
L'usage de tout système électronique ou informatique est interdit dans cette épreuve

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Not the ace in the pack

Why Europe loses in the global competition for talent

Desperate Africans and Asians risk their lives in the Atlantic or the Mediterranean each year in the hope of finding a low-skilled job somewhere in Europe. But why are so few high-skilled engineers, technicians or doctors banging on the door? The best educated seem keener to go almost anywhere but the European Union. In Australia nearly a tenth of the employed population are highly qualified foreigners, in Canada more than 7% and in America just over 3%. The EU manages a paltry 1.7%, or roughly 70,000 highly skilled non-Europeans in the workforce, says Franco Frattini, the commissioner for justice, freedom and security.

That is a problem. Europe's economies, along with everyone else's, increasingly rely on talented workers. But not only are too few ageing natives equipped with the necessary scientific, engineering and other skills; many who are qualified choose to go elsewhere. That high figure for Australia, for example, is no doubt boosted by the many British émigrés down under. With skilled labour ever more footloose, getting migrants to fill the gaps is essential.

This week the European Commission launched a plan to provide a "blue card" (yes, for the colour of the flag) to help would-be migrants with suitable job offers, and their families, to get into Europe faster. Once inside, the holders could swap jobs, come and go from the EU and, after a while, move freely between countries. Although valid, at first, for just two years, the card would also make it simpler to get long-term residency. "We are trying to make Europe a bit more competitive," says Mr Frattini. He modestly suggests that the scheme would nudge the number of highly skilled foreign workers up to 100,000 or so.

All good in theory, but do not expect much of a threat to America's green (in fact, pink) card. For a start, many European governments are jealous of their control of migration policies and will resist any harmonising effort by Brussels. Look out for possible German or British vetoes.

Europe's "blue card" plan, *The Economist*,
October 27th, 2007.