

Employment Council**Ageing society: Ministers to explore cooperation**

By Sophie Petitjean | Tuesday 05 July 2011

The ageing of the population, the key social priority of the new Polish EU Presidency, will be the focus of discussions at the informal Council of the EU's employment and social affairs ministers, on 7-8 July.

The ministers will discuss demographic challenges, their different perceptions of this challenge and ways of tackling it. The idea is to adopt conclusions at the Employment and Social Affairs Council in December (two sets of conclusions, one on European management of demographic change and the other on ageing as an opportunity for the labour market).

The ministers will open their talks, on 7 July, with two plenary sessions, on employment services and intergenerational solidarity. The second day's meeting will concentrate on responses to demographic challenges with three workshops on work-life balance, pension reform and intergenerational solidarity. The ministers' session will be preceded by a meeting of the trio of Presidencies (Poland, Denmark and Cyprus) with Commissioner László Andor (employment and social affairs) and representatives of the European social partners and the Social Platform.

SOLIDARITY

The watchword of the two plenary sessions will no doubt be 'cooperation' both on assistance services for the unemployed and job seekers and intergenerational solidarity. The first plenary session will explore ways of making proactive employment policies more effective through 'competition' in services for the jobless and job seekers. The Polish EU Presidency will encourage greater cooperation between public employment services, private employment agencies and civil society. The second session will focus on solidarity between generations, the theme of the European year 2012. The ministers will review opportunities for enhancing cooperation as a means of coping with demographic challenges at European level. The Polish Presidency will argue for closer institutional cooperation between member states and will support a platform for experience-sharing with the aim of building labour markets adapted to the generations ('lifelong flexicurity'). It will also insist on support for families being taken into account in the development of employment policies and strategies to combat poverty and exclusion, as well as in economic policies.

The employment and/or social affairs ministers from Poland, the UK, Sweden, France, Belgium, Estonia and Hungary will make specific presentations.

PARALLEL TRIO WORKSHOPS

Three workshops headed by the trio states will be held in parallel, on 8 July. The Polish EU Presidency will lead a workshop on legal solutions for reconciling work and family life. It will stress the advantages, consequences and challenges of flexible forms of employment, whether basic flexibility – temporary work, fixed-term contracts – or a flexible organisation of working time – autonomous schedule, part-time, job-sharing and telework. Denmark, considered a model in the EU on addressing demographic change, will highlight the need for pension reform in the member states "in order to increase the labour force and offer greater financial stability". Workshop participants will brainstorm on ways of raising the age at which workers retire, not only by increasing legal pension age but also by creating incentives to work longer, for example by introducing opportunities for more flexible employment. Cyprus will explore the theme of intergenerational solidarity in the context of an ageing society at the third workshop.

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