Guidelines for the employment policies 2008-2010

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The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs adopted the report by Anne **VAN LANCKER** (PES, BE), adopting, under the consultation procedure, and amending the proposal for a Council decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States (part V of the package proposed by the Commission).

Overall, the approach advocated by MEPs is two-tiered. They ask that:

1. requirements linked to the promotion of a **high level of employment**, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health be better taken into account and that the **fight against discrimination** based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation be stepped up;
2. interaction between the guidelines and the open method of coordination on the **Social Protection** and **Social Inclusion** Process be strengthened.

In particular, MEPs call for better cooperation between Member States and social partners in order to improve the compliance of national legislation with the application of European social legislation and the principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination. Member States are also called upon to implement their own pathways based on the common principles of **flexicurity**, within the framework of effective social dialogue.

MEPs introduce, in particular, an **additional annex** setting new benchmarks for the European Employment Strategy. According to MEPs, this strategy shall aim to:

- offer a new start before reaching 4 months of unemployment in the case of young people and 12 months in the case of adults (in the form of training, retraining, work practice, a job or other employability measure);
- ensure, by 2010, the participation of 25% of the long-term unemployed in a programme of active measures, with the aim of achieving the average of the three most advanced Member States;
- ensure that jobseekers throughout the EU are able to consult all job vacancies advertised through Member States' employment services;
- increase by five years, at EU level, the effective average exit age from the labour market by 2010 (compared to 59.9 in 2001);
- ensure the provision of childcare, by 2010, for at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age;
- reduce the average rate of early school leavers to 10%;
- ensure that, by 2010, at least 85% of 22-year olds have completed upper secondary education and that at least 12.5% of the adult working-age population (between the age of 25 and 64) actively participate in lifelong learning.

In this context, the main amendments to the introductory part of the annex and the guidelines can be summarised as follows:

- reintegrating employment guidelines for 2008-2010 in the three main pillars, namely macroeconomic policies, microeconomic reforms and employment policies, which , together, contribute to achieving the objectives of sustainable expansion and employment and to strengthening social cohesion;

- promoting job flexibility while also bearing in mind family constraints and the work-life balance;
- taking into consideration the gender dimension and the need to bear in mind gender inequality in the workplace (by reducing, in particular, the pay gap between men and women);
- taking the situation of older workers and disabled persons better into account;
- highlighting the need for better quality jobs, by facilitating a work-life balance, and the need to increase labour supply;
- promoting active social integration and the fight against poverty and social exclusion by ensuring a decent income and quality social services together with opportunities for recruitment and ongoing vocational training for everyone;
- improving the security of workers;
- increasing investment in human capital by adapting education and training systems to new competence requirements;
- increasing investment in research, science and innovation.

In direct relation to these amendments, MEPs make amendments to the guidelines:

- **Guideline 17**: MEPs call for the promotion of labour markets that encourage integration and advocate support for businesses through financial assistance so that they can compete in the market. They also call for increased investment in human capital. Furthermore, they also reinsert the provision in the approach advocated by the European Pact for Gender Equality and by the European Alliance for Families;
- **Guideline 18**: MEPs consider that that this guideline should aim to "enhance a life cycle approach to work" through a series of measures aimed at, among other things, combining work with caring for a close relative, enabling persons who lose their job later in life to get back to work (particularly people over the age of 40), focusing on the different impact of benefits systems on men and women, adapting parental leave schemes and establishing terms for temporary leave without obstacles…;
- **Guideline 19a**: MEPs insert a new specific guideline that aims to ensure the active social integration of all workers and tackle poverty and social exclusion by guaranteeing a decent income and better access to quality social services together with better access to the labour market through the expansion of job opportunities and vocational training;
- **Guideline 20**: MEPs ask that this guideline encourage better access to the labour market, preventing the brain drain of the EU through sufficient investment in training;
- **Guideline 21**: MEPs ask that this guideline (which aims to promote flexibility of the labour market) include the following components: (i) flexible and reliable contractual arrangements through modern labour laws, collective agreements and work organisation; (ii) comprehensive lifelong learning strategies to ensure the continual adaptability and employability of workers; (iii) effective active labour market policies which do not involve an active early retirement policy and better integrate older workers; (iv) modern social security systems that provide adequate income support, encourage employment and facilitate labour market mobility. In particular, MEPs call for control measures for workers, in order to **combat the problem of undeclared work** by means of appropriate sanctions;
- **Guideline 22**: MEPs request that, within this guideline, **workers be guaranteedsufficient purchasing power** and that gender pay gaps be avoided;
- **Guideline 23**: as part of lifelong learning, MEPs call for the number of early school leavers to be significantly reduced, and for access by women to education, continuous training and lifelong learning to be facilitated;
- **Guideline 24**: lastly, MEPs call for foreign language learning to be promoted as part of both initial and lifelong training.