



26 October 2007

COMMISSION COMMUNICATION ON:

CIRCULAR MIGRATION AND MOBILITY PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN THE EU AND THIRD COUNTRIES

APPLYING THE GLOBAL APPROACH TO MIGRATION TO THE EASTERN AND SOUTH-EASTERN REGIONS NEIGHBOURING THE EU

I. Introduction

1. On 16 May 2007, the European Commission published a Communication on Circular Migration and Mobility Partnerships between the European Union and third countries.
2. The Communication considers ways to ease conditions of legal movement of people between third countries and the EU. It proposes the establishment of Mobility Partnerships between the EU and third countries interested in securing better access to the EU for their citizens and willing to commit themselves to the fight against illegal migration in partnership with the EU.
3. The Communication also reflects on circular migration and how it can help addressing EU labour needs while maximising the benefits of migration for the countries of origin through transfers of skills and other resources by returning migrants.
4. Together with the above-mentioned Communication, the Commission also adopted a communication on “Applying the Global Approach to Migration to the Eastern and South-Eastern Regions Neighbouring the European Union” which brings forward proposals for the expansion of the geographical scope of the Global Approach, which has initially focused on Africa and the Mediterranean region.¹

II. General comments

5. BUSINESSEUROPE welcomes the Commission Communication on Circular Migration and Mobility Partnerships. It marks the start of an important debate on these novel approaches to better manage migration flows. The negotiation of mobility partnerships in particular constitutes an important new strategy in the field of immigration policies at EU-level.

¹ Brussels European Council 15-16 DECEMBER 2005, Presidency Conclusions



6. Labour immigration can help the EU to address labour needs and tackle the challenge of demographic ageing. Increased availability of labour is needed to alleviate both short-term and longer-term shortages on labour markets in order to ensure competitiveness and sustainable economic growth.
7. European companies are therefore pleased to see that progress is being sought in the area of legal migration. In BUSINESSEUROPE's view, it is in the interest of European societies as a whole and of migrants themselves that immigration is managed in a properly organised framework. This can also help to combat illegal immigration and deal with migration pressures from job-seekers from third countries.
8. The EU has an important role to play in co-ordinating and improving the relations of Member States with third-countries to develop common strategies to better manage migration flows.
9. European employers agree with the Commission that, if well conceived, mobility partnerships and circular migration could be useful instruments to facilitate legal and fight illegal migration.
10. Nevertheless, BUSINESSEUROPE insist that any EU initiative should respect the principle of subsidiarity. It is and should remain the full responsibility of Member States to decide on the number of economic migrants to be admitted as well as the type of their qualifications. Given the differences between labour market needs, companies' requirements and skills gaps across Europe, the EU should refrain from any attempt to quantify needs at EU level. This is neither feasible nor desirable. Moreover, any EU initiative should not prevent Member States from applying more favourable provisions for the admission of economic migrants from third countries.
11. Regarding the Mobility Partnerships, European companies fully agree that these should be tailor-made, taking into account the needs and ambitions of the third-countries and of the participating EU member States. The latter must be able to decide freely whether to participate in a mobility partnership.
12. In terms of content, European companies consider the suggested commitments expected from third countries and to be given by the EU and participating Member States very ambitious. BUSINESSEUROPE therefore supports the idea of pilot projects, the results of which should allow a careful assessment of the practical feasibility of the project.
13. In the case where Member States decide to participate in a mobility partnership, employers should be fully involved in the discussion and decision on the number of economic migrants to be admitted to seek work and the types of their qualifications and skills.
14. With respect to circular migration, BUSINESSEUROPE agrees with the Commission that, if well managed, it could prove a mutually beneficial tool allowing to tackle on the one hand labour needs in the EU while, on the other hand, maximising the benefits of migration for the countries of origin.



15. A key challenge to ensure the long-term benefits of circular migration is the need to design policies in such a way that circular migration remains circular and does not become permanent. BUSINESSEUROPE therefore welcomes the accent that is put on meeting this concern but has nevertheless doubts concerning the effectiveness and/or feasibility of some of the proposed actions to do so (such as the requirement for a written commitment by migrants to return voluntarily, support to help the partner country create sufficiently attractive professional opportunities locally for the highly skilled etc.).
16. In addition, European companies would like to point out that there could be a potential contradiction between the strong emphasis put simultaneously on both circular and return migration on the one hand and the efforts to foster integration of third country nationals on the other hand.
17. As the Commission rightly acknowledges, the concept of circular migration and its practical application need further development. As a first step, a consultation process will be launched on the basis of the Communication of 16 May 2007 to collect views and experiences from other Community institutions, Member States and relevant stakeholders. BUSINESSEUROPE is looking forward to co-operate with the Commission in this process.
18. Through the concepts of mobility partnerships and circular migration, the Commission aims to give operational substance to the Global Approach to Migration. European companies fully support the Global Approach which brings together migration, external relations, development policy and other relevant policy areas to address the challenge of migration in an integrated, comprehensive and balanced way with third countries. As growing numbers of illegal migrants are arriving from or through Eastern and South-Eastern regions neighbouring the EU, the extension of the geographical scope of the Global Approach to cover these areas is logic and welcome.

Conclusion

19. European companies consider immigration one of the biggest challenges facing European economies and societies which need to be urgently addressed. BUSINESSEUROPE therefore broadly welcomes both Commission Communications and their focus on policies that aim to facilitate legal migration while tackling illegal immigration.
20. While BUSINESSEUROPE is in favour of policy co-ordination and initiatives at EU-level in the area of immigration, it stresses at the same time the need to respect the competences of Member States in this field.
21. Mobility partnerships and circular migration policies could play an important role in better managing migration flows. However, it is clear that both at the conceptual and practical level much remains to be done in order to fully assess their practical feasibility and effectiveness. BUSINESSEUROPE therefore looks forward to the debate launched by the Communication on Mobility Partnerships and Circular Migration and the pilot projects which are soon-to-be negotiated with interested third countries.
