Agenda 2000: European Social Fund ESF

1998/0115(COD) - 19/11/1998 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

In adopting the report by Mrs Karin JÖNS (PSE, D), Parliament sought to define the tasks of the European Social Fund (ESF) in order to avoid any restrictions on the scope of its activities. Parliament considered that the ESF should support measures seeking to prevent and combat unemployment and also those intended to promote social protection, full employment, sustainable development and economic and social cohesion. Consideration must be given to the principle of equality of opportunity between men and women and the needs of disadvantaged groups (long- term unemployed, disabled persons, older workers and young people). The ESF should also contribute to measures to combat discrimination of all types in the labour market (sex, race, ethnic origin, religion, disability, age or sexual orientation). Parliament considered that the ESF should: - operate throughout the whole European area; - support not only the European employment strategy and the development of active labour market policies but also their practical implementation; - support local employment initiatives and territorial pacts and the development of the 'third system' (social economy). The NGOs and local partnerships involving NGOs should have access to ESF funding. It also stressed that the activities eligible for funding should facilitate integration into the labour market. The ESF could in particular be involved in the modernisation of public employment services or other non-profit-making job placement services and the development of links between the world of work and bodies whose aim is to combat social exclusion from the world of work. It could also support initiatives seeking to enhance the compatibility of family and working life or to facilitate the transition from working life to retirement. Parliament recommended that this support should be concentrated on the main objectives and the most effective activities. Not less than 15% of appropriations should be allocated to improving systems for training a skilled and adaptable workforce, fostering innovation, supporting entrepreneurship and employment creation. The same percentage of appropriations should be used for measures to encourage greater participation of women in the labour market. Parliament called for the appointment of a representative with responsibility for equal opportunity issues on the ESF monitoring committees. Organisations receiving support from the Fund should be required to provide details of their equal opportunities policy in order to ensure effective evaluation of the implementation of 'mainstreaming'. Equality of opportunity and a preventive labour market policy should be included in the list of innovatory measures eligible for direct financing from the Commission. However, the Commission and the Member States should ensure that there is no overlap between interventions under the ESF and other Community measures relating to training and the labour market.