

Agenda 2000: European Social Fund ESF

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The report by Karin JÖNS (PES, D) (cooperation procedure, first reading) makes a number of amendments to the European Social Fund Regulation. The committee's aim is to spell out the ESF's tasks so as to prevent any limitation of its field of activity. According to MEPs, the ESF should include measures to prevent and combat unemployment and promote social protection, full employment, sustainable development and economic and social cohesion. In addition, the principle of equal opportunities between women and men and the needs of disadvantaged groups should be taken into account in all the Fund's activities and it should also contribute to measures to combat discrimination in the labour market. The rapporteur stressed that the ESF should not only support the EU's employment strategy and the development of active labour market policies but also their practical implementation. She was in favour of providing funding for local employment initiatives and territorial employment pacts and for the development of the third system (the social economy). NGOs and local partnerships involving NGOs should have access to ESF funds. The rapporteur argued that eligible activities must facilitate integration into the labour market. The ESF could assist the modernisation of public and other non-profit-making employment services and the development of links between the world of work and organisations whose aim is to combat exclusion from the labour market. The committee recommended that ESF support should be concentrated on the most important objectives and the most effective operations. At least 15 % of the appropriations should be used for improving systems which promote a skilled and adaptable workforce, foster innovation, support entrepreneurship and help boost job creation. The same proportion of funds should be allocated to measures which encourage greater participation of women in the labour market. The committee was in favour of appointing a representative for equal opportunity issues to the ESF monitoring committees. It believes organisations receiving ESF funding should provide details about their equal opportunities policies so that meaningful assessments can be made of the extent to which mainstreaming has become a reality.