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Press conference: Europe takes action to help 12 million long-term unemployed get back to work

These days we are focusing our energy and efforts on coping with the refugee crisis and finding ways to support people who have fled from war and persecution. Yesterday we had an important discussion during our college meeting and we will continue our work on this issue. I am also working on the contributions that are possible in my portfolio in this respect, not least when it comes to support from the European Social Fund. Friday next week I will sit down with the managing authorities of the 28 EU Member States to see what the best practices are on the ground and how the money can be best used to promote the social inclusion of asylum seekers. I also expect this to be an item on the agenda of the next EPSCO meeting on the 5 October in Luxembourg.

Yesterday during our college meeting we also adopted a new initiative in the context of our economic and social agenda to help people that are not so much in the limelight these days. Yet, they deserve our full attention: 12 million long-term unemployed. Today there are indeed 12 million people who have been out of a job for more than one year, and 60% of those, for more than two years even. To put this figure into perspective: this is more than the entire population of Belgium. These are not just figures, these are real people. This situation is unacceptable, knowing that what people care most about is having a job.

Economic recovery in Europe is slowly translating into more jobs. This summer we have recorded the lowest unemployment rate in Europe since more than 4 years. It now stands at 9.5% in the EU. Our initiatives to tackle youth unemployment are starting to bear fruit. There are almost 10% less young people unemployed this year compared to last. This is an encouraging trend and I hope it will continue.

However, despite these encouraging signs, long-term unemployment doubled in Europe between 2007 and 2014. The longer they remain unemployed, the more difficult it is for them to get hired again. Every year, one in five even stops trying to find a job and becomes inactive. Once people do so and are off the radar screen of public employment services, it is extremely difficult for them to exit a vicious circle of lost hopes, poverty and social exclusion. This is why urgent action is needed, because there is a risk that these people are left behind even as the economy recovers.

This Commission has been working hard on the economic and social front from day one to support the economic recovery, to foster growth and job creation and to achieve more social fairness in Europe. The Investment Plan for Europe is rolling out and has the potential to create 1.3 million new jobs. In May we relaunched the Youth Employment Initiative and paid out one billion euro to jump-start concrete support for 4.6 million young people without a job. President Juncker has announced that we will propose a European pillar of social rights in the course of next year to make sure that Europe actually deserves a "social triple A". I am working tirelessly on this vision and will deliver on that promise. And today I am presenting to you another concrete initiative that delivers on this promise in this broader context.

Let me now explain in some more detail the content of today's recommendation. It sets out three concrete steps to strengthen the services that long term unemployed people receive to make it easier for them to return to work.

The first is to encourage the **registration with an employment service**. This sounds very self-evident, but practical experience shows that it is not. In some Member States registration rates are below 50%. We need to do more to make sure people actually register and are on our radar screen. This is the starting point to be able to get support.

The second step is to provide each registered long-term unemployed with an **individual in depth assessment**. To make a difference we need to take account of the individual situation. There is no one-size-fits-all-solution. We therefore recommend that long-term jobseekers will receive an individual assessment at the latest after 18 months of unemployment.

The third part is to offer a **job integration agreement** to all registered long-term unemployed. This will be based on the individual assessment and will offer a tailor-made plan to return to work, taking into account the individual needs and potential. It can include different measures: from help with the job search and mentoring to further education and training or practical help like transport or child care services.

To make it as simple as possible, the agreement will be signed by the jobseeker at one single point of contact. Having one single interlocutor not only makes life easier for jobseekers, but also ensures the coherence of all the support they receive.

I am convinced that this proposal will make a difference. Today, jobless people are often pushed away from the labour market because they don't have access to this combined support through one service. And they often do not have the individual support or guidance they need. For example, a

young single parent out of a job may not have the necessary access to child care, even if he or she receives a job offer. A person struggling with financial problems already will sometimes have difficulties even financing the trip to work, if he or she receives an offer for a new job.

To facilitate the rollout of the proposal, Member States will have access to money from the European Social Fund to implement these recommendations. At least 10 billion euro is specifically allocated under the European Social Fund for actions for long-term unemployed.

I am convinced that this will work because it is based on models that have been successful in a number of Member States already. This has not been invented in an ivory tower, this is guidance that comes from practitioners.

But let me be very honest with you: this can only be a success if we have all 28 Member States, our social partners and strongly involved employers on board. I count on their support. We all need to work together on this. That is the only way we can really make a difference and help the 12 million jobless people into work again.

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