

EU Intelligence Report

December 2013



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Employment Law/ Labour Skills

- [Commission proposes standards to improve quality of traineeships](#)

Consumer Issues

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Tourism Policy

European Commission publishes two consultations on Tourism EU Commission

On 13 December the European Commission released two public consultations on tourism related subjects. Stakeholders are invited to submit their contributions on: (I) *Identification of regulatory and administrative burdens for the tourism industry* and (II) *European Tourism for the Future*.

The scope of the first consultation is to identify the obstacles – both at the regulatory and administrative level - in tourism in order for the Commission to address the bottlenecks that impede the growth of the sector.

The questions are aimed at identifying those areas where there may still be scope for reducing regulatory or administrative burdens.

Any stakeholder's response to the consultation is based on the attribution of the nature of the burden (from 1 -5) emerging from some specific type of

regulation. These are related to several sectors including business environment, consumer protection, custom and border controls entry tariffs customs and border formalities, employment issues energy, VAT and the environment.

The second consultation on *European Tourism for the Future* aims at identifying the challenges that future tourism policies need to take into account.

The questionnaire asks stakeholders to give their opinion on the actions that the EU should undertake to support tourism competitiveness and to assess the future challenges in the sector. Challenges like accessibility, the ageing populations, or the increasing digitalization of services are mentioned in the text as potential key issues.

All stakeholders have three months to respond to the consultations from the date of their release. The deadline is fixed for the 15 March 2014.

EC places accessible tourism at the centre of the EU day of rights of people with disabilities.
European Commission

On 3 and 4 December, the European Commission - DG Justice and DG Enterprise and Industry –celebrated the "European Day of Persons with Disabilities" and the "European Tourism Day" 2013 with the Joint Conference on “Accessible Tourism in Europe”.

The event was organised to raise awareness on the right of everybody to have equal access to tourism services and destinations and to present some success stories and best practices in the field.

On 3 December the conference focused mainly on accessibility for tourists and residents from the users' perspective.

On 4 December the conference concentrated on the more economic aspects of these issues, focusing on how to further open Europe to international tourism.

Employment Law/ Training/ Skills

EC organises event on bridging the European Tourism Skills Gap
European Commission/ ETAG/ATLAS

On 3 December the European Commission in joint cooperation with the [European Travel & Tourism Action Group \(ETAG\)](#)

and ATLAS organised an event on skills in the tourism sector. Specifically it looked at bridging the divide between industry and academia. The event featured the interventions of ETAG Secretary General, Gareth James, Ms. Anya Diekmann, from [the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education \(ATLAS\)](#) coordinator, Ms. Asnate Ziemele, from the Latvian Country Tourism Association and Mr. Felix Rohn, from DG Culture and Education. The event was moderated by Nick Hall (SE1 Media). Key points touched upon by the speakers follow below:

Gareth James from ETAG

Highlighted that EU tourism lays its foundations on almost 2 *mln* enterprises/SMEs. However, each of them is usually run by less than 10 people. Lack of time, money and inclination to upgrade the staff's skills hampers the *knowing the customer* experience that should take place through three steps:

- The identification of MKT Segments
- Focus on the enterprise Market segment
- Customer research

Understanding customers' needs should also underpin marketing.

Anya Diekmann , ATLAS Europe

Ms. Diekmann highlighted the existing gap between tourism practitioners and academics and illustrated ATLAS' role as a network of 240 researchers and lecturers in tourism. According to her, Tourism is not yet an autonomous academic discipline but it deserves its own recognition. Researchers should be crucial in informing policies related to skills. The skill gap is the divide between practitioners and academics where the former avoids the use of tourism research and the latter is too detached from reality. The divide is exacerbated by a general prejudice that anyone can be a tourism practitioner and this leads to: 1) a gap between practical and academic skills expected by many employers 2) tourism students want to have management positions that are taken by people with business background 3) the lack of use of academic research often leads to reinventing the wheel when it comes to tourism policy 4) lack of knowledge transfer.

She suggested some solutions to these challenges:

- Tourism need to be more vocational

- Collaboration between actors (governments and university, traineeship, applied research projects) to foster a dialogue on the right level of professional experience

Asnate Ziemele, Latvian Country Tourism Association

Ms. Ziemele illustrated the skills gap from a practitioner perspective. In her view all the skills necessary to deal with demanding clients are natural or can be taught. The academic framework is only marginally useful.

Mr. Felix Rohn, European Commission, DG Culture and Education

Mr. Roth gave an overview on how the European Commission intends to address the skill gaps in tourism. In particular through the ERASMUS+ funding programme. The first calls for proposal will be available by the end of 2013.

Commission proposes standards to improve quality of traineeships
European Commission

As announced in the [Employment Package](#) released in December 2012, the Commission presented a proposal for a **Quality Framework for Traineeships**. This supports the implementation of the

[Council Recommendation on Establishing a Youth Guarantee](#) that called on Member States to ensure that 'all young people up to the age of 25 years receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education'. The framework sets out guidelines to enable trainees to acquire high-quality work experience under safe conditions.

The Quality Framework for Traineeships is supposed to help facilitate the mobility of young people through 2012 and adopted by the EU's Council of Ministers in April 2013.

EACEA publishes report on the responses of the 28 Member States to the Europe 2020 priorities in the field of education and training
EACEA

On 12 December, the European Commission's Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) published a [report](#) on the responses of the 28 Member States to the Europe's 2020 priorities in the field of education and training. The report focuses on Member States' recent and upcoming reforms in the fields of early school leaving, higher

education, youth employment, vocational education and training and lifelong learning. More specifically the report assesses policy measures that are implemented and other measures that are in an advanced stage in the implementation process in Member States since 2011, which is the year after the Europe 2020 strategy was launched.

The report's findings indicate that overall, since 2011, EU countries have launched or prepared to implement a wide range of measures to respond to the key challenges identified which relate to early school leaving and access to higher education, improving skills, and lifelong learning. Overall, most of the reported national reforms related to early school leaving are focussed on prevention measures, notably aiming to facilitate access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) and improve its quality, as well as reforms to support disadvantaged pupils. Regarding access to higher education, most countries report that they aim to widen participation in higher education.

Consumer Issues

Member States implement Consumer Rights Directive into National Law
Member states

By the 13 December Member States were required to implement the European Union's [Consumer Rights Directive](#) into national law. The EU legislation will strengthen consumers' rights in all 28 EU countries, particularly when shopping online. Some of the key provisions of this piece of legislation include the following:

- The new rules will eliminate hidden charges and costs on the Internet
- Consumers will be protected against "cost traps" on the Internet
- Increased price transparency, as traders have to disclose the total cost of the product or service
- Banning pre-ticked boxes on websites when shopping online
- 14 days to return an order
- Better refund rights
- Elimination of surcharges for the use of credit cards and hotlines
- Introduction of an EU-wide model withdrawal form
- Common rules for businesses will make it easier for them to trade all over Europe

The European Commission put forward the proposal for a new set of consumer rights in October 2008. Following agreement on the legislation in 2011, governments had two years to implement the rules at national

level. The final agreement between the European Parliament and the Council on the Consumer Rights Directive was brokered by EU Justice Commissioner Viviane Reding in June 2011 and formally adopted on 10 October 2011

European Parliament Discusses Travel Package Directive

European Parliament

Key Actors: MEP Hans Peter Meyer (EPP, Germany), MEP Emma McClarkin (ECR, UK)

On 16 December the IMCO committee held a discussion on MEP Mayer's [report](#) on the Package Travel Directive. During this debate **MEP Hans-Peter Mayer** (EPP, Germany) presented his report highlighting that he is in favour of full harmonisation in order to have unified rules amongst Member States. He went through the different points of his report including the scope and definition, Pre-contractual information, Right of cancellation and withdrawal, Packages changes, prices reductions or price increases, insolvency protection, No-fault liability.

MEP Sergio Gaetano Cofferati (S&D, Italy) supported the rapporteur's position as

regards full harmonisation, especially with respect to the changes made to a package in order to make sure that consumers have to give their explicit consent to any changes. It is also key to limit price increase and the deadline for amending the package.

MEP Olle Schmidt (ALDE, Sweden) said that it is important to have common rules that protect the consumers but expressed concerns on the potential impact on small business.

MEP Heidi Rühle (Greens, Germany) agreed with MEP Schmidt as regards full harmonisation. She said would want to leave more flexibility to Member States to adapt the rules when necessary and called for a better definition of the scope.

More relevant to IAAPA was the intervention of **MEP Emma McClarkin** (ECR, UK), who highlighted that the definition of "significant" proportion of a package in relation to other tourism services is confusing and it will therefore not be obvious for consumer what will be covered and what will not.

She is also opposed to full harmonisation saying that some Member states have put

in place stronger consumer protection and she does not want consumers to lose the benefits they currently enjoy.

In addition, she said it is important to have a clear distinction about what is package travel and what is "linked travel"; According to her a package should be all services selected at the same time when linked travel could include additional services booked a bit later.

MEP Catherine Stihler (S&D, UK) agreed with Emma McClarkin as regards the renaming of assisted travel to linked travel. She said it was important with this new Directive to be very clear and precise and not to create new loopholes. Consumer information need to be clear and available.

MEP Malgorzata Handzlik (EPP, Poland) welcomed the report. However, she wants to extend the possibility of withdrawing without paying charges and not limit it to a price increase of 10%.

From the European Commission, **Mrs Manfredi**, although welcoming the report, she expressed some concerns as regards the definition of the scope and the clear distinction that should exist between package and linked travel.

The following timeline for the discussion was confirmed:

- 18 December Deadline for amendments
- 21/22 January: consideration of amendments
- 10 February: consideration of compromise amendments
- 11 February - Vote in IMCO
- March vote in plenary in for 1st reading

TRAN Committee votes on European Air passenger rights

European Parliament

Key Actor: MEP Georges Bach (EPP, LU)

On Tuesday 17 December the Transport committee adopted the European Commission's proposal on revised air passenger rights.

MEPs tabled some 600 amendments to tighten up the Commission proposal. These included :a new definition of unforeseeable "extraordinary circumstances" in which compensation may be denied; compensation due after three hours' delay on short flights; the introduction of competent staff to inform and help stranded passengers.

The report was approved by 37 against 3 votes, no abstentions. The plenary vote is scheduled for 4 February, to allow time to negotiate a first-reading agreement with Council before the May 2014 European elections.

MEP Questions

Commission answers to MEPs concerns about the level of minimum wage in the EU

European Parliament/ European Commission

Key Actor: MEP Tarabella (S&D, BE)

A parliamentary [question](#) on a European minimum wage had been tabled by Marc Tarabella MEP (S&D, BE). The MEP asks whether the Commission thinks it necessary to establish a European minimum wage.

The commission [answered](#) stressing that In the [Employment Package](#) the Commission focuses on the importance of decent and sustainable wages within the Member States. Minimum wages set at appropriate levels can help prevent in-work poverty and a race to the bottom in terms of labour costs. Thus they are an important factor in

ensuring decent pay and job quality. In setting minimum wage levels, Member States must strike a balance between offering a decent wage, matching productivity levels and providing the right incentives to the unemployed (making work pay). Minimum wages can also contribute to sustaining aggregate demand. This is particularly relevant in depressed economic circumstances.

EP questions on Youth employment guarantee

European Parliament

Key Actor: Andreas M \ddot{u} lzer (NI - AT)

In a recent parliamentary [question](#) MEP Moelzer stressed that young people, after completing their training, are forced, in the absence of a suitable job, to switch to a different sector or even to move to the low-wage sector, they often have no opportunity to switch back again later. Back in the autumn of last year, the Commission proposed a number of specific measures intended to tackle the high youth unemployment rate. In the meantime, the EU made additional funding available. From 2014 onwards, priority will be given to supporting young people, in particular in regions where youth unemployment is

above 25%. He asks about how much funding will be available to tackle youth unemployment and what control will prevent young people being hidden.

The European Commission is going to reply within 8 weeks.

Funding

Erasmus+

Council/ European Commission

The Council adopted on 3rd December a regulation establishing "[ERASMUS +](#)", the Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport for the period 2014-2020. It brings together in a single programme activities previously covered by a number of separate programmes (including the Lifelong Learning Programme, Erasmus Mundus and Youth in Action) and it also covers activities in the new area of European competence, sport.

The new programme has a total budget of about €14.7 billion which represents an increase of 40% compared to the precedent budget - and can also benefit for

Any additional funding from external action instruments (such as the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, the

Development Cooperation Instrument, the European Neighbourhood Instrument, as well as the European Development Fund).

Its main operational priorities are simplification of procedures and a

performance-based allocation of funds, as well as closer links between the formal, informal and non-formal education and learning sectors.

COSME - Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs

European Commission

For the period 2014-2020, the European Commission has published a proposal for a [Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs](#) (COSME) with a planned budget of € 2.5 billion.

The Programme has the following general objectives: 1) improve access to finance for SMEs in the form of equity and debt; 2) improve access to markets inside the Union and globally through Enterprise Europe Network that will facilitate expansion of businesses beyond the borders; 3) promote entrepreneurship by developing entrepreneurial skills and

attitudes, especially among new entrepreneurs, young people and women.

The Commission proposal includes a reference to specific objectives to improve the competitiveness of enterprises in the tourism sector. The Commission intends to ensure coherence and consistency implementation, as well as informed policy-making at Union level. Benchmarking, the exchange of best practices and sectorial initiatives in particular will be encouraged. The main beneficiaries will include existing entrepreneurs (small businesses in particular), future entrepreneurs (including young people) as well as national, regional and local authorities. On this basis, eligible tourism partners could include: Accommodation providers, Transport providers, Restaurants/ Cafés, **Attractions**, Public Authorities

Consumer Programme 2014-2020

European Commission

The new consumer programme was adopted last 23 October and [proposed](#) by the Commission in November 2011. Although ensuring continuity with the previous one, the new initiative aims to better serve consumers' interests by enhancing product safety through effective

market surveillance, improving consumers' information, education and awareness of their rights, consolidating consumer rights and strengthening effective redress, especially through alternative dispute resolution.

This programme sets financial framework for many actions that aim to improve consumer protection throughout the EU. These actions include financing of joint cooperation actions between Member States market surveillance authorities and supporting Union level consumer organizations.

Events

February

- Plenary Vote on Air Passenger Rights Report

March

- Plenary Vote on the Travel Package Directive
- Deadline for Submitting Responses to the Public Consultations on Tourism

April

3-6 April: [GITANDO.ALL](#) Italy – fair on Accessible Tourism, Venice