

The European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) is a confederation of more than 40 national and European trade union organisations from over 20 European countries, with a total of more than 5 million individual members. Founded in 1990, CESI is a recognised European sectoral social partner and advocates improved employment conditions for workers in Europe and a strong social dimension in the EU. Most of CESI's affiliates are employed in the different fields of the European, national, regional and local public services, as well as in privatised services of general interest. As such, CESI represents workers in various sectors that are particularly affected by labour migration and brain drain, including the health and care sector.

CESI welcomes the initiative of the European Commission described in its Call for Evidence document of March 29 2022 to launch an initiative to address challenges related to brain drain in Europe, meaning the emigration of qualified individuals from their place of origin to other countries with better employment and working conditions.

In response to the European Commission's Call for Evidence document of March 29 2022, CESI:

- supports the EU Single Market's principle of free movement of workers, goods, services and capital and notes that brain drain emigration may help to meet skills shortages in the labour market of Member States with the most advantageous working conditions and social protection coverage, but is deeply concerned about the long term effects of such migratory flows of workers for the countries of origin. These face depopulation of vast regions that are left un-served and deprived due to lack of professionals, to the detriment of the population and the economic perspective of the country at large. They lose out financially when they educate their workforces in the public education systems, only to see them move away afterwards to work elsewhere. Such developments, in time, widen the financial disparities, living standards and economic performance between more and less advantaged countries and regions. In an EU Single Market with free movement of labour, there is a **strong role of the EU to set the frame for ethical, sustainable and fair labour migration in Europe** and help balance out push and pull factors of labour migration and address its complex and diverse socio-economic consequences.
- notes that in the next 10 years¹ it is estimated that in 1 out of 5 EU Members States 25% of the current workforce will retire and that the working age population will shrink by 4%. This puts pressure on the sustainability of social protection systems. The challenge of brain drain is not only about balancing out push-and-pull factors between countries in Europe but also about a **strategic and integrated approach to address the consequences of overall shrinking workforces in Europe**. The EU brain drain initiative should be sensitive to this.

¹ <https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/latest/news/eu-open-consultation-brain-drain-why-it-happens-how-stop-it-and-reverse-it>

- acknowledges that shrinking workforces mean that labour availability is becoming increasingly scarce, which in turn increases competition for workers among regions and countries. In theory, this **competition should lead to better working conditions. However, experience has shown that the opposite may occur**: The desire of professionals from disadvantaged regions and countries move to more wealthy regions and countries is often so strong that many accept working conditions which are worse than these region's or country's standard (even if still better than the standards in the region or country of origin). In its recent www.noprecariouswork.eu project², CESI has therefore advocated for measures by policy makers and social partners to ensure (1) that every mobile worker receives adequate social protection; (2) that there is effective equal treatment of those in atypical work compared to those with standard work contracts; and (3) that a strong interest representation is guaranteed for all, ideally through social dialogue and legal assistance by unions. The EU brain drain initiative should facilitate such priorities.
- notes that brain drain is especially critical in the area of essential services, which are often public services. The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted to what extent access to essential public services, such as health and care, is key for a strong, resilient and healthy society and economy especially in times of crises. Essential services must always be readily available, sufficient in scope and adequate in quality for all EU citizens. During the Covid-19 pandemic, this was not the case. For accessible, available and high quality essential services, adequate investments must target both facilities and infrastructure as well as equipment and, above all, human resources. Many essential public services are understaffed while working conditions are precarious and pay for personnel is often inadequate. As long as these shortcomings persist, quality services cannot be delivered. This is confirmed by a recent study commissioned by the European Parliament on 'Revaluation of working conditions and wages for essential workers'.³ In light of potential future crises, which are sure to occur, **the EU brain drain initiative should put an emphasis on addressing brain drain issues in essential public services.**
- Implementing the EU brain drain initiative, and implementing the above considerations of CESI in particular, will require that:
 - **EU cohesion policy and the EU's structural and investment funds** are further tailored to mitigate causes and consequences of brain drain.
 - the **EU's economic governance framework** is sensitive to allow necessary investments by Member States to structurally address brain drain.
 - brain drain is addressed systematically in the **European Semester process** and its country reports and country-specific recommendations.

² <https://www.cesi.org/posts/cesi-conference-addresses-precarious-work-and-lack-of-access-to-social-protection/>

³ See: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/695491/IPOL_STU\(2021\)695491_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/695491/IPOL_STU(2021)695491_EN.pdf)