

March 2009

## Policy news



### Anti-discrimination bill approved by the European Parliament's civil liberties committee

On 16<sup>th</sup> of March, the Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) approved the final version of its report which would outlaw discrimination against people on the basis of age, disability, sexual orientation, belief or religion in the areas of education, social security, health care and goods and services including housing. The committee was scrutinising the proposed EU anti-discrimination Directive.

Since 2000, the European Union has prohibited these forms of discrimination at work, but legal protection in the realms of public services, buying products or making use of commercial services was not covered.

The new legislation brings bans on these forms of discrimination in line with existing laws against religion or belief, age, disability, gender or sexual orientation, whether direct or indirect, and whether based on real or presumed criteria and on assuring equal treatment of men and women.

The deputies underlined that the bill will not affect national legislation on marriage or family law and the deputies

insisted that the EU member states remain responsible for educational content.

For disabled persons, enterprises and other organisations are expected to provide reasonable accommodation to their needs.

Disability and age can still be taken into account by insurance companies or banks, as this is not considered discrimination, but a requirement of the determination of risk. They can console themselves in the knowledge that youth cards - and their retiree equivalents - for museums, swimming pools, buses and the like will still be permitted.

The full European Parliament will now meet on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of April to consider whether to adopt the LIBE Committee report as its own recommendations on the Directive.

More information on:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress\\_page/016-51922-075-03-12-902-20090316IPR51921-16-03-2009-2009-false/default\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/016-51922-075-03-12-902-20090316IPR51921-16-03-2009-2009-false/default_en.htm)



## Social Platform Letter to the Spring Council: three steps to restart our economies and protect people from the crisis

Ahead of the Spring Summit where EU leaders will decide on next steps with regard to the economic crisis, the Social Platform sent a letter to the Heads of State and Government asking them to help restart their economy and protect people by reinforcing social protection systems, prioritising social and health services and supporting civil society. The message sent to the Heads of State and Government on behalf of European Social NGOs highlighted the following actions:

- At EU and national level, commit to invest in and reinforce social protection systems, and guarantee adequate minimum income;
- At EU and national level, include investment in the field of education, social and health services as a chapter of your recovery plans and account for it as an investment rather than a cost;
- Support civil society by including a chapter on cooperation with NGOs in each of your recovery plans and work with the representatives of civil society to find a way out of the crisis.

Also read the EASPD press release on the financial crisis on [www.easpd.eu](http://www.easpd.eu)



## Commission statement to EU leaders on the economic crisis

The European Commission published its communication to the Spring European Council in which it suggests the way in which we should move forward, including a new chapter on supporting people through the crisis. The communication outlines measures Member States should consider in the following areas:

1. Restoring and maintaining a stable a reliable financial system
2. Supporting the real economy
3. Supporting people through the crisis
4. Promoting global recovery: the European contribution to the G-20 Summit

The full text of the Communication is available at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_barroso/president/pdf/press\\_20090304\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/president/pdf/press_20090304_en.pdf)



## Conclusions of the Meeting of Ministers of Social and Employment Affairs – EPSCO Council

EU Ministers of Social and Employment Affairs met on 9<sup>th</sup> March in Brussels and agreed on their common message to present to the Heads of State and Government during the Spring Summit that took place on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> March. The EPSCO Council held a debate on the current financial and economic crisis which focused mainly on employment and social policies, subjects on which they adopted key conclusions.

The ministers agreed that timely, temporary and targeted measures are necessary to stimulate employment, to limit job losses and reduce their social impact. Efforts to help people retain their jobs and assisting the unemployed in entering the job markets should be particularly targeted to vulnerable people, like low earners and less qualified workers. The principles of flexicurity were outlined as key in further modernising labour markets, but Ministers also warned of its possible abuse by weakening social rights.

Member States further agreed that short term strategies should be fully in line with the long term vision of the Lisbon strategy, and called for a coordination of national measures at European level.

Some delegations also suggested that the rules of the European Social Fund and of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund should be adapted so that their resources can be mobilised more quickly.

The Ministers further recognised that even though the Lisbon strategy “has

significantly contributed to growth and to more and better jobs”, none of its overall objectives have been fully attained yet. Inequalities and exclusion persist affecting social cohesion. The reforms and policy mix needed to meet the long-term economic, financial, employment and social and environmental challenges of the EU should be more coherent and mutually reinforcing. These concerns should figure prominently in the definition of the EU long-term reform objectives.”

The Council also stressed the importance of investing on access to training and active labour market inclusion for workers at risk, as well as supporting employment and job creation by investing in public infrastructure that can quickly contribute to job creation. Unfortunately, social services were not identified as a potential employment sector that can also contribute to much needed job creation in a short time frame.

Finally, another key objective of the EPSCO Council was to keep working towards the goal of reducing poverty and social exclusion. People with disabilities were identified as one of the groups at higher risk, and the social inclusion of migrant citizens (many of which are active in the social care sector) should also be prompted.

The full text of the results of the EPSCO Council is available on:

[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/106560.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/106560.pdf)



## 2010: European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion

The growth and jobs strategy was launched in March 2000 with EU leaders pledging to make "a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty" by 2010. Yet, one year before the deadline too many European citizens continue to live in poverty without access to basic services such as health care. 79 million Europeans live below the poverty line. This violates EU principles of solidarity and social justice.

It is in this framework that the decision to dedicate 2010 as the "European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion" was taken by the European Commission to recognise that:

- all people have a right to live in dignity and take part in society
- the public and private sector share responsibility to combat poverty and social exclusion

- eradicating poverty for a more cohesive society benefits all
- commitment at all levels of society is needed to achieve this goal.

EASPD is among the organisations invited to participate in the Stakeholder Expert Group that can contribute the preparatory work for the European Year. As such, it can participate in an exchange of views with the Commission on its design, implementation, follow-up and assessment. All EASPD members who wish to contribute ideas or plan an event around the theme of poverty and social inclusion in 2010 are invited to contact Miriana Giraldi at [miriana.giraldi@easpd.eu](mailto:miriana.giraldi@easpd.eu) with their suggestions.



## Czech EU Presidency News: Negotiations with the European Parliament on the Working Time Directive will continue

The EU Member States led by the Czech EU Presidency met for the first time with the Members of the European Parliament at the session of the Conciliation Committee on 17<sup>th</sup> March. The Conciliation Committee is trying to reach a compromise concerning new EU rules on working time. After difficult negotiations, both sides have agreed to meet again, probably on 1<sup>st</sup> April.

The Czech Presidency provided the MEPs with new options to deal with controversial issues. The Presidency

aims at improving the overall situation of workers in the whole of the EU.

During the preparatory talks it became obvious that the European Parliament considers the abolition of the opt-out clause, i.e. an exception from the maximum weekly working hours, as issue number one.

The proposal for a new working time directive, which has been discussed within the EU since 2003, aims at improving the overall situation of workers compared to the current state. The Czech Presidency strives hard to reach

an agreement with the European Parliament.

The opt-out to the maximum working week is currently being used by 15 out of the 27 Member States. It mostly serves to solve difficulties related to professions which involve regular standby duty (e.g.

in healthcare or fire service) and allows for flexible work arrangements according to the wish and needs of workers. The Member States' position towards the new Directive maintains the opt-out, but also strengthens the protection of workers.



## Maintaining employment is one of EU's key tasks

Ahead of the European Council summit in Brussels, Czech Prime Minister and Council President met with delegates of EU employer associations and trade unions at the Tripartite Social Summit.

The Czech Labour and Social Affairs Minister and the European Commission

President José Manuel Barroso took part in the meeting as well.

The Czech Prime Minister pointed out that maintaining employment and creating new job opportunities at a time when we are hit by the financial and economic crisis is one of the key tasks of the European Union.

## Project news



### Kick-off meeting ImPaCT in Europe

The Project ImPaCT in Europe – Improving Person Centered Technology in Europe was officially launched during a two days event, encompassing a project kick-off meeting and a stakeholder forum that took place in Brussels on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> February. The meetings were attended by representatives from all partner organisations, and the stakeholder forum proved to be a lively discussion between the project partners and representatives of the Commission, the European Committee for Standardisation, as well

as delegates from the industry and the NGO sector.

ImPaCT in Europe is a project aiming to demonstrate how assistive technology and ICT can significantly support independence for people with disabilities and their carers. It is designed to raise awareness of the benefits of Person Centered Technology (PCT), i.e. technology specifically designed around the needs of the individual for disabled people and their carers. PCT can substantially improve quality of life and open up potential employment opportunities for the individual.

# EASPD news



## EASPD project development workshop in Thessaloniki on 10<sup>th</sup> June

Once more EASPD organizes a project development workshop to give you the opportunity to develop new project ideas and to set up international partnerships for the implementation of innovative project ideas. The workshop will take place in Thessaloniki on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2009 before the conference on Employment 'Bringing people to work' co-organized

by EASPD. Therefore we would like to ask you to hand in your project ideas. The workshop will be based on a selection of your ideas.

The complete document can be downloaded on our website [www.easpd.eu](http://www.easpd.eu)

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