 16.6.2000), point 1.3

⁽⁶⁾ See the EESC opinion of 29.11.2000 on 'White Paper: Youth Policy', rapporteur: Ms Hassett (OJ C 116, 20.4.2001).

3.6 Although the European institutions have made numerous efforts to solve the problems identified in the Green Paper as making mobility difficult for young people, teachers, trainers and researchers, and despite the good intentions of the Action Plan for Mobility, a number of these problems persist today.

3.7 Nonetheless, some examples of legal solutions to existing problems can be cited. For instance:

3.7.1 Legislative acts adopted:

- Directive 2004/38/EC on the right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States ⁽⁷⁾;
- Regulation 1408/71 and its successor, Regulation 883/2004, on the coordination of social security systems ⁽⁸⁾;
- Decision No 2241/2004/EC on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass) ⁽⁹⁾;
- Directive No 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications ⁽¹⁰⁾;
- Recommendation 2006/961/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on transnational mobility within the Community for education and training purposes: European Quality Charter for Mobility ⁽¹¹⁾;
- Recommendation 3662/07 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning ⁽¹²⁾.

3.7.2 Measures on which work is in progress:

- European credit system for vocational education and training;
- Recognition of competences acquired through voluntary activities ⁽¹³⁾;
- Framework strategy for multilingualism ⁽¹⁴⁾.

⁽⁷⁾ OJ L 158 of 30.4.2004.

⁽⁸⁾ OJ L 166 of 30.4.2004.

⁽⁹⁾ OJ L 390 of 31.12.2004.

⁽¹⁰⁾ OJ L 255 of 30.9.2005.

⁽¹¹⁾ OJ L 394 of 30.12.2006.

⁽¹²⁾ PE-CONS 3662/07.

⁽¹³⁾ See the EESC opinion of 13.12.2006 on 'Voluntary activity: its role in European society and its impact', rapporteur: Ms Koller, Co-rapporteur: Ms zu Eulenburg (OJ C 325, 30.12.2006).

⁽¹⁴⁾ See the EESC opinion of 26.10.2006 on 'Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — A new framework strategy for multilingualism', rapporteur: Ms Le Nouail-Marlière (OJ C 324, 30.12.2006).

3.8 The Committee has expressed its views on these issues in various opinions, stating its position on a number of aspects which directly affect the mobility of EU citizens in general, and young people in particular. In concrete terms, there is a decision-making process underway which is designed to resolve problems relating to the mobility of young Europeans, but leaves certain important aspects poorly defined with regard to the stated aim of promoting and facilitating mobility.

3.9 Lastly, it is important to bear in mind that certain instruments are available to the public, which could be promoted and their operation improved. One noteworthy example is the European Job Mobility Portal (EURES). Its databases should be easier to access and regularly updated; the information they contain should be monitored, as it can sometimes be too concise; and, above all, it should be visible to the public as a portal and network.

3.10 In this context, perhaps the EU institutions should ask how much Europe's young people actually know about the different initiatives that exist to encourage their mobility. Who knows what Europass, Youthpass or the European Quality Charter is? Do Member States disseminate their knowledge sufficiently? Apart from Erasmus, what other mobility schemes do Europe's young people know about? The EESC believes that promoting knowledge of the multiple resources at our disposal is another way to remove obstacles to mobility.

4. Cross-border mobility of young Europeans: position of the European Economic and Social Committee

4.1 The EESC believes that the main obstacle to mobility for young Europeans is the lack of solutions to the problems so often raised, and the inability to carry out the measures so often proposed as solutions.

4.2 The EESC believes that it is more important to gear efforts towards effectively implementing proposed measures than to set up further groups of experts who identify the self-same, previously described obstacles as are already being resolved.

4.3 This is not to say that there is no need to highlight the real difficulties faced by Europe's young people when they take part in mobility and exchange activities connected with the life-long learning ⁽¹⁵⁾, Erasmus Mundus ⁽¹⁶⁾, Youth in Action ⁽¹⁷⁾ and Culture ⁽¹⁸⁾ programmes. However, the EESC believes that a preliminary assessment should be conducted, as a priority. It is necessary to stop and think actively about where we are with

regard to this important issue that affects young people in Europe so directly.

4.4 The EESC considers it necessary to set up a coordination group for the different Commission DGs with responsibilities in the area, with the specific task of conducting an exhaustive analysis of the situation, with the following basic objectives:

- to determine the obstacles that have already been identified and described previously;
- identify effective measures approved at EU level in order to overcome these (regulations, directives, decisions, resolutions, recommendations, etc.);
- to identify as yet unsolved problems which have been defined and are in the process of being resolved by means of legislation;
- to identify problems which have been defined but for which there are no pending solutions;
- to identify measures which have been proposed but not taken into account, or not implemented by the Member States.

4.5 Once this general analysis has been conducted, the next step should be to methodologically define the situation of young people, dividing them into different target groups with comparable circumstances and subject to similar issues, as set out in point 1.5 above.

4.6 On the basis of this analysis and bearing in mind that the circumstances of the different groups mentioned are completely different, it could be possible to gear the action of the EU institutions and Member States towards more specific, less generic measures. This could improve the effectiveness of measures and increase efficiency in resolving mobility problems.

4.7 As the representative of organised civil society and a consultative body with extensive experience in analysing and proposing solutions to problems relating to mobility in general and, more specifically, to the improvement of young people's situation in the labour market ⁽¹⁹⁾, the EESC would be willing to work with the European Commission towards the abovementioned goals. The mobility of young employees should be covered by specific measures, which would be enhanced by provisions applicable to all citizens regarding the portability of rights. The EESC's experience and proximity to society make it a key partner in this field.

⁽¹⁵⁾ OJL 327 of 24.11.2006.

⁽¹⁶⁾ OJL 345 of 31.12.2003.

⁽¹⁷⁾ OJL 327 of 24.11.2006.

⁽¹⁸⁾ OJL 372 of 27.12.2006.

⁽¹⁹⁾ See the EESC opinion of 12.3.2008 on 'Role of the social partners in improving the situation of young people on the labour market', rapporteur: Mr Soares, Co-rapporteur: Ms Päärendson, CES 500/2008.

4.8 Nonetheless, the EESC is aware that measures are being adopted to overcome specific situations which in the past were real legal/administrative obstacles to mobility, and that these obstacles are diminishing. However, it is important to stress that significant obstacles do continue to exist: one clear example that can be cited is the recognition and validation of knowledge and skills. The European Qualifications Framework could be one way of overcoming this obstacle, but the difficulties that its implementation entails have already been highlighted in the EESC's opinion on the subject ⁽²⁰⁾.

4.9 In addition to the above, in the spirit of constructive criticism that always governs the EESC's opinions, the Committee will always support any initiative designed to eliminate obstacles preventing people from exercising their right to mobility and to free movement. However, sometimes these obstacles involve situations which do not fall into the legal/administrative sphere: for instance, the lack of resources for young people who wish to participate in mobility initiatives, which prevents them from travelling under the abovementioned

programmes; the language-learning difficulties that pose an insurmountable barrier to accessing other countries; the uncertainty about what lies ahead in the host country, about which absolutely nothing may be known. Clearly, these are situations that do not require major legal agreements but do need every effort to be made in order to resolve them. Documents such as the Action Plan for Mobility already include proposed measures for developing mobility, financial associations, democratising mobility by making it financially accessible, improving reception facilities for people, granting proper status, etc.

4.10 The EESC stresses that what is needed is not so much to continue to identify obstacles and solutions but, rather, to implement the right measures in a reasonably short time so that all that has already been said about mobility can be legitimised. By involving all stakeholders in making mobility a reality for young people and taking a more proactive approach to the different EU policies in the field, it could be possible to bring about a fundamental change to the status quo.

Brussels, 29 May 2008.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Dimitris DIMITRIADIS

⁽²⁰⁾ See the EESC opinion of 30.5.2007 on the Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, rapporteur: Mr Rodríguez García-Caro (OJ C 175, 27.7.2007).