

Legal migration: Council presidency and European Parliament reach provisional agreement on scheme to attract highly qualified workers



The Council presidency and European Parliament representatives reached a provisional agreement on a draft directive establishing the entry and residence conditions for highly qualified non-EU nationals coming to live and work in the EU (the blue card directive). This EU-wide admission system aims to attract and retain highly qualified workers, particularly in sectors facing skills shortages.

The green and digital transformation of our economies will only succeed if we have a workforce with the necessary skills to lead it. Education and lifelong training will play a key part in this, but we must also make sure that we are equipped to compete in the global search for talent. The revised rules for the EU blue card provide an EU-level scheme that allows more flexibility, improved conditions and simplified mobility, placing the EU firmly among the top destinations for highly qualified workers.

Eduardo Cabrita, Minister for Home Affairs of Portugal

The new rules, which will replace the existing ones, further harmonise the conditions of entry and residence for highly qualified workers and increase the attractiveness of the EU blue card, in particular by:

- **establishing more inclusive admission criteria**, including by reducing the salary threshold for admission, allowing for lower salary thresholds for recent graduates or professions in need of workers, reducing the minimum length of the work contract to six months, and extending the scope to include highly skilled workers from the information and communication technology (ICT) sector;
- **facilitating intra-EU mobility**, including by reducing the minimum period of residence in the first member state, simplifying and speeding up the procedure for exercising mobility and allowing for the accumulation of periods of residence under different schemes to acquire long-term resident status;
- **facilitating family reunification** and giving the spouse or partner of the blue card holder unrestricted access to the labour market;
- **simplifying procedures** for recognised employers;
- **granting a very high level of access to the labour market**, in particular by establishing that member states may allow EU blue card holders to engage in self-employed activities or other subsidiary professional

activities, as well as offering protection, particularly in the case of unemployment;

- **extending the scope** to include non-EU family members of EU citizens and beneficiaries of international protection.

EU member states will be able to maintain national schemes aimed at highly qualified workers in parallel with the EU blue card scheme. However, the new rules will introduce a number of provisions to ensure a level playing field so that EU blue card holders and their families are not at a disadvantage compared to holders of national permits.

The provisional political agreement is subject to approval by the Council and the European Parliament before going through the formal adoption procedure.