

Commission outlines new, more operational European Employment Strategy

The European Commission has today adopted the outline of a new, more operational European Employment Strategy to confront new challenges such as faster economic change, ageing populations and enlargement. The Commission proposes three basic objectives for the future strategy, in line with the Lisbon reform agenda: full employment, the promotion of quality and productivity at work (better jobs) and fostering cohesion and an inclusive labour market. Specific priorities, to be supported wherever possible by quantified targets, will inter alia include: getting women (back) into work, helping older workers to stay in work and making work pay. The Commission also proposes better governance of the strategy, especially through more involvement of social partners and civil society and streamlining of the strategy with other EU policy coordination processes such as the broad economic policy guidelines. This policy paper is intended to provoke a broad discussion about the future shape of the European Employment Strategy in the run-up to the EU's Spring Summit to be held on 21st March this year. The Commission will then make formal proposals for the new employment guidelines and recommendations in early April.

Anna Diamantopoulou, Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs said: "Employment always features near the top of the list of priorities when EU citizens are polled on what they expect from the European Union. The existing EU employment strategy has served us well. However, in the current climate of economic uncertainty and profound economic and social change, what we need is a new and more operational strategy to manage this change in a coordinated way. This is the outline for the new strategy".

Central to the proposed approach are three overarching objectives:

- full employment, in line with the Lisbon strategy targets;
- quality and productivity at work, reflecting the need for better jobs in a knowledge-based economy and the need to promote EU competitiveness;
- cohesion and an inclusive labour market, so as to reduce existing disparities in access to the labour market.

Responding to the Barcelona summit's request for simpler and more effective guidelines, and in line with the need to streamline the various EU policy coordination processes, the Commission now proposes simpler guidelines which would be defined with a time horizon of 2010 and remain stable until a mid-term review to take place in 2006. More emphasis will be put on results: monitoring the implementation of the guidelines by Member States.

The communication proposes a more concentrated set of priorities for the future guidelines which follow the Lisbon objectives: helping those without a job into work and making work pay, fostering entrepreneurship to create more and better jobs,

combating undeclared work, promoting active ageing, managing immigration, promoting adaptability on the labour market, investment in human capital and life-long learning, gender equality, supporting integration and combating discrimination on the labour market for people at a disadvantage, and helping address regional employment disparities.

The Commission also proposes that the governance of the strategy should be improved through more effective delivery services, strong involvement of social partners, mobilisation of all relevant actors and adequate financial support.

The presentation of concrete objectives, priorities and targets will offer the basis for an open discussion with all interested parties, especially the Member States, the European Parliament, representative organisations of the social partners and civil society. In line with the new and streamlined approach for the overall follow up of the Lisbon agenda, the Commission will, in April 2003, make a formal proposal for employment guidelines and recommendations in the light of this debate and of the general political guidance issued by the EU's Spring Summit.

This communication is a follow up to the communication of 17 July 2002 in which the Commission took stock of the experience of five years of the European Employment Strategy¹. The debate which was launched by the July communication confirmed the need to renew the strategy with a view to aligning it more closely upon the Lisbon process, addressing new emerging challenges and preparing for enlargement. Past reforms have helped to increase resilience of EU labour markets to the economic slowdown, to boost employment by more than 10 million jobs and reduce long-term unemployment from 5.2% to 3.3.% over the lifetime of the European Employment Strategy. However, reforms must be sustained and extended in order to create another 15 million jobs needed to achieve the Lisbon employment target.

The communication is available on-line at (as soon as possible) :

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2003/jan/ees2003_en.html

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2003/jan/ees2003_fr.html

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2003/jan/ees2003_de.html

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¹ COM (2002) 416, 17.7.02