

RECENT & ONGOING ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELD OF EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Recent legislation/policy making activities:

✓ *Reinforcing the social dimension of the growth and jobs strategy – new report*

The EU's strategy for growth and jobs must pay more attention to social cohesion goals in the future, says a new report presented by the European Commission on 29 September 2009.

The report from the Social Protection Committee – which brings together experts from each EU country – finds that social protection systems have helped shield Europeans from the worst effects of the financial crisis. But it concludes that social protection alone is not enough to prevent poverty and exclusion, calling for more emphasis on goals such as fighting child poverty and promoting active inclusion. Further modernisation of social protection needs to be fully articulated with growth and jobs strategies.

Over the past decade, economic and employment growth has in general improved overall living standards in Europe, says the report. However, inequalities have often increased and poverty and social exclusion remain a major issue in most countries, although with substantial differences across the EU. Poverty rates in the EU range from 10% in the Czech Republic and the Netherlands to more than 20% in Bulgaria, Latvia, and Romania.

Certain groups – such as the low skilled, lone parent and migrants – still face specific hurdles to the labour market such as poor access to enabling services, or poor design of benefits that create financial disincentives. At the same time, job quality remains a problem, and precarious forms of employment have contributed to persistently high levels of in-work poverty. Evidence shows that workers on temporary or involuntary part-time contracts are generally paid less per hour after controlling for differences in education and experience; and for many, these jobs are not stepping stones towards better jobs.

As a response, active inclusion strategies are crucial, both to support the most vulnerable in the crisis and to limit losses to human capital and preserve future growth potential. Lessons from past experience show that addressing labour market segmentation and promoting job quality are both crucial.

In terms of social protection systems, recent reforms have improved their long-term financial sustainability but projections show that there are still challenges ahead. Efforts to modernise all functions of social protection should be sustained to ensure effective access to quality services for all, while contributing to the efficiency of public expenditure. Ensuring adequate and sustainable pensions will require further efforts to prolong working lives, which also means combating health inequalities.

The report also shows that Member States are in very different positions in terms of facing the social impacts of the crisis. In some countries, there are significant weaknesses in the social safety nets provided by social protection systems; others are faced with major public finance imbalances, leaving little room for manoeuvre in social policy; and some are better prepared to cushion the impact of the crisis but face questions about financial sustainability in the long run. Promoting labour market participation while improving the fairness, efficiency and effectiveness of social spending will be crucial for all countries, both in good and bad times. If social protection expenditure is to be effective as an automatic stabiliser in the economy, it has to increase in bad times (i.e. when unemployment is rising) and subsequently decrease when the economies recover.

The report is a contribution to the EU's reflections on its future strategy for growth and jobs in the period after 2010. EU leaders are due to adopt a new strategy next year covering the coming ten years

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=596&furtherNews=yes>

Négociations et consultations interprofessionnelles et sectorielles

✓ **Personal services**

The European social partners continue their negotiations on 28 and 29 September with a view to reaching an agreement on risk prevention and workers' health protection in the hairdressing sector by the end of the year. They have jointly requested that an additional negotiations meeting be held on 9 and 10 November.

Autres développements majeurs du dialogue social européen

✓ **Construction – social partners launch joint website database on posting of workers**

On 25 September 2009, the European social partners in the construction industry – EFBWW and FIEC – held a joint press conference to present their newly launched website on posting of workers in the construction sector (<http://www.posting-workers.eu> – to be activated for the public on 1st October 2009). This website is the main outcome of a joint project co-financed by the European Commission under the social dialogue budget line. It presents information on the applicable working conditions in the construction industry (minimum wages, working time, health and safety, etc.) in the EU member states (information still missing for Estonia, Latvia, Malta and Sweden). While they made clear their disagreement with regard to the need of a possible revision of the posting of workers directive, the social partners agreed on the need to improve implementation, including through transparency, better account of SMEs and micro-enterprises as well as of (bogus) self-employed, and strengthening of labour inspection. They see the website as a contribution to further developing the internal market and fighting illegal practices. They also announced their joint commitment to develop an EU-wide 'social identity card' for workers in the construction industry.

✓ **Education – launch conference for new sectoral social dialogue**

European social partners in the education sector (EFEE representing employers and ETUCE representing workers) met on 29 September in order to plan the next steps for the creation of the new sectoral social dialogue committee in education. During that conference a letter addressed to the Commissionaire Spidla with a request to set up a Committee has been signed (to be sent on 30 September 2009). Social partners discussed the work that should be done before the Committee is formally created. This concerns *inter alia* the necessity to reinforce the representativeness on the employers' side, the stronger involvement of representatives in the higher education sector and finally the involvement of the remaining 9 countries in the work of the future Committee. At the conference social partners presented their draft rules of procedures and their work program for the years 2010-2011, both of which are attached to the letter to be sent to the Commission. There is a strong willingness on both sides to continue the work and to deliver outcomes. The representatives of the European Parliament (members of EP Committee on Education and Culture) and the Commission expressed their support for works of the future Committee. If the Committee is approved by the Commission (after checking that all the requirements from the Commission decision from May 1998 are fulfilled) the first Plenary Session of the Committee is planned to take place on 22/23 of March 2010.

✓ **Legal seminar on anti-discrimination and gender equality - Brussels - 6 October 2009**

In cooperation with the European Networks of Legal Experts in the non-discrimination and gender equality fields, the European Commission organised a legal seminar in Brussels on Tuesday 6 October 2009. The seminar was intended to contribute to bringing participants up to date on issues concerning the implementation of the non-discrimination and gender equality Directives.

<http://www.regonline.co.uk/builder/site/tab2.aspx?EventID=733822>