



Department of Social and Family Affairs

European Union Ministers Say More Must Be Done On Jobs And Social Inclusion

European Employment and Social Affairs Ministers meeting in Brussels under the joint chairmanship of Ministers Mary Coughlan and Frank Fahey have recognised the urgency of doing more to stimulate job creation and social inclusion within the Union.

Progress towards the employment targets agreed three years ago at the Lisbon Summit "has come to a standstill", the Ministers stated, in a formal communication to the Heads of Government which will be considered at the summit on March 25th.

"A narrow approach to labour market reforms will not suffice. Progress on all fronts of the Lisbon agenda, notably in terms of research and innovation, education and training, and reform of social protection systems, including pension systems, must go hand in hand," they said.

The Employment and Social Policy Council, jointly chaired by the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Ms Mary Coughlan TD, and the Minister for Labour Affairs, Mr Frank Fahey TD, also agreed that social welfare systems throughout Europe needed to strengthen the incentives offered to people moving from benefits to work.

The future sustainability of pension systems and their ability to continue to deliver socially adequate incomes to retired people would depend heavily on raising the employment rate of older workers and raising the retirement age, they stated.

"These key messages involve strengthening the drive for social inclusion, making work pay, ensuring that pension systems support longer working lives, ensuring accessibility, sustainability and quality of health and long term care for the elderly, and reinforcing gender equality," said Minister Coughlan.

"The Joint Report on Social Inclusion which was adopted today represents a renewed commitment to the Union's social goals and a reiteration by Member States of their conviction that modernisation of the economy should go hand in hand with efforts to reduce poverty and fight against exclusion.

"With enlargement, the Union will have to face new and comparatively greater challenges in promoting social inclusion.

"For these reasons, it is crucial to involve all the acceding countries in the EU social inclusion process before the date of formal enlargement," added Minister Coughlan.

The Ministers have also urged the Heads of Government to reinforce efforts to promote gender equality in all policy areas, which was essential if the overall Lisbon employment targets were to be met. "Despite developments towards equality between men and women in the EU over the past decade, significant gender gaps still exist in most policy fields" they said.

The Employment Council also formally approved a regulation paving the way for the introduction of a new European Health Insurance Card later this year.

The Ministers also discussed the Organisation of Working Time Directive. According to Minister Fahey "the key message from our discussions today is that an urgent EU solution is needed to address the impact of the recent European Court of Justice rulings" on the issue.



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"The outcome of the Council deliberations is to be forwarded to the European Commission which is expected to bring forward new proposals later this month," Minister Fahey said.

Ends

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