

Petition N° 0827/2021

Petition No 0827/2021 by Patricia Brunner (German), on behalf of the International Au Pair Association (IAPA), on establishing a reciprocal youth mobility scheme between the UK and the EU

Dear members of the Committee of Petitions

I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to present our petition to you personally and for taking our concerns seriously.

We urgently encourage the commencement of immediate negotiations on establishing a reciprocal Youth Mobility Scheme between the UK and the EU.

The International Au Pair Association represents many au pair agencies and supports au pair programmes and cultural youth exchange worldwide. Au pairs and host families turn to us for support and information.

Since 01 January 2021 many young people from the EU have been left with no viable visa option to enter the UK as au pairs or on other cultural exchange programmes such as internships, work and travel or volunteer work.

The decision of the British government to largely close many routes for cultural exchange affects British host families, companies in the UK and the EU but above all it has an impact on young Europeans who can no longer participate in this type of exchanges.

The resulting long-term estrangement between the peoples of the EU and the UK is regrettable and cannot be in the EU's interest.

The European au pair programme has a formal history of more than 50 years (see [European Agreement on Au Pair Placements](#) from 1969). 95% of the approximately 44,000 au pairs placed in the UK each year before 2021 used to be from European Union member countries.

The UK is one of the most popular destinations for young Europeans seeking a cultural exchange experience whilst learning the English language.

We are aware that the EU has always been in favour of establishing “reciprocal mobility arrangements with the UK for purposes such as study, training, au pair and youth exchanges”. The statements to our petition by the Committee on Culture and Education and on Foreign Affairs clearly reflect this. We received similar supportive answers in our communication with the European Commission during the Brexit negotiations.¹ We know that the plan was to include youth mobility within the BREXIT agreements, but that the UK decided otherwise.

¹ Letter to IAPA from Mr. Luca Rossi, Head of Unit,
Task Force Relations with the United Kingdom on behalf of Mr. Barnier, 27 July 2020

“First, the EU's legal migration acquis is open to all third country nationals, including UK nationals after the end of the transition period, and offers opportunities and protection to categories such as workers... (including in particular seasonal workers), students, researchers, au pairs, trainees, volunteers, school pupils, family members, and long-term residents.”

However, in various statements the UK Home Office has expressed its willingness to extend its Youth Mobility Scheme (YMS) Tier 5 to other countries, or even the EU as a whole, on a reciprocal agreement principle.²

Regarding the requested reciprocity we would like to point out that there is currently an imbalance of reciprocity between the EU and the UK. The EU clearly allows UK citizens to enter the EU for various cultural exchange programmes, also non-academic ones. E.g. Germany, France, and others, offer au pair visa to young Britons under the same conditions as to other non-EU citizens.

Most UK programmes currently offered to young people are for enrolled college and university students. Whereas opportunities to spend a gap year abroad after finishing school, are very limited.

Apart from the said Youth Mobility Scheme, which at present includes only the two EU Member states Monaco and San Marino, au pair has also been assigned to the skilled worker scheme. So far, this route has proven not to be practicable. Nor does the skilled worker visa reflect the au pair idea or its participants.

Au pair programmes worldwide are typically limited regarding age, time spent abroad, working hours, and tasks performed.

Participants are not expected to be skilled. They are young adults between 18 and 30 completing a gap year after school or between two educational life phases.

They are interested in immersing in the life and culture of the people of a country. They seek opportunities to learn a language, explore their host country and participate in cultural events with the intention to grow as personalities and gain life experiences.

Our youth is the bond between cultures and nations.

Don't we owe it to these young people to keep trying to negotiate a reciprocal Youth Mobility Scheme?

We are confident that you will agree that people-to-people-diplomacy through cultural exchange is essential for our nations to foster ongoing mutual understanding, co-operation, and peace. We hope that the EU and its member states will speak to the British government on behalf of their youth and do their utmost to open the doors again to each other's young people.

Thank you for your attention.

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² *Looking to the future, we have indicated our desire to negotiate a youth mobility arrangement with the EU, or with individual countries within it if a collective agreement is not possible, which may provide a viable route for EU nationals to come to the UK to work as an au pair. Yet given the YMS is a reciprocal arrangement which will also benefit UK citizens, we will not add nations to the scheme unilaterally.*