

The legal basis of the Employment and Social policy is Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union and Articles 2 and 13, Titles III (Articles 39 to 42), VIII and XI of the Treaty establishing the European Community.

More and better jobs and equal opportunities are the watchwords of European employment and social policy. The European Union wants to make sure that everyone is equipped for change in a knowledge-based economy confronting the challenges of globalisation. The main framework is a Social Agenda designed to ensure that the benefits of the EU's growth reach everyone in society while at the same time ensuring that the policies to achieve this are environmentally sustainable.

The European Employment Strategy

Each year, the European Council agrees on common priorities and individual objectives for member states' employment policies. These address strategies for job creation, job quality, productivity and for making work pay, i.e. making it economically attractive to work while nevertheless providing adequate social safety nets.

The European Social Fund

Creating worthwhile jobs in a knowledge-based society and guaranteeing equal opportunities requires a large investment in human resources in order to increase the number of people with the skills the economy needs, to improve the quality of skills and people's ability to deal with change. A significant amount of funding for this comes from the European Social Fund. The Fund is spending €60 billion between 2000 and 2006 to develop not just work skills, but also the social skills which make it easier for people to find work or set up businesses of their own. €3 billion is reserved for the EQUAL programme. This tests new ways of tackling discrimination and inequality.

Minimum standards for all

Common EU rules establish the baseline standards to protect people from health risks at work, such as noise or exposure to chemicals, and to protect pregnant women and workers under 18. Other legislation spells out basic rights on working hours, parental leave, the basic information all employers must supply to new employees about the job and the terms on which they have been hired, the terms of any collective redundancy and the same treatment for part-time or temporary workers as for permanent full-time employees. Equal pay for equal work is also a fundamental tenet of the EU as is protection against sexual harassment.

The EU has outlawed discrimination on the basis of gender, racial or ethnic origin, disability, sexual orientation, age, and religion or belief. This is bolstered by legislation banning gender-based discrimination in access to goods and services (with some exceptions for insurance), policy strategies on combating discrimination and xenophobia, and on ensuring that gender issues are taken into account in all EU policies.

Pan-European mobility for all

The right to work anywhere in the EU is a fundamental right of all EU citizens, subject to some transitional arrangements for countries which joined the EU in 2004. The Public Employment Services of the European Economic Area (the EU, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) and Switzerland are linked through a single service, Eures. Job-seekers can post their CVs and look for jobs on the site.

The ability to work in another EU countries carries with it the right to most social benefits for the whole family. Those who have retired to another EU country and in many cases citizens of other countries who

Employment and Social Affairs

move around the EU enjoy many of the same rights. The right to health care anywhere in the EU also applies to emergency care when people go on holiday. The European Health Insurance Card introduced on 1 June 2004, and being phased in across the EU by 2006 makes it more straightforward to obtain treatment.

Social inclusion and social protection Social security systems in the individual EU countries reflect specific traditions, social advances and cultural heritage. These differences are respected.