Employment: qualifications and mobility, programme of action

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PURPOSE : to propose an Action Plan for skills and mobility in the European Union. CONTENT: the Action Plan proposed by the Commission is the culmination of the process launched in February 2001 by the Commission's Communication on the New European Labour Markets (see COS/2001/2084), the conclusions of the Stockholm European Council of March 2001and the work of the High Level Task Force on Skills and Mobility. This Action Plan puts forward a coherent political vision to promote human resources in the Union in accordance with the Lisbon goals, primarily create opportunities for citizens to more around the Union for educational and professional purposes, and make it easier for them to take advantage of the benefits of European integration, including the European single market. Three fundamental challenges are highlighted in the Action Plan to promote the objectives of European labour markets being made more open and accessible: 1) expand occupational professional mobility : in this context, education and training systems should be adapted, boosting life long learning and skills acquisition (particularly skills in information and communication technologies - ICT) and to improve systems to recognise qualifications and competences; 2) increase geographic mobility : low levels of geographic mobility within and between Member States suggest that the benefits of the internal market are not yet explored, for example in terms of dealing with skills bottlenecks or labour imbalances. Many obstacles still exist, including deficiencies in language skills, family circumstances, as well as in relation to taxes, pensions, social security and related issues. Furthermore, a declining EU workforce due to demographic changes suggest that immigration of third country nationals would also help satisfy some of the skill needs; 3) facilitate access to mobility : deficiencies in access to and the quality of information on mobility and individual sectors deter many people from considering a job move or particular career choice. The objectives and the action set out in the Action Plan are designed to address these challenges : - firstly, they aim to expand occupational mobility and skills development, by ensuring that education and training systems become more responsive to the labour market, competence development strategies for workers are drawn up, learning is recognised wherever it is acquired and qualifications are more easily transferable, and by more human resource investment in less advanced regions; - secondly, facilitating geographical mobility calls the removal of administrative and legal barriers where they still exist (for example through a universal health card); - thirdly, improving information provisions means setting up a One-Stop mobility information site, improving the effectiveness of the EURES jobs vacancy systems and launching mobility information campaign. Implementing the various actions needed to achieve the objectives will require responsibility and commitment from a range of actors, Member States, the Commission and other EU institutions, social partners and others. The Commission will assess on an annual basis the implementation of the Action Plan on theoccasion of the European Council meetings in springtime.