



UNION EUROPEENNE DE L'ARTISANAT ET DES PETITES ET MOYENNES ENTREPRISES
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EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF CRAFT, SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES
UNIONE EUROPEA DELL' ARTIGIANATO E DELLE PICCOLE E MEDIE IMPRESE

UEAPME Position Paper on the Commission's communication:
Working together, working better:
A new framework for the open coordination of social protection and
inclusion policies in the European Union

Introduction

The European Commission published on the 22nd December 2005 its communication: *Working together, working better: A new framework for the open coordination of social protection and inclusion policies in the European Union*. In its communication the Commission outlines its proposal for new common objectives for the streamlined OMC on social protection and social inclusion.

The Commission's main objective of the streamlining is to "make the OMC more effective and give it a higher profile". This is aimed at strengthening the process and integrating it better with the Lisbon process and in particular with the new integrated guidelines for growth and jobs.

General comments on the Commission's communication

UEAPME generally welcomes the Commission's communication, in which it presents the new objectives for the streamlined OMC on social inclusion, pensions and healthcare.

UEAPME agrees that the streamlining of policy coordination on social protection should enhance the quality and the coherence of the overall socio-economic governance of the EU. These three areas of social protection are clearly linked with each other and make up an important part of the social dimension of the European Union. Therefore it is crucial to use the synergies with the Lisbon strategy, and in particular the new integrated guidelines for growth and jobs, because of the interaction between the modernisation of the European social model and the agenda of economic reforms, and how economic reforms affect social models.

UEAPME believes that the OMC represents an efficient method in this field, respecting the principle of subsidiarity and offering tailored made solutions and can help to take action for reforming the social protection systems but in a progressive manner in order to keep contact with the citizens. However, while the OMC exists at European level, it should not be forgotten that the area of social protection and

inclusion lies within the competences of the Member States, who have to organise and finance social protection, and the European level has only a supplementary role.

Specific comments on the detailed proposals

The overarching objectives of the OMC for social protection and social inclusion

UEAPME agrees with the overarching objectives for the OMC for social protection and social inclusion. In particular the objective to link it better to the Lisbon strategy in order to achieve greater economic growth and more and better jobs is welcomed.

The specific objectives

The general principles of the previous objectives for the individual OMCs on inclusion, pensions and health care, are taken over in the specific objectives of the new streamlined OMC. UEAPME welcomes this decision, as the objectives of the individual OMCs were adequate. Furthermore it guarantees the continuity between past and future work. UEAPME is particularly satisfied with the objectives for health care, focusing on the accessibility, high quality and sustainability of the social system. However, one should be more explicit on a reference to ensuring the financial sustainability of the health care systems, just as under the pension section.

Furthermore, the individual objectives complement the overarching objectives in assuring the integration between the OMC and the Lisbon strategy. Especially, the overlap with the employment strategy, in particular on issues such as participation on the labour market, will contribute to this end.

Moreover, having a limited number of specific objectives is important, in order not to make the process not too complex and no more manageable. The simplification and streamlining of the various strands under a coherent framework (within the OMC) was already requested by the EU Council in March 2003.

Reporting and evaluation arrangements

The division between a common section as well as three thematic sections is sensible in order to keep the particularity of each area while at the same time showing how the different sections form part of an overall approach.

Furthermore UEAPME welcomes the reduction of the number of reports. This can help to focus more on the implementation of the national strategies than only on reporting.

Finally, Member States should ensure the adequate consultation and the inclusion of national stakeholders, in particular social partners in the process of drawing up the National Strategy Reports.

Working arrangements: involvement of actors and governance

UEAPME agrees with the Commission's objective to promote good governance, transparency and the involvement of stakeholders. However, when different policy areas are brought together, where different stakeholders have different roles, these differences have to be taken into due account. Contrary to many other stakeholders, social partners should be involved in all of these policy areas.

Working arrangements: indicator

When drawing up new indicators they have to be defined so that they are adaptable for the situation in every Member State. Additionally, they should be designed in a way, which will produce reliable and comparable data that then can be used for the exchange of good practises. Furthermore there is a need for continuity so that clear trends in the evolution can be identified.

Enhancing the visibility of the OMC

If the Commission together with the Member States decide to carry out more national seminars, these should include NGOs and social partners, in order to enlarge the audience and increase the visibility.

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 The logo for UEAPME features the acronym 'UEAPME' in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a blue square containing five white stars of varying sizes, arranged in a slightly curved pattern, reminiscent of the European Union flag.	<p>UEAPME is the employer's organisation representing the interests of crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level.</p> <p>UEAPME has 78 member organisations, which represent crafts and SMEs across the whole of Europe, covering over 11 million enterprises with nearly 50 million employees.</p> <p>UEAPME is a European Social Partner.</p>
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