Agenda 2000: European Social Fund ESF

1998/0115(COD) - 12/07/1999 - Final act

OBJECTIVE : to redefine the framework and political priorities of the European Social Fund (ESF) for the period of 2000-2006. COMMUNITY MEASURES : Regulation 1262/1999/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Social Fund. CONTENT : this Regulation falls within the overall framework set up under Council Regulation 1260/99/EC laying down general provisions on the Structural Funds (AVC980090). The role of the European Social Fund within the new framework is based on the implementation of the European employment strategy and the annual guidlines on employment. This Regulation contains specific provisions applicable to the ESF to the effect that the Fund must provide assistance throughout the European Union in line with the new Objectives 1, 2 and 3 set up under the General Regulation. The ESF's remit is to support measures which aim to prevent and combat unemployment, develop human ressources and foster social integration in the labour market, so as to promote a high level of employment, equal opportunities for men and women, sustainable development and economic and social cohesion. In particular, as has been stated before, the Fund shall contribute to the actions undertaken in pursuance of the European Employment Strategy and the Annual Guidelines on Employment. The ESF provides assistance and it is imperative that it is based on the national priorities set out in National Action Plans for employment which are drawn up by Member States. The forms of assistance covered by the ESF include : a) development of active labour market policies to combat and prevent unemployment, to avoid long-term unemployment, to facilitate the reintegration of the long-term unemployed and to support integration into the labour market of young people and persons returning to work after a period of absence; b) promotion of equal oppotunities for all in terms of access to the labour market, with particular attention to persons at risk of social exclusion; c) promotion and improvement of vocational training, education and counselling in the context of a lifelong learning policy; d) promotion of a skilled, well-trained and flexible workforce, innovative and adaptable forms of work organisation and entrepreneurship; e) specific measures to improve access and active participation of women in the labour market (career prospects, access to new job opportunities, setting up businesses, etc.). In addition, the ESF helps to implement the Community initiative to combat all forms of discrimination and inequality in the labour market (EQUAL). Social and occupational integration of asylum seekers is also to be taken into account in the EQUAL initiative. To make ESF measures more effective, assistance must be concentrated on a limited number of areas or themes and have to be directed towards the most important needs and the most effective operations, having due regard to the ex-ante evaluations and to covering relevant areas of policy. In general, 3 forms of asisstance are eligible for ESF funding : assistance for individuals, which should represent the main form of aid, covering areas such as vocational training or education and careers guidance, etc.; assistance forstructures and systems to make support activities for the individuals more effective; and accompanying measures (provisions of services and equipment for the care of dependent persons, promotion of social skills training and public awareness and information campaigns). Furthermore, the ESF also finances preparation, follow-up and assessment activities in the Member States or at the Community level for innovative and pilot projects, studies or technical assistance. Moreover, the Regulation also establishes small susidy schemes under Objectives 1 and 3 with special provisions governing access for NGO's and local partners. It also provides for ESF financing of up to 100% of eligible costs for implementation of these schemes. ENTRY INTO FORCE : 29.06.1999.