



HR JOB FEATURE



## Watch Out HR Professionals, Europe Wants Your Company's Employees!

[By Anique Gonzalez]

In many ways, human resources professionals mold the direction of a company and have a hand in creating its heart and soul. After all, one of the job responsibilities of an HR professional is the hiring of personnel and the oversight of employee relations. Essentially then, the human resources professional's role is to make sure the company functions appropriately.

To do so effectively, though, there must be a talented pool of professionals from which to hire. Typically, HR professionals in the United States have been fortunate enough to find these employees within and beyond the country's borders. Soon though, HR professionals' jobs may get slightly more difficult because the European Union (EU) has come up with a plan to lure skilled foreign workers to its shores.

Over the course of nearly a decade, 10 million foreigners have uprooted their lives and moved to EU states in order to fill positions that were previously held by retired members of the European labor market. And, as more job holders continue to retire in the coming years, the EU will increasingly need more and more professionals to take over these positions in order to alleviate the unemployment crunch that will inevitably be left behind by them. Within the next 25 years, for instance, it is believed that a minimum of 20 million workers will need to be hired to fill the gap in employment left by those retiring. And by 2050, one-third of the European population will have retired.

As they search to fill their vacant positions though, HR professionals in the EU must compete against many other countries for the best and the brightest the world has to offer, a battle that the EU has typically

lost. Currently, employees who fall into the "highly qualified" category only represent 1.7% of the EU's job market, which levels out at nearly 290 million members.

Hoping to combat this trend, and ensure its ability to compete and subsequently succeed in the international business market, the European Commission has proposed a new "blue card" program. Similar to the United States' green card, which HR professionals are intimately familiar with, the blue card will allow holders to easily switch jobs and, along with their families, change residences within EU member states. Eventually, the card will entitle holders to be eligible for permanent-resident status.

"With the European blue card, we send a clear signal," European Commission President José Manuel Barroso said last year. "Highly skilled workers are welcome in the EU."

If implemented successfully, the blue card system should help to ease some of the barriers foreigners face as they try to obtain jobs in the EU. As it is, every member state, of which there are 27, has different immigration rules, making it difficult for workers to move between them with ease.

Still, HR professionals in the United States

don't need to worry just yet. One major problem, which cannot be fixed simply by assigning cards to prospects, is tied to language.

In the United States, no matter what state a foreign worker works in, they will be speaking one language: English. In the EU, on the other hand, there isn't one unifying language that is spoken in every country.

"Language is always going to be the fly in the ointment," says Georges Lemaitre, at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Also, there has been hesitation by EU countries such as Britain, Austria, and Germany to implement the program. The issues primarily concern how the members of these countries are treated when they attempt to move between states. In response to these concerns, the Commission has since modified the plan, allowing individual countries, for instance, to establish immigration quotas.

So, while your HR job — and the jobs of the professionals that you helped to hire — is safe for the time being, be forewarned that soon enough, Paris, Frankfurt, and London may come calling.

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