Employment policy: guidelines for strengthening the implementation of the European strategy

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PURPOSE : to recommend concrete action to promote growth and employment in the enlarged Union.
CONTENT : the first update of the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines (BEPGs), adopted by the European Commission (INI/2004/2020), reaffirms the economic policy strategy adopted by the European Council in June 2003 and confirms that this strategy is also appropriate for the acceding countries. The Commission also adopts in parallel recommendations on employment, drawing on policy lines agreed at the European Council in March 2004, and the findings of the European Employment Task Force, chaired by Wim Kok, while maintaining the same framework of European Employment Strategy and Guidelines as revised in 2003. While the challenges facing the new Member States are similar to those of the EU-15, the scale of these challenges is, in some cases, much greater. Overall unemployment and the budget deficit are both around double that of the EU-15, while income per capita is less than half that in the EU-15. But the situation varies considerably between the new Member States. Taking due account of their different performances, country-specific recommendations are presented to each of them. In order to maintain a stable structure, the Commission is not proposing any changes to these guidelines, but has adjusted the recommendations to take into account developments within Member States' employment policies as well as the findings of the European Employment Task - Force. The 2004 employment recommendations are presented in three sections: - four common recommendations, concentrating on the priorities for reform, namely: 1) increasing the adaptability of workers and enterprises; 2) attracting more people to enter and remain on the labour market; 3) investing more and more effectively in human capital and lifelong learning; 4) ensuring the effective implementation of reforms through better governance. Individual recommendations to each of the current Member States incorporate many of the specific points raised by the European Employment Task Force. Priorities for the acceding countries to be taken into account as they prepare National Action Plans for Employment for the first time build on the priorities identified by the European Employment Task Force and the Joint Assessment Papers signed by the accession countries and the Commission. These recommendations are one of the tools for implementing the European Employment Strategy, as they identify the most pressing areas to be addressed in each Member State. They recognise that there can be no "one-size-fits-all" solution, but instead identify individual actions that reinforce the process of mutual learning and exchange of experience that is fundamental to the European Employment Strategy.