Social policy agenda: following the European Councils of Lisbon and Feira, Council of Nice, December 2000

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PURPOSE : to present the scoreboard on implementing the social policy agenda (third update).
CONTENT : the social policy agenda is the EU's roadmap for modernising and improving the European social model by investing in people and building an active welfare state. It should contribute to achieving the strategic objective defined at the Lisbon European Council which is to strengthen social policy as a productive factor as well as solidarity and social fairness. This is the third scoreboard the Commission presents to report on the implementation of the social policy agenda. This edition focuses essentially on the main achievements of the year 2002. This report shows that the agenda is still on schedule and that it has helped to make EU labour markets more employment-friendly with 2.5 million new jobs created in 2001-2002. The report also highlights that the EU cannot be complacent and must step up the rhythm of reform if, as the Lisbon summit has set out, 15 million more new jobs are to be created between now and 2010. The Commission particularly criticises Member States for failing to set national employment targets, which risks undermining progress towards the Lisbon employment targets. The report also calls for action to reduce unemployment rates which, nudged by the economic downturn, have crept up to 7.8% in the EU, and 8.5% in the eurozone. The report adds that labour market weaknesses are partly responsible for keeping people in social exclusion and poverty. Latest available income data show that 15% of the EU population are a poverty risk, and 9% are at persistent risk of poverty. However, the report underlines that 40% of the EU population would have been at risk of poverty if welfare transfers were to be taken out of the calculation. It also points forward to the midterm review of the Social Policy Agenda later this year, which will stress the need for 'better jobs' as a motor of growth, both through productivity gains and by attracting more people into work. It is estimated that if the EU gave the equivalent of one extra year of education and training to everyone, it would increase overall EU productivity by about 5% immediately and an additional 5% in the long run. By the same token, good health boosts productivity : healthy workers earn 15-30% more than workers in poor health. As to the year 2003, a number of important initiatives will be launched by the Commission. Among these initiatives, the following will issues will be dealt with: - key initiatives on employment; - legislative and non-legislative initiatives on change and the working environment; - several communications and reports on promoting social inclusion and fighting discrimination; - legislative initiatives on social protection; - the recasting of the directive on equal opportunities; - the follow-up of the enlargement preparations.