



EUROPEAN
COMMISSION

Brussels, 29.1.2026
C(2026) 462 final

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

of 29.1.2026

on attracting talent for innovation

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on attracting talent for innovation

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Article 292 thereof,

Whereas:

- (1) Attracting and retaining third-country nationals with specialised skills or strong innovation potential, including researchers, students and graduates in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), highly qualified and skilled workers, startup founders, and innovative entrepreneurs, is essential for maintaining the Union's economic growth, competitiveness and technological leadership.
- (2) Attracting talent for innovation is particularly important in key sectors for the Union's competitiveness and strategic autonomy, including information and communication technologies, deep-tech and frontier innovation such as artificial intelligence ('AI'), quantum and semiconductors, virtual worlds, clean and renewable technologies (including nuclear technology), biotechnology (including health and bioeconomy applications), advanced manufacturing and materials, and cybersecurity.
- (3) Persistent labour and skills shortages in innovation-intensive sectors weaken the Union capacity to achieve its goals. These shortages have almost doubled since 2015 and are projected to persist, with more than half of new job openings by 2035 expected to require highly skilled profiles. Gender gaps contribute to these shortages, particularly as concerns the workforce in science and engineering, and in the business enterprise sector. Shortages also reflect barriers to fully use the skills of third-country nationals already residing in the Union, including challenges with qualification recognition and limited access to employment matching their profiles. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and startups are disproportionately affected by these shortages and face difficulties in attracting the talent needed to scale up and compete globally¹.
- (4) Mobilising the potential of the Union's own workforce remains essential. However, attracting skilled and innovative individuals from outside the Union is also necessary to ensure a sustainable talent pipeline that strengthens the Union's competitiveness and enables progress on putting its strategic priorities into practice. In an increasingly uncertain global environment, the Union's openness, respect for fundamental rights, academic freedom and strong democratic institutions constitute a key factor of attractiveness for skilled and innovative individuals seeking a stable and open environment that allows them to live, work and create freely.

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Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2024 – Addressing Labour and Skills Shortages for Europe's Green and Digital Future, European Commission, 2024.

- (5) The Pact on Migration and Asylum² reaffirms the importance of attracting skills and talent to the Union. In the last years, the Commission has put forward a set of legislative, operational and forward-looking measures, including a proposal to establish an EU Talent Pool³ to promote international recruitment, and the establishment of Talent Partnerships to promote structured cooperation frameworks with partner countries.
- (6) Effective implementation of talent attraction measures should be supported by cooperation with partner countries, notably on document security, identity management and information exchange, also to address potential concerns of 'brain drain'. Such cooperation should aim to strengthen mutual trust, contribute to the integrity of admission procedures and complement broader EU partnerships, including Talent Partnerships and engagement in the enlargement and neighbourhood context. In this context, the Pact for the Mediterranean⁴ reinforces the significance of talent mobility to build comprehensive partnerships, also by fostering higher education, promoting mobility for students and proposing the establishment of a Mediterranean University.
- (7) The Union of Skills⁵ outlined key deliverables at Union, national, regional and local levels with the objective of attracting and retaining skills from third countries to address shortages and develop talent in the Union. It also stressed the importance of supporting integration and family life to attract and retain skilled workers and researchers, including the necessity to develop attractive research careers as promoted by the European Charter for Researchers.
- (8) The Union of Skills aims that by 2030, the annual number of learners from outside the EU coming to study and obtain a degree at tertiary level in the EU should be at least 350 000. The Erasmus+ programme is an important enabler of the Union of Skills, including through flagship initiatives such as Erasmus Mundus, the European Universities alliances and future joint European degree/label.
- (9) The upcoming Vocational Education and Training (VET) Strategy, announced in the Union of Skills, will also contribute to the attractiveness of VET students and graduates, who can support the Union's innovation.
- (10) The '*Choose Europe for Science*'⁶ initiative promotes Europe as a destination of excellence for international students, researchers and professionals, and the EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy⁷ aims to make Europe the best place in the world to launch and grow global technology-driven companies, including deep tech companies. These initiatives, together with the AI Continent Action Plan⁸, highlight the strategic importance of deep tech, AI, clean tech, health, and digital sectors for Europe's competitiveness and sovereignty, as well as the need to ensure that the EU can attract the skilled professionals driving these sectors forward. The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions are a key instrument for attracting and retaining international talents in Europe, supporting the training and career development of researchers from all over the world, at all stages of their careers. Finally, the EU Blue Carpet initiative, launched

² COM(2020) 609 final.

³ COM(2023) 716 final.

⁴ JOIN(2025) 26 final.

⁵ COM(2025) 90 final.

⁶ <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs#choose-europe-for-science-new>.

⁷ COM(2025) 270 final.

⁸ COM(2025) 165 final.

by the EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy, will support the attraction and retention of highly skilled and diverse talent, focusing on entrepreneurial education, tax-related aspects of employee stock options and cross-border employment.

- (11) The Commission offers support through ongoing and planned initiatives aimed at strengthening the EU's attractiveness to talent, in particular through 'Choose Europe' related actions for research and innovation. These efforts will also include funding opportunities and communication activities to inform talent about employment opportunities within EU research organisations.
- (12) The upcoming European Innovation Act aims to increase and accelerate the deployment of innovation and improve the regulatory environment for innovative companies, including startups and scaleups. A Commission proposal for a European Research Area (ERA) Act will also strengthen research and development investments, align Union and national investment priorities, and support mobility of researchers towards and within the Union. The Commission Action Plan for Women in Research, Innovation and Start-ups will tackle persistent gender gaps constraining the full mobilisation of talent and innovation potential, aiming to establish the EU as the world's most attractive place for women in these fields by 2030.
- (13) Attracting international talent for innovation and competitiveness is also one of the key objectives of the EU visa policy strategy⁹, which sets out a framework for a visa policy that advances Europe's long-term interests, by strengthening security across the Schengen area, fostering EU prosperity and competitiveness, and projecting Europe's position and resilience on the global stage.
- (14) The Union should implement the actions already launched, and step up its efforts taking additional measures to become an attractive destination for international talent whose skills, knowledge or activities can contribute to its competitiveness and innovation ecosystems. These measures should improve access to, and implementation of, the Union and national frameworks for study, research, highly qualified and skilled employment, startup founders and innovative entrepreneurs.
- (15) The flexibility provided for by the Union legal framework should be used to accelerate and facilitate the admission of international talent and increase the Union's attractiveness. These measures should be accompanied by operational measures at both Union and national levels.
- (16) The Union *acquis* provides a framework to attract and retain talent from third countries. Directive (EU) 2016/801 ('Students and Researchers Directive')¹⁰ harmonises the conditions of entry and residence for students and researchers, facilitating mobility and post-study and research opportunities; Directive (EU) 2021/1883 ('EU Blue Card Directive')¹¹ establishes common rules for the admission and rights of highly qualified workers. These rules are complemented by Council

⁹ COM(2026) 43.

¹⁰ Directive (EU) 2016/801 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or educational projects and au pairing, OJ L 132, 21.5.2016, p. 21 (ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2016/801/oj>).

¹¹ Directive (EU) 2021/1883 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2021 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purpose of highly qualified employment, and repealing Council Directive 2009/50/EC, OJ L 382, 28.10.2021, pp. 1–38 (ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2021/1883/oj>).

Directive 2003/86/EC ('Family Reunification Directive')¹² setting the conditions for family reunification, an element that plays an important role in attracting and retaining foreign talent and promoting long-term integration.

- (17) Lengthy procedures, difficulties for talented workers to access consulates, lack of information and complex national schemes, including those for startup founders and innovative entrepreneurs, continue to undermine the effectiveness of the Union framework, and limit its attractiveness and visibility at global level. They also reduce the impact of Union efforts in other areas, such as education, research, or innovation.
- (18) To attract international talent to the Union, it is essential to have fast, transparent, and predictable admission procedures. Specific actions can be taken to make admission processes simpler and more predictable, shorten processing times, and ensure that consular and administrative systems are adequately equipped to handle applications efficiently while ensuring safeguards against potential misuse, including through the support of Union funding.
- (19) Strengthening long-term perspectives is key to attract and retain researchers, international students, highly qualified and skilled workers, and startup founders and innovative entrepreneurs. Council Directive 2003/109/EC (the 'Long-Term Residents Directive')¹³ gives the possibility to acquire an EU long-term resident status after five years of legal and continuous residence in a Member State, and supports highly mobile talent like researchers and highly skilled workers. The Commission proposal¹⁴ to recast the Long-Term Residents Directive would further contribute to making the Union more attractive.
- (20) Facilitating recognition of qualifications and validation of skills of third-country nationals is also key to successful attraction and retention policies. The Skills Portability Initiative to be adopted in 2026 will explore whether to propose common rules for simpler procedures for handling the recognition and validation of qualifications and skills of third-country nationals.
- (21) Improving the provision of information to talent abroad, reinforcing coordination among education, training, research institutions and innovation actors, and ensuring adequate administrative capacity are essential to make procedures faster, more transparent and effective.
- (22) Targeted recommendations should be presented to facilitate talent's access to the Union and Member States and streamline application procedures, reinforce measures to attract and retain international talent that can contribute to the Union's competitiveness and growth, enhance capacity and access to information and promoting coordination mechanisms.
- (23) Beneficiaries of international protection residing in the EU or third-country nationals in need of protection displaced in a third country can also have the skills the European labour market needs or have strong innovation potential. However, they might face specific challenges to access residence permits for the purpose of study, research and

¹² Council Directive 2003/86/EC of 22 September 2003 on the right to family reunification, OJ L 251, 3.10.2003, pp. 12, (ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2003/86/oi>), while the Directive (EU) 2016/801 (for researchers) and Directive (EU) 2021/1883 provide more favourable rules.

¹³ Council Directive 2003/109/EC on the status of third-country nationals who are long-term residents, OJ L 16, 23.01.2004, p. 44 (ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2003/109/oi>).

¹⁴ COM(2022) 650 final.

highly qualified employment. This includes addressing issues with access to recognition procedures for foreign diplomas, certificates and other evidence of formal qualifications, in particular in circumstances where there is a lack of documentary evidence or an inability to meet the costs related to recognition procedures. The experience developed by complementary pathways related to work or education, in line with Commission Recommendation on legal pathways to protection in the EU¹⁵, could be used in this regard.

- (24) Cooperation and exchange of information on attracting talent for innovation between Member States, social partners and stakeholders should be promoted, including through mutual learning and exchange of good practices. A Talent for Innovation Attraction Platform should be set up to bring together experts from existing fora on migration, employment, education and innovation in view of creating synergies, ensuring coordination, and monitoring the implementation of the Recommendation.
- (25) The Commission should take stock on a regular basis of the implementation of this Recommendation, starting in 2026, also to assess whether targeted legislative adjustments are needed to make procedures simpler and more responsive to the EU's competitiveness and innovation ambitions. For this purpose, Member States should be invited to inform the Commission on relevant national initiatives, reforms, good practices and statistics.
- (26) This Recommendation should focus on admission and residence frameworks for stays of more than 90 days. Member States could also decide to apply the measures of this Recommendation to relevant categories of visa required third-country nationals visiting the EU for the purpose of study, research or business, for stays up to 90 days within a 180-day period, provided that this is in line with the applicable EU legal framework on short-term visas¹⁶.
- (27) This Recommendation is without prejudice to the competence of Member States to determine the volumes of admission of third-country nationals for work purposes, in accordance with Article 79(5) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

RECOMMENDS:

FACILITATING ACCESS TO THE UNION AND MEMBER STATES AND STREAMLINING APPLICATION PROCEDURES FOR TALENT

Measures to facilitate the submission and evaluation of applications for long-stay visas and residence permits

1. Member States should provide for simple, fast, transparent and digitalised application procedures to incentivise highly qualified and skilled workers, as well as research organisations, education and training institutions and employers to make use of international mobility opportunities.
2. Member States should allow applicants to submit applications remotely or in-person. In-person appointments should be required only where strictly necessary, for example to provide biometrics or in case of reasonable doubts that third-country

¹⁵ Commission Recommendation (EU) 2020/1364 of 23 September 2020 on legal pathways to protection in the EU: promoting resettlement, humanitarian admission and other complementary pathway, OJ L 317, 1.10.2020, pp. 13 (ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reco/2020/1364/0j>).

¹⁶ Regulation (EC) No 810/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 July 2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas (Visa Code), OJ L 243, 15.9.2009, pp. 1 (ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2009/810/0j>).

nationals would reside in the Union for purposes other than those for which they apply to be admitted. Where in-person applications are required, Member States should ensure the availability of sufficient and easily accessible appointment slots for submission of applications, interviews and collection of long-stay visas or residence permits.

3. Member States should ensure that measures to facilitate the submission of applications are accompanied by appropriate safeguards to ensure that third-country nationals do not pose a threat to public policy, public security or public health, and to prevent abuse and fraud, including through the verification of the authenticity and trustworthiness of host entities and employers, of the supporting documents, and of the profile of applicants seeking to conduct research, study or work in areas of strategic importance (e.g. defence, nuclear energy, intelligence, etc.). Member States should also put in place proportionate monitoring mechanisms after the third-country nationals entered their territory to ensure that admission conditions continue to be fulfilled, including monitoring that there are no new risks to public security and public policy, notably risks of technology leakage.
4. Member States should put in place online application systems that are user-friendly, efficient, and that allow for secure and interoperable¹⁷ data exchange and coordination between the competent national authorities involved in processing applications.
5. Member States are encouraged to pool and coordinate consular resources in third countries, where relevant, to address limited capacities of consular authorities. Such cooperation could include shared or joint visa sections, providing targeted information on the application procedures and facilitating long-stay visa and residence-permit procedures for international students, researchers, highly qualified and skilled workers, startup founders and innovative entrepreneurs. These dedicated sections could be set up in cooperation with EU Delegations, national innovation agencies and chambers of commerce, and may also host promotional activities.
6. Where a Member State lacks diplomatic or consular representation in a third country, it should take the necessary measures to facilitate the submission of applications, for instance through a system for the online submission of applications or through representation arrangements with other Member States present in that third country.

Measures to foster simpler admission conditions

7. Member States should use approval or recognition procedures for research organisations, higher education institutions and employers to exempt applicants from certain documentary requirements, using the possibilities provided under Articles 9 and 15 of Directive (EU) 2016/801 and Article 13 of Directive (EU) 2021/1883. For transparency purposes and to ensure that applicants are aware of the facilitations provided to approved and recognised research organisations, higher education institutions and employers, Member States should regularly publish updated lists of approved host and support entities and recognised employers on the same websites where applicants can find information on long-stay visas and residence permit procedures.

¹⁷ The interoperability of Member State's application systems can be facilitated by taking into account relevant resources on the Interoperable Europe Portal.

8. Member States should reduce the documents or evidence that applicants need to present when applying to study, research or highly qualified and skilled employment in an approved research organisation, higher education institution or for a recognised employer, as allowed under Articles 8(3) and 11(3) of Directive (EU) 2016/801 and Article 13(2) of Directive (EU) 2021/1883. As a minimum, Member States should exempt applicants from providing documents that have already been verified by the host entity or another competent authority, such as proof of accommodation, translations of diplomas, proof of sickness insurance, labour-market tests or other supporting documentation previously assessed during the approval or recognition process.
9. Third-country nationals coming to the Union for the purpose of study, research or highly qualified and skilled employment often do not know their future address at the time of submitting their application nor can they rent proper accommodation without a signed employment contract and a valid long-stay visa or residence permit. Member States should refrain from requiring students, researchers and highly qualified workers to provide an address in the Member State in question at the time of applying, including a temporary address, in accordance with Article 7(2) of Directive (EU) 2016/801 and Article 5(7) of Directive (EU) 2021/1883.
10. To make the EU Blue Card more accessible to innovative talent, Member States should consider:
 - applying lower salary thresholds for occupations facing structural shortages and for recent university graduates, within the margins allowed by Article 5(4) of Directive (EU) 2021/1883; and
 - accepting relevant professional experience in place of formal qualifications during the application procedure in strategic sectors for the Union's innovation ecosystem beyond the ICT sector listed in Annex I of Directive (EU) 2021/1883, in accordance with Article 2(9)(b) of the Directive.

Measures to shorten processing times

11. Member States should establish facilitated or fast-track procedures for startup founders and innovative entrepreneurs to obtain a long-stay visa or residence permit, in cooperation with innovation actors recognised or endorsed by national authorities (e.g. certified incubators, accelerators, innovation agencies, technology parks). Member States should in particular apply facilitated or fast-track procedures for startup and SME founders and innovative entrepreneurs participating in national or EU-supported innovation programmes such as Horizon Europe, including the European Innovation Council, European Institute of Innovation and Technology, EUREKA EuroStars or participating in projects supported by InvestEU.
12. Member States should process applications for long-stay visas and residence permits (including applications for renewals) of international students, researchers and highly qualified and skilled workers in STEM and other innovation-related sectors, as well as of startup founders and innovative entrepreneurs, as soon as possible, and are encouraged to do so within 30 days from the submission of the application.

13. Also in line with the objectives set out in the Europe on the Move Council Recommendation¹⁸, Member States should process applications of long-stay visas and residence permits (including renewals) of international students and researchers coming to the Union under Union-funded programmes, such as Erasmus+, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, European Research Council grants and other schemes designed to attract talented R&I teams, as soon as possible, and are encouraged to do so within 30 days from the submission of the application.
14. Member States should refrain from requesting at different stages of the admission procedure non-essential documentation that was already submitted at a previous stage of the procedure, such as copies of employment contracts, proof of accommodation, official translations or legalisation of diplomas, and should act on the basis of mutual trust in the authenticity and accuracy of the documents provided. In accordance with Article 5(2) of Directive 2016/801, Member States should consider accepting documentation in official languages of the Union other than their official languages, or at least in English.
15. Member States should allow international student applicants to initiate immigration procedures before the payment of the full tuition fees, provided that the proof of payment of the full amount is supplied at the latest when the long-stay visa or residence-permit is issued.
16. Where Member States issue residence permits only on their territory and applicants need a visa to enter the territory, Member States should process the issuance of the requisite visa as soon as possible, and within the same overall time limit of 30 days recommended under points 12 and 13 of this Recommendation. This time limit should also cover the time needed by the competent authorities to check the labour market situation, where applicable.
17. Member States are encouraged not to apply labour market tests for researchers and highly qualified and skilled workers, unless when duly necessary, and not to apply them for renewals of the residence permit or in cases of intra-EU mobility. Member States are also encouraged not to apply labour market tests for occupations facing structural labour shortages and for those contributing to the EU's innovation ecosystem, including in the STEM-related sectors. When conducted, labour market tests should be rapid, proportionate and transparent.

FROM ATTRACTION TO RETENTION, KEEPING INTERNATIONAL TALENT IN THE UNION

Measures to enhance entrepreneurial and long-term employment opportunities

18. Member States should raise awareness among international students and researchers of their possibility to stay on their territory for at least nine months after completing studies or research for the purpose of job searching or to set up a business, as provided under Article 25(1) of the Directive (EU) 2016/801. This period could be extended, where relevant, to provide graduates and researchers sufficient time to find a job matching their level of skills or launch an entrepreneurial activity.

¹⁸ Council Recommendation of 13 May 2024 'Europe on the Move' — learning mobility opportunities for everyone, OJ C, C/2024/3364, 14.6.2024.

19. Member States should use the possibility, provided under Article 15(5) of Directive (EU) 2021/1883, to allow EU Blue Card holders to engage in other professional activities that are complementary to their main activity as an EU Blue Card holder, without it affecting their rights of residence as EU Blue Card holders. This flexibility is particularly relevant in ICT and other innovation-driven sectors, where it could encourage highly qualified and skilled workers to test and develop entrepreneurial projects while maintaining their main activity under their EU Blue Card holder status.

Measures to retain talent

20. Member States should facilitate access of international students, researchers, highly qualified and skilled workers, startup founders and innovative entrepreneurs to relevant national and EU-level support services and networks to help them settle and pursue their professional activities in the EU. EURAXESS is already a reference point for researchers. Further support for innovation could include:

- information on business-acceleration and mentoring programmes for startup founders and innovative entrepreneurs;
- career-development, including job search and placement services for international graduates and academics;
- promotion of entrepreneurial education, as well as upskilling and reskilling initiatives for professionals;
- support to find accommodation, information on property rental, dealing with housing providers and local administrations;
- support to learn or improve language skills;
- assistance with administrative formalities, including local registration, taxation, access to health services, and social security;
- support for spouses or partners, for the purpose of job searching or to set up a business, including language training;
- facilitating childcare and school-enrolment for children, from early stages and throughout the year, also ensuring that previous studies are duly recognised as equivalent.

21. Member States should ensure that eligible researchers, highly qualified and skilled workers, startup founders and innovative entrepreneurs can effectively access EU long-term resident status. To do so, Member States should provide clear information on eligibility conditions, procedures and the rights attached to it, and should facilitate coordination between local authorities, host and support entities to verify residence periods and integration conditions.

22. Member States should facilitate access to EU long-term resident status for EU Blue Card holders, as provided by Article 18(2) of Directive (EU) 2021/1883, by enabling the cumulation of periods of residence completed in different Member States. They should also facilitate access to the EU long-term resident status for former international students who remain in the EU after graduation, and after finding a job. In those cases, as allowed by Article 4(2) of Council Directive 2003/109/EC, Member States are encouraged to take into account half of the periods of residence for study purposes in the calculation of the five-year period necessary to obtain the EU long-term resident status.

23. Member States should apply the same processing times of 30 days as provided in points 12 and 13 to the accompanying family members of researchers and highly qualified workers, who can apply for a residence permit at the same time as the researcher or highly qualified worker, in accordance with Article 26(4) of Directive (EU) 2016/801 and Article 17(4) of the Directive (EU) 2021/1883. Researchers and highly qualified workers should be informed of this possibility as well as of the rights of family members to access the labour market, healthcare services, education and vocational training.

Measures to foster intra-EU mobility

24. Member States should inform applicants about the possibility for intra-EU mobility of international students, researchers and EU Blue Card holders. Member States should also ensure that relevant national authorities and research and education institutions are informed about the rules of intra-EU mobility.

25. Member States should use the flexibility provided for by Articles 27 to 31 of Directive (EU) 2016/801 and Articles 20, 21 and 22 of Directive (EU) 2021/1883 to simplify and streamline procedures for intra-EU mobility. For this purpose, Member States should consider:

- allowing the mobility of international students without requiring the student or the higher education institutions to notify the competent authorities of the two Member States¹⁹;
- allowing the short-term mobility of researchers (and their family members) without requiring the researcher and the research organisation to notify the competent authorities, as provided for by Articles 28 and 30 of Directive (EU) 2016/801;
- allowing EU Blue Card holders to carry out business activities during a short-term intra-EU mobility move, in addition to the activities listed in Article 2(13) of Directive (EU) 2021/1883, for instance participation in innovation projects, mentoring or knowledge-sharing activities, entrepreneurial engagements (e.g. startup incubation, acceleration programmes, launching or joining an innovative company), and temporary teaching or research assignments in universities or research organisations. The list of such activities should be regularly updated and made accessible, in accordance with Article 24(1), second subparagraph, point (a) of Directive (EU) 2021/1883;
- using the simplified notification procedure for the long-term mobility of researchers and their family members, as provided for by Articles 29(1)(a) and 30(2) of Directive (EU) 2016/801, instead of the procedure requiring a new application;
- limiting the documentation required for intra-EU mobility of international students, researchers and EU Blue Card holders and their family members to essential elements, such as a valid travel document and an authorisation issued by the first Member State. Other documents such as proof of sickness insurance, resources or address should not be requested again unless strictly necessary. Documents should be accepted in English.

¹⁹ Article 31(2) of Directive (EU) 2016/801 provides that it is optional for the second Member State (where the students intend to carry out part of their studies) to require a notification procedure for the mobility of students.

ENHANCING CAPACITY AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PROMOTING COORDINATION MECHANISMS

Measures to strengthen administrative capacity

26. Member States should equip their competent authorities, including diplomatic and consular representations, with adequate human and financial resources to handle applications efficiently, particularly in locations receiving high volumes of applications and during seasonal peaks (e.g. the months preceding the start of the academic year).
27. Member States should ensure that the relevant personnel, in particular consular staff, receive regular and comprehensive training on assessing applications and relevant documentation, advising applicants to ensure timely and complete applications.
28. Member States are encouraged to use available Union instruments, in particular the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), to support capacity building, staff reinforcement and training, as well as the Technical Support Instrument (TSI) to support their efforts in designing, implementing and evaluating structural reforms needed to enhance migration management capacity and improve cross-sectoral coordination, and the Horizon Europe research programme to support the gathering of relevant evidence and data²⁰.

Measures to improve access to information

29. Member States should provide clear information on the documents required for a long-stay visa or residence permit application, including examples of admissible evidence for requirements such as '*sufficient resources*', as well as on the timeline of the visa and residence permit application procedure.
30. Member States should use and promote existing national and EU-wide tools and initiatives, to facilitate access to information for non-EU talent, such as the EU Immigration Portal, the Europe Startup Nations Alliance Opportunity Hub for startup founders, and the EURAXESS Portals and the 'Choose Europe' Portal for researchers. In designing and developing the EU Talent Pool, the Commission will seek convergence between the existing EU-level tools and initiatives to promote synergies and simplification.
31. As regards the obligation to make easily accessible information on admission conditions and rights for students, researchers and highly qualified workers as required under Article 35 of the Directive (EU) 2016/801 and Article 24 of Directive (EU) 2021/1883, Member States are encouraged to use centralised single-entry-point online portals, also available on mobile applications, with multilingual content, FAQs, chatbots or helplines. These portals should offer interactive guidance on preparing applications and on practical aspects related to the stay in the Member State, such as housing, healthcare, banking, and taxation. Active participation by national authorities and innovation actors is essential to keep information accurate, comprehensive and up to date. Third-country nationals should also be able to apply directly for the long-stay visa or residence permit on the same online platform.

²⁰ See Horizon Europe research projects funded under the topic *HORIZON-CL2-2023-TRANSFORMATIONS-01-03 (Innovative approaches to talent partnerships)*.

32. Member States are encouraged to cooperate with partner countries on measures to strengthen document security, identity management and information exchange, as well as to address potential concerns of 'brain drain'. This cooperation can contribute to strengthening mutual trust and the integrity of admission procedures, complementing initiatives under EU comprehensive partnerships, Talent Partnerships, and cooperation with enlargement and neighbourhood partners.

Measures to reinforce coordination

33. Member States should ensure effective coordination, communication and information exchange between immigration and labour authorities on the one hand, and host and support entities, in particular research organisations and higher-education institutions, startup accelerators and incubators, innovation agencies and chambers of commerce, on the other hand. Competent authorities should appoint contact points to facilitate direct and secure exchanges with host and support entities.

34. Member States should promote arrangements, under which host and support entities can assist applicants during the submission process to ensure that applications are complete before being sent to immigration authorities.

35. Member States should inform host and support entities of the average processing times to allow timely submission of the necessary documents (e.g. hosting arrangement, proof of university acceptance) well in advance, and in any case not later than 90 days before the start of the research project or academic year. To prevent administrative delays and ensure timely admission, direct information channels should be established to notify immigration authorities of late international student admissions or changes in enrolment dates.

36. Member States should prioritise late admission requests to enable international students to travel before the start of the academic year and allow the early submission of long-stay visa and residence permit applications to prevent seasonal peaks and alleviate consular services.

Commission support and governance

37. Member States are encouraged to cooperate and exchange information, including with social partners and other stakeholders, on measures to attract talent for innovation, including through mutual learning and exchange of good practices. For this purpose, Member States should contribute to the Talent for Innovation Attraction Platform that the Commission will convene to bring together experts on migration, employment, education and innovation in existing fora - such as the Contact Group on Legal Migration, the Labour Migration Platform, the Working Group on higher education, and the European Innovation Council - to create synergies, ensure coordination between public authorities and stakeholders, and monitoring the implementation of the Recommendation.

38. To support the monitoring of this Recommendation and the attraction of talent for innovation, Member States should inform the Commission of the relevant national initiatives, reforms, good practices and statistics, on which the Commission will take stock during 2026 - and on a regular basis afterwards - also in view of possible targeted legislative adjustments that may be needed to make procedures simpler and more responsive to the EU's competitiveness and innovation ambitions.

Done at Brussels, 29.1.2026

For the Commission

Magnus BRUNNER
Member of the Commission

CERTIFIED COPY
For the Secretary-General

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