Living and working without borders:

Freedom of movement for workers in the EU

When Laura left Portugal to take up a nursing position in Malta, she was excited about the opportunity to gain international experience and advance her career. However, shortly after arriving, she encountered difficulties when applying for certain employment-related benefits. Unsure of her rights, Laura sought advice and learned that, as an EU citizen exercising her right to freedom of movement, she was entitled to equal treatment with nationals of her host country. After seeking guidance and support, she was able to challenge the issue and continue building her future abroad.

Laura's story reflects the experience of millions of EU citizens, including Maltese citizens, who choose to live and work in another Member State each year. According to the European Commission's latest Annual Report on Intra-EU Labour Mobility, around 10 million EU citizens of working age (20-64) live in another EU Member State, while approximately 7.3 million citizens work in a country other than that of their nationality.

These numbers demonstrate the real impact of one of the EU's most valued rights, freedom of movement. Every day, millions of people use this right to pursue new career opportunities, gain experience and build a future across borders, while helping businesses access talent and strengthening economies throughout Europe.

EU citizens who exercise their freedom of movement are entitled to the same treatment as nationals of the host Member State in matters related to employment, working conditions, and access to social and tax advantages. In principle, workers should be assessed on the basis of their abilities and qualifications rather than their nationality.

Freedom of movement has brought significant social and economic benefits to Europe. Yet, achieving equality requires continuous efforts to ensure that all workers can access opportunities that reflect their skills and qualifications, regardless of their nationality.

In this regard, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) plays an important role in promoting equal treatment, addressing discrimination, and supporting individuals in exercising their rights. In 2016, the right of freedom of movement for workers in the EU was included in the remit of the NCPE by virtue of Subsidiary Legislation 456.03, where persons who encounter discrimination or obstacles to exercising the right of freedom of movement may lodge a complaint to the NCPE.

The NCPE can investigate complaints in relation to access to employment; conditions of employment and work (remuneration, dismissal, health and safety at work, and, if workers become unemployed, reinstatement or re-employment); access to social and tax advantages; membership of trade unions and eligibility for workers' representative bodies; access to training; access to housing; access to education, apprenticeship and vocational training for the children of workers; and assistance afforded by the employment offices.

No one should face discrimination for exercising their right to move, live, or work in another EU Member State. When obstacles arise, reporting them to the NCPE is crucial. Such reports help identify and address discriminatory practices, protect individuals' rights, and promote equal access to opportunities across the EU.

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) can be contacted on: 2276 8200, equality@gov.mt or NCPE's social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, X, and LinkedIn - NCPE.Malta)

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