



Delivering the European Agenda on Migration: Commission presents Action Plan on Integration and reforms 'Blue Card' scheme for highly skilled workers from outside the EU

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Today the European Commission is presenting an Action Plan to support Member States in the integration of third-country nationals and their economic and social contribution to the EU, as well as a legal proposal to reform the rules on highly skilled migrants coming to the EU to work, which will support European businesses in attracting qualified and talented people from around the world. These initiatives follow up on the commitment in President Juncker's [Political Guidelines](#), which set legal migration as a priority for this Commission.

Dimitris **Avramopoulos**, Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs, and Citizenship, said: "*If we want to manage migration in the long-term, we have to start making those investments now, in the interest of us all. The early and effective integration of third-country nationals is key to making migration a benefit for the economy and cohesion of our society. At the same time, we have to better equip our systems to deal with labour market and skills shortages in the future. The revised EU Blue Card scheme will make it easier and more attractive for highly skilled third-country nationals to come and work in the EU and strengthen our economic growth.*"

An EU Action Plan on integration

Today's Action Plan provides a common policy framework and supporting measures which should help Member States as they further develop and strengthen their national integration policies for third-country nationals. Member States – at national, regional and local level – are at the forefront when it comes to integration. The Action Plan sets out the concrete policy, operational and financial support to be delivered at EU level to support them in their efforts.

Ensuring that third-country nationals can contribute economically and socially to their host communities is key to the future well-being, prosperity and cohesion of European societies. A study published today by the Commission services confirms that, if well and quickly integrated, third-country nationals can contribute to a better performance of the labour market, help address demographic challenges and improve fiscal sustainability. There is a clear risk that the cost of non-integration will be higher than the cost of investment in integration policies.

Despite efforts by Member States, migrants and recognised refugees from third countries who are legally resident in the EU continue to face an increased risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Whilst integration policies remain very much a national competence, in the current context many EU Member States are facing similar challenges, and the EU level can add value through the structural and financial support it provides.

Actions are proposed in key-areas such as: pre-departure and pre-arrival integration measures, in particular for people in clear need of international protection who are being resettled; education, employment and vocational training; access to basic services; and active participation and social inclusion. A more strategic and coordinated approach is also proposed for the use of EU funds to support national integration measures.

Under the New Skills Agenda for Europe, the Commission will also support labour market integration with various tools to improve migrants' skills and to recognise and benefit from their existing qualifications.

Actions to support the integration of third-country nationals need not, and should not, be at the expense of measures to benefit other vulnerable or disadvantaged groups or minorities.

Attracting highly skilled migrants: A reform of the EU 'Blue Card'

The EU Blue Card scheme, adopted in 2009, has proven insufficient and unattractive so far and is

therefore underused. Restrictive admission conditions and the existence of parallel rules, conditions and procedures at national level have limited the use of the EU scheme. Only 31% of highly-educated migrants to OECD countries chose the EU as a destination, meaning skilled workers are choosing other destinations which compete economically with the EU.

Today's proposal revamps the existing rules and aims to improve the EU's ability to attract and retain highly skilled third-country nationals, since demographic patterns suggest that even with the more skilled EU workforce the New Skills Agenda aims to develop, there will still be a need to attract additional talent in the future.

- The new proposal establishes a single EU-wide scheme, replacing parallel national schemes for the purpose of highly skilled employment to provide more clarity for applicants and employers and make the scheme more visible and competitive.
- It enhances intra-EU mobility by facilitating the procedures and also allowing for shorter business trips of up to 90 days within the Member States who apply the Blue Card.
- It lowers the salary threshold by creating a flexible range within which Member States can adjust the threshold to their labour markets contexts, and foresees more appropriate conditions for recent third-country national graduates and workers in areas with a labour shortage.
- Under the new Blue Card scheme, highly skilled beneficiaries of international protection will be able to apply for a Blue Card.
- The proposal strengthens the rights of both the Blue Card holders (allowing for quicker access to long-term residence status, immediate and more flexible labour market access) and their family members (ensuring they can join the EU Blue Card holder simultaneously), which should make the EU a more attractive destination for the highly skilled employees which our economy needs.

The new Blue Card Scheme would bring an estimated positive annual economic impact of between €1.4 billion to €6.2 billion from additional highly skilled workers coming to the EU to take up jobs. Member States would remain responsible for deciding on the numbers of third country nationals admitted on their territory to seek work, in line with the Treaty. They can also carry out a labour market test if the labour market undergoes serious disturbances, such as a high level of unemployment in a given occupation or sector, including in part of their territory.

The United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark are not taking part in the adoption of this Directive and are not bound by or subject to its application.

Background

Action Plan on integration of third country nationals: Whilst responsibility for integration lies primarily with the Member States, the EU has established measures to provide incentives and support for Member States in their efforts to promote integration of third country nationals. This includes dedicated funding and instruments addressing social and economic cohesion across Member States. Today's Action Plan is part of the set of actions announced in the European Agenda on Migration and the Commission's [Communication of 6 April 2016](#).

Reforming the EU Blue Card Directive: In April 2014, Jean-Claude Juncker presented as part of his election campaign [a five-point plan on migration](#), including a call for Europe to show more political determination when it comes to legal migration. In his [Political Guidelines](#), President Juncker announced his intention to promote a new European policy on legal migration to address skills shortages and attract talent to better cope with the demographic challenges facing the EU, including through a review of the EU Blue Card.

The EU already faces significant structural skills shortages in certain sectors, which have the potential to limit growth, productivity and innovation in the EU (e.g. healthcare, ICT and engineering). In the future, structural changes in the EU's economies will continue to increase the demand for higher skills that are not immediately available in the labour market, creating further skills shortages that cannot be filled by the existing EU workforce. The number of highly skilled third-country national workers currently coming to the 25 EU Member States applying the Blue Card are by far insufficient to address these labour and skills shortages, despite the efforts to upgrade the skills of EU nationals proposed under the New Skills Agenda. The United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark do not apply the Blue Card Directive.

For more information

Frequently asked questions: [Action Plan on Integration and the improved EU Blue Card scheme](#)

FACTSHEET: [Revision of the EU Blue Card Directive](#)

FACTSHEET: [Action Plan on the integration of third-country nationals](#)

[Directive on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purpose of highly skilled employment](#)

[Action Plan on the integration of third-country nationals](#)

[Commission Staff Working Document: An economic take on the refugee crisis](#)

[Public Consultation](#) on the EU Blue Card

New dedicated EU Blue Card section on the [EU Immigration Portal](#)

[European Website on Integration](#).

[Analysis of the EU's labour migration policies, part of joint DG HOME-OECD "Review of Labour Migration Policy in Europe" project](#)

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