Employment policy: guidelines for 2005-2008

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This Staff Working Paper follows the announcement made in the integrated guidelines adopted by the Commission last 12 of April and serves the main purpose of providing guidance to Member States in drawing up their respective national reform programmes in particular in terms of structure and content.

In order to make the refocusing of the Lisbon strategy effective, the European Council called for improved governance at European Union (EU) and national level on the basis of: a new partnership with Member States: in order to increase the ownership by Member States, clarify the responsibilities and confirm the role of the Commission as facilitator, supporting policy developments in Member States; far reaching simplification: both in terms of policy priority setting, with the integrated guidelines and in terms of streamlining of procedures and reporting, with a single integrated national reform programme.

The aim is threefold: to facilitate the identification of priorities while maintaining the overall balance of the strategy and the synergies between its various components; to improve the implementation of those priorities on the ground through an increased Member States' involvement; and to streamline the monitoring procedure so as to give a clearer picture of national implementation of the strategy.

This new cycle of governance is based on a three-year cycle starting in 2005 and which will have to be renewed in 2008. The integrated guidelines to be adopted by the Council on the basis of the Commission's proposal will be the starting point of the first cycle. Based on those integrated guidelines, which encompass the economic, social and environmental dimensions, Member States will draw up their national reform programmes, which should be conceived as forward-looking political documents setting out their three year strategy to deliver growth and jobs. These programmes will also allow the Commission to assess the policies and progress identified by Member States. On the basis of the assessment of the national reform programmes, the Commission will adopt in January 2006 its Annual Progress Report and may propose updates to the integrated guidelines and possibly country-specific recommendations as the basis for the continuation of the cycle in 2006.