

**Axel Ruppert**

The revision of the EU Blue Card Directive.  
An opportunity to establish a higher  
standard of rights for labour migrants in  
the European Union?

**Master's Thesis**

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Master Thesis by Axel Ruppert

## **Master Thesis**

### **The revision of the EU Blue Card Directive: An opportunity to establish a higher standard of rights for labour migrants in the European Union?**

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## **Executive summary**

This thesis explores the first phase of the revision of the European Union (EU) Blue Card Directive from June 2016 to June 2017. Out of the four EU labour migration Directives, the Blue Card aims to attract highly-skilled third country nationals to the EU and grants those admitted a favourable set of rights. In the revision, the European Parliament is for the first time fully involved as a co-legislator for the Blue Card Directive. While in the scholarly debate little attention has been paid to the role of the European Parliament in labour migration policy-making, existing research indicates that the European Parliament seeks to strengthen labour migrants' rights. In this context, this thesis asks the question to what extent the revision process offers the opportunity to strengthen Blue Card holders' rights. At the same time, strengthened rights for Blue Card holders inevitably result in an increase in the diverging treatment of labour migrants in the EU. In light of this ambivalence, this thesis aims to not only analyse opportunities for strengthened rights for Blue Card holders, but also to what extent the revision of the Blue Card Directive offers the opportunity to establish a higher standard of rights for labour migrants in the EU. This analysis shall complement academic literature that questions the practice of granting labour migrants in the EU different rights, but lacks of research on the manner in which the more preferential treatment of highly-skilled labour migrants is justified by actors in the European Commission and Parliament. Addressing this gap in research, this thesis offers new insights into how involved actors from the European Commission and Parliament address Blue Card holders' rights and the diverging treatment of labour migrants in the EU.

To achieve its analysis objective, this thesis uses a methodological triangulation approach of qualitative policy document and interview analyses. It finds that the Commission's proposal and the Parliament's involved Committees propose to strengthen Blue Card holders in several regards. At the same time, findings indicate that the perception about labour migrants' economic contribution, their perceived scarcity and their intended duration of stay determine the rights granted. The results suggest that a revised Blue Card might serve as a reference for all labour migration Directives and future initiatives regarding equal treatment and safeguards to protect permit holders from the loss of status. In terms of rights to family reunification, access to long-term residence and intra-EU mobility, the thesis' findings raise doubts whether strengthened rights can benefit labour migrants that are not categorised as highly-skilled or do not belong to a comparable category.

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## **List of abbreviations**

ALDE – Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

DG Home – Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs

EC – European Commission

ECR – European Conservatives and Reformists

EESC – European Economic and Social Committee

EMPL Committee – Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

ENAR – European Network Against Racism

ENF –Europe of Nations and Freedom

EP – European Parliament

EPDD – Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy

EPP – European People's Party

EU – European Union

Greens/EFA – The Greens / European Free Alliance

GUE/NGL – European United Left / Nordic Green Left

ICT Directive – Intra-Corporate Transferees Directive

LIBE Committee – Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

MEP(s) – Member(s) of the European Parliament

OLP – Ordinary Legislative Procedure

QMV – Qualified Majority Voting

S&D – Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats