

Agenda 2000: European Social Fund ESF

1998/0115(COD) - 18/03/1998 - Legislative proposal

OBJECTIVE: in connection with the revision of the Structural Funds, to present the specific Regulation governing the ESF for the period 2000-2006, taking account of the implications of AGENDA 2000 (COS0590). **SUBSTANCE:** the proposal only concerns the scope of the ESF, the overall logic being described in depth in the general proposal on the Structural Funds (AVC98090). The role of the ESF in the context of the new Structural Funds is based on the new title on employment in the Amsterdam Treaty, the European Employment Strategy adopted at Essen and the Guidelines on Employment. It is of a horizontal nature, providing a common framework for all measures falling under Objectives 1, 2 and 3. However, the ESF will function as a separate objective, providing support for measures to develop human resources funded outside Objective 1 and 2 regions. The main provisions of the proposal concern: -the implementation of the Fund: the ESF must be sufficiently flexible to take account of the considerable diversity of policies, practices and needs in the field of employment in the Member States. The measures which may be funded are therefore defined relatively broadly at this stage, in order to facilitate an effective link-up with the annual Guidelines on Employment; - the scope of the ESF: unlike the other Funds, the ESF is horizontal and operates throughout the territory of the Union; - the measures: ESF measures relate to five fields grouped under the new Objective 3: (a) active labour market policies to combat unemployment and prevent long-term unemployment by facilitating the occupational reintegration of this category of the unemployed, and integration of the young and of people returning to the labour market after a period of absence; (b) promoting social inclusion; (c) lifelong learning and education and training systems to enhance employability and mobility on the labour market; (d) measures to anticipate and facilitate economic and social change; (e) improving the participation of women in the labour market. To improve the effectiveness of ESF aid, the proposal guarantees a certain minimum participation by the aid in each of the five fields of action. Special importance is to be attached to the last two fields (each of which should receive at least 15% of resources). However, Member States may set their own priorities for ESF investment. The proposal stipulates that every ESF measure must devote at least 1% of its funds to distributing small grants to local groups.