

European Platform to enhance cooperation in tackling undeclared work

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The Commission presented its report on the implementation of Decision (EU) 2016/344 establishing a European Platform for enhancing cooperation in tackling undeclared work.

This report assesses the extent to which the Platform has achieved its main objectives, fulfilled its mission and addressed the priorities in its work programme. It integrates the results from a specific survey among Platform members in 2019 as well as ongoing monitoring of Platform activities.

Generalities

Since its start in 2016, the European Platform tackling undeclared work has facilitated greater cooperation between and across countries. Building on a strong governance, comprehensive work programme and active involvement of members, it has contributed to efficiency gains and the modernisation of enforcement bodies across the EU. It has produced solid evidence-based knowledge enabling Member States and social partners to learn from each other, innovate and act together.

The magnitude of undeclared work in Europe is difficult to estimate given that, by definition, it is hidden from view. A study on the scale of undeclared work across Europe was also produced in 2017. Based on the discrepancies between the reported labour inputs from workers and businesses, the study estimated that 9.3% of total labour input in the private sector in the EU is undeclared work, and that undeclared work constitutes 14.3% of gross value added (GVA) in the private sector. However, there are marked differences in its size across Member States, ranging from 7% to 27% of GVA.

Progress in its activities

After the Platform adopted its initial work programme in May 2016, the report noted that activities kicked off smoothly. It has since delivered on average 15 yearly activities and brought together over 1450 stakeholders to learn together and cooperate on issues ranging from promising policy approaches to organisational structures and cross-border action. Most Platform members and observers share the opinion that the Platform made good or very good progress towards the achievement of its mission according to the 2019 survey. Activities since 2016 include:

- 53 events;
- 14 studies and surveys;
- 103 learning resources;
- 31 staff visits and joint activities.

Enhanced cooperation

The Platform has widened existing networks and strengthened cooperation in tackling undeclared work, both within countries and across borders. Almost all respondents (94%) to the 2019 survey indicated that its activities contributed to widening their organisations' networks and contacts. Most (68%) share the view that the Platform has also contributed to enhancing cooperation between Member States' relevant authorities and other relevant actors.

Members and observers have been generally active, with all having taken part in activities. However, there have been varying levels of commitment and participation in the Platform between countries. The network is still maturing and there is much untapped potential for members and observers, including social partners, to fully engage, and better disseminate the learning to achieve wider buy-in and impact.

Consensus amongst Platform members and observers has emerged that a 'holistic approach' is required to tackle undeclared work at the policy and operational level, using the full range of policy measures available and cooperation across key bodies and with social partners.

Cross-border cooperation

In the 2019 survey, 61% of respondents stated that the Platform contributed to improving the capacity of Member States' relevant actors to tackle undeclared work regarding its cross-border aspects. Organisations undertook or plan to engage in cross-border activities in the next year, including: cross-border meetings of officials (52%), staff exchanges / joint actions (41%), joint inspections (39%).

The Platform has helped Member States step up partnerships in tackling cross-border undeclared work, paving the way for further cooperation under the European Labour Authority (ELA). However, the level of engagement in cross-border cooperation remains uneven.

Awareness raising

The Platform has contributed to a stronger emphasis on awareness raising among its membership, with half of the members reporting changes in this area. However, direct impact in increasing public awareness has been slower to develop. Only 35% respondents to the 2019 survey agree the Platform made very good or good progress towards this objective. Recognising the need to translate this into action, the 2019-2020 work

programme had a stronger focus on communication and awareness-raising.

Outstanding challenges

The Platform's activities have highlighted the need to enhance the commitment from all members and to increase the Platform's operational capacity. Enforcement bodies and social partners need to continue to develop more effective cooperation, both at national level and cross-border.

Further developing synergies with key EU initiatives and policies (for instance those related to the labour conditions of platform workers, the European Semester and the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, exchange of information for tax purposes including employment income) and funding instruments (such as the European Social Fund +) is also essential in this regard. It is important to further develop a comprehensive approach which combines efficient and effective deterrence measures with measures aimed at preventing undeclared work from occurring in the first place.

Future monitoring and set up

The Platform's 2019-2020 work programme shall be implemented as planned, allowing for a smooth transition. Decision (EU) 2016/344 shall be repealed once the ELA has reached full operational capacity, however the Platform's current objectives, missions and activities have been largely confirmed in the Regulation establishing the ELA.

Besides, the establishment of the ELA provides the opportunity for further change and addressing the challenges emerging from the Platform's initial configuration. The European Labour Authority shall set priorities and propose how to address the challenges highlighted above in the long run. It can be envisaged

that the Platform, as a permanent working group of ELA, focuses on its core task of tackling undeclared work while certain more horizontal tasks such as support to operational cross-border cooperation, capacity building in enforcement bodies and developing EU-wide tools can be more coherently addressed by wider ELA activities.

The Platform shall benefit from a comprehensive operational structure within ELA and from specialised staff expertise in different areas.