

Penalized for Being Mobile? National Pension Schemes as an Obstacle to Mobility for Researchers in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)

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Working Group 2: Mobility between EU-Members, additional Bologna Countries and the World

Conclusions of Dr. Gerhard Duda, rapporteur of Working Group 2

The group discussed the following topics:

1. Are researchers/staff of higher education institutions (here in short: "scientists") in general a distinct mobile professional group that needs special solutions in regard to the portability of social security rights?

Scientists have a particularly long phase of training and career selection, which is marked by a high degree of job insecurity, a relatively low remuneration, often changing social security status (employment, grant/scholarship holder). Employment contracts frequently are fixed term contracts. In addition, international mobility is considered a prerequisite for a successful career of a scientist and can be considered as an almost obligatory part of the career development.

Many of these features are also characterizing the mobile life of other professional groups such as managers, artists etc., but maybe not in their entirety. Scientists are already treated as a distinct group e.g. in the German "Law on fixed term contracts in science" ("Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz", 2007) or in the EU-Council directive 2005/71/EC on a specific procedure for admitting third country nationals for the purposes of scientific research ("Researcher's visa"). Considering that the social security systems are usually solidarity based, one could consider using scientists as a professional pilot group for testing new forms of the portability of social security rights, of new products of the financial services industry for mobile professionals and of developing new advisory and consultative services on social security issues for mobile workers.

2. Are the current advisory structures in the EU/EHEA countries sufficient to facilitate mobility of incoming and outgoing scientists?

The current advisory structure is based on the duty of the mobile scientist as an individual to look for the necessary and often very complicated information on the repercussions of his or her mobility, particularly in the case of self initiated moves. There is still a lack of service orientation on the side of the institutions (higher education institutions) and on the side of the insurance and financial services providers, too. Routinely and rapidly providing information should be the responsibility of the institutions involved. Information should be reliable and transparent to allow for an informed decision of a scientist. If a young mobile scientist decides on social security/pension related payments, he/she should do so on the basis of a clear knowledge of the repercussions.

3. How do existing advisory structures work in the different EHEA countries?

With the help of the EU over the last years "Mobility Centres" (ERA-MORE – European Network of Mobility Centres) have been built up in many EU countries that provide internet based advice for foreigners looking for information. The continuing financing of these structures in smaller countries seems to be threatened unfortunately. In addition the information flow in the higher education institutions between the human resources departments and the international departments and welcome centres still leaves room for improvement. It will have to be discussed, which department in a higher education institution will have to provide the expert knowledge and whether every institution or groups of institutions should pool the provision of this service. Pension providers should issue information packages in different languages and help to organise the training of the human resources experts.

As researchers usually travel with their family the social security and pension issues of the whole family should be considered in a package and information and assistance organised "in one stop shops", if possible.

4. Outlook: Cooperation of ERA and EHEA

The partnership offer of the EU-Commission in its current communication to the European Council and the European Parliament "Better careers and more mobility: A European Partnership for Researchers" (23.05.2008) has to be considered in this context. It offers the opportunity for close cooperation in the framework of the European Research Area (ERA) and the EHEA concepts. The communication asks the member states of the EU to adopt national action plans setting out specific objectives and actions. Here member states could address specific national issues, e.g. in Germany the vesting period of 5 years for the statutory and supplementary pension schemes.