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European Commission's proposals on intra-corporate transferees fail to address the needs of working spouses

Proposals by the European Commission for a directive on the entry and residence of Intra Corporate Transferees fail to address the needs of working spouses and partners. The Commission's initiative is intended to facilitate common work permit procedures for transferring managers, specialists and graduate trainees to Europe by international companies. However, although the proposals respect basic family rights to accompany the employee, they do not include a provision for partners to work. This is despite the fact that several individual European countries already allow this.

While it is good news that the Commission recognises the economic importance of intra-company transfers, the lack of recognition of partner needs is seen as a missed opportunity according to the Permits Foundation, an international organisation that campaigns for employment access for accompanying partners.

"If the spouse can't work, the employee may not accept the appointment and the key skill the employer is trying to resource won't be available. That's bad for business and it's bad for the local and European economy" said Permits Foundation Board Member Kathleen van der Wilk-Carlton. "We had expected the Commission's proposal would allow partners to work as is the case with the Blue Card Directive for other highly skilled employees."

Permits Foundation recently published the results of a global spouse survey giving evidence that a lack of partner employment opportunity adversely affects the mobility of highly skilled international staff. Around 22 per cent of international employees had previously turned down an assignment, and 7 per cent had ended an assignment early, because of concerns about the partner's career. Nearly 60 per cent said the employee was unlikely to transfer in future to a location where it is difficult for a partner to get a work permit.

According to Gill Gordon, an HR director with Schlumberger Limited, Governments that want to attract top international employees should take account of the fact that talented workers need assurance that host countries are welcoming. *"Partners and spouses are often also highly educated, with diverse professional backgrounds. If permitted to work, they too benefit the local economy."*

Permits Foundation will now push for improved regulations at European Council and Parliament level. *"Spouse employment should be a key element of a modern migration policy to support the attractiveness of Europe as a place to do international business,"* said Kathleen van der Wilk-Carlton.

Notes for the press:

More than 40 major international companies including AkzoNobel, AstraZeneca, BMW, Bosch, BT, Ericsson, GlaxoSmithKline, Schlumberger, Shell, Unilever and TNT support Permits Foundation. The Foundation has been successful in contributing to change in the USA, France, The Netherlands, Hong Kong and Malaysia. It is currently promoting improvements throughout the European Union and several countries in Asia and is working to raise awareness worldwide.

The EU Commission's proposals for ICT directive: http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/malmstrom/archive/proposal_directive_intra_corporate_transferees.pdf

Permits Foundation global survey summary:
http://www.permitsfoundation.com/docs/permits_survey_summary.pdf

Countries that allow spouses to work:
<http://permitsfoundation.com/docs/Permits%20Country%20Summary%20March%202010.pdf>

Contact: Kathleen van der Wilk-Carlton tel:+31610220771 or Helen Frew tel +31650645582

<http://www.permitsfoundation.com>