

The European
Employment
Strategy



Investing in
people

Employment & social affairs



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Investing in
people

Investing in
more and better jobs





The employment challenge for Europe

The European Union is one of the main economic blocks in the world today. With only 6 per cent of the world's population, it creates more than 20 per cent of its total production. But, despite its many strengths, Europe has not managed to meet one of its key objectives: to generate employment opportunities for all. All Member States are concerned by the different facets of this common problem:

- Many people in Europe have no opportunity to create wealth and earn their share of it. 16.5 million people - one in ten of the workforce - are looking for work without success.
- Over half of those unemployed have been out of work for more than one year; one third of them for more than two years. This reduces a person's employability, while adding to the growing problem of social exclusion.
- Unemployment hits particularly hard those people who are often already at a disadvantage when it comes to competing in the labour market: young people, the elderly, the disabled, or ethnic minorities.
- While over recent decades women have entered the workforce in massive numbers, labour markets still favour men:

unemployment rates for women are generally higher, employment rates are lower, and women face discrimination when it comes to wages and to career opportunities.

Unemployment has a high social cost for the individual and a high economic cost for society. Europe's employment challenge represents both a missed opportunity and a barrier to future prosperity. We are not fully exploiting one key asset of Europe's potential for growth: the skills and willingness of the EU's citizens to work.



What causes Europe's employment challenge

There are two main reasons for the failure to provide jobs for all:

- The first reason is an **inability to handle macroeconomic shocks**. Unemployment has risen over the last 25 years in the wake of two major oil price increases - in the 1970's and the 1980's- and the currency turmoil of the early 1990's. Europe could not prevent the job losses that resulted, and lacked co-ordinated economic policies oriented towards growth and stability. The response to Europe's macro-economic problems is Economic and Monetary Union, a convergence and co-ordination in economic policies. Europe will soon benefit from the



same advantages, a Single Market and Single Currency, that have helped to make the US economy one of the world's most productive.

- The second reason is an **inability to handle transformation of the labour market**. The way our labour market policies and social protection systems have been working can, to a high degree, explain why unemployment has turned into long term unemployment. We have a good safety net against income loss during unemployment. But we tend to give passive income support and let people wait until they have drifted into long term unemployment before something is done for them. We don't have a good springboard to new skills and jobs.

Europe does create jobs, but not enough. There is much untapped potential for job creation in the services sector, especially in new emerging activities. But many unemployed people, limited by their low or outdated skills or qualifications, cannot take up the jobs that are created.

At the same time Europe's adaptation to new technologies is relatively slow both in terms of work organisation and the lack of opportunities for those in work and for those out of work to develop and renew their skills throughout their working life.

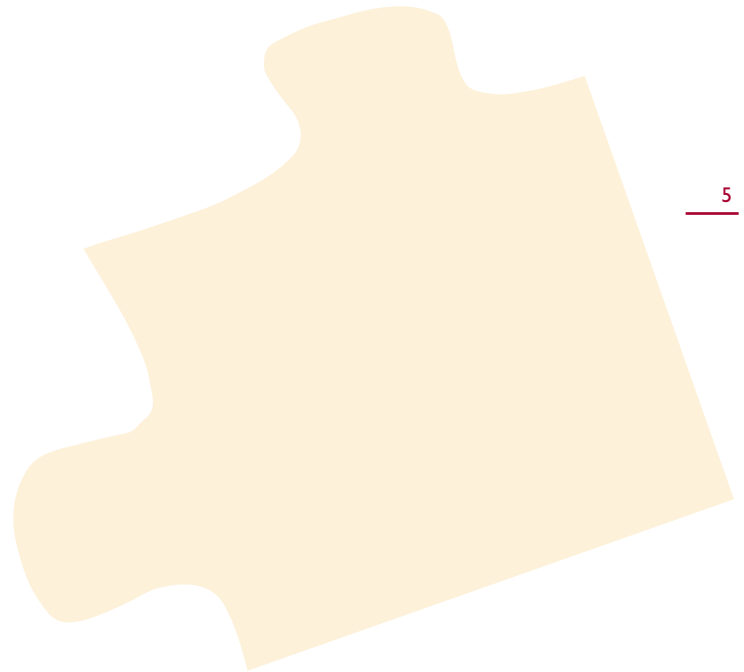
Europe's response to this second problem is the [European Employment Strategy](#). Its task is to support Member States and Social Partners in their effort to modernise.

Throughout this period, the [European Social Fund](#) contributed to the Member States' policies by co-funding programmes to develop people's skills and potential for work.

The EU response to the employment challenge

The brief history of the European Employment Strategy has the following milestones:

- The [Delors' White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment](#) in 1993 raised the debate on employment to the European Union.
- One year later, in [Essen](#), European leaders endorsed the [first plan of action](#) for tackling the employment challenge by identifying five areas of priority for employment policy at national level.
- Successive European Councils from Madrid in 1995 to Dublin in 1996 assessed the progress made in the "Essen Strategy", adding further elements to the five points of Essen.





Amsterdam, June 1997: A new Employment Strategy for Europe

When Europe's leaders met in Amsterdam, they gave a new impulse to the strategy initiated in Essen. Employment was recognised as "a matter of common concern" for Europe.

The European Employment Strategy, defined by the Treaty of Amsterdam, calls upon the Member States to co-ordinate their employment policies around four common pillars for priority action, with clearly-defined targets and objectives.





The European Employment Strategy in brief

MAIN GOALS:

- To achieve a high level of employment in the economy and for all groups in the labour market.
- To move away from a passive fight against unemployment towards promoting sustained employability and job creation.
- To favour a new approach to work organisation in such a way that EU firms are able to cope with economic change while reconciling both security and adaptability, and allowing individuals to participate in life-long training.
- To provide equal opportunities for everyone in the labour market to participate and have access to work.

MAIN POLICY PRINCIPLES ARE:

A SHIFT TOWARDS PREVENTION AND EARLY ACTIVATION IN EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

This means helping people before or as soon as they become unemployed, rather than addressing their needs only once they have been out of a job for some time.

A NEW MANAGEMENT-BY-OBJECTIVES APPROACH

Member States will set concrete targets and objectives, in some cases at EU level, as benchmarks for evaluation of the success or failure of their employment policies.

ANNUAL MULTILATERAL MECHANISMS FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATING THE PROGRESS OF THE STRATEGY

Member States, together with the Commission, will set up institutional mechanisms and common employment indicators to allow for systematic assessment of action taken.

INTEGRATING EMPLOYMENT POLICY WITH OTHER POLICY AREAS

Other policies, at both national and Community level, must take account of the employment impact.

PROGRESS TOWARDS AN EMPLOYMENT PACT

Employment policy is not the responsibility of governments alone. Social partners, regional and local partners, and NGOs all have a role to play by committing themselves to meeting the employment objectives

At the European Council in Amsterdam in June 1997, two key steps were taken to bring life to the new Strategy:

- THE LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR PROMOTING THE CONVERGENCE OF EMPLOYMENT POLICIES IN THE EU: THE NEW EMPLOYMENT TITLE IN THE TREATY;
- THE POLITICAL DECISION NOT TO WAIT FOR THE TREATY'S ENTRY INTO FORCE (1 MAY 1999) BUT TO IMMEDIATELY LAUNCH THE SURVEILLANCE AND CO-OPERATION PROCEDURE ON NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT POLICY.

To that end, Heads of State and of Government agreed to hold the first-ever 'Jobs Summit' of EU leaders.





The Amsterdam Treaty's Employment Title in a nutshell

- Member States retain principal responsibility for employment policies, but shall regard promoting employment as a **matter of common concern** and shall co-ordinate their action. (Art. 126)
- All areas of Community policy must take account of their impact on employment. The objective of a **high level of employment** has to be taken into account in all policy (Art. 127)
- The Treaty sets up the framework for an **annual multilateral surveillance procedure**, articulated on three documents: the annual **Employment Guidelines**, national implementation reports, and the **Joint Employment Report** for submission to the European Council every year. (Art. 128)
- As an outcome of the joint surveillance, based on common **employment indicators**, the Council may issue, upon a proposal from the Commission, specific recommendations to individual Member States for urgent action. (Art. 128)
- There is now a legal base for the promotion of **incentive measures** for employment, and for analysis, research and exchange of best practice in employment policy. (Art. 129)
- The Treaty sets up a permanent structure, a new **Employment Committee**, which will play an active part in this institutional process and serve as a forum for debate on employment issues at European level. (Art. 130)



Getting the Luxembourg Process started

The extraordinary Jobs Summit in Luxembourg, in November 1997, set out to translate the idea of “employment as a common European concern” into reality. There, Europe’s leaders decided to launch the annual cycle for implementing and monitoring national employment policies, which has become known as the [Luxembourg Process](#).

THE LUXEMBOURG PROCESS WORKS AS FOLLOWS.

1. At the beginning of the year, based on a proposal by the Commission, the Council approves a series of priority areas for action - the [Employment Guidelines](#). These Guidelines include concrete objectives to be met.
2. Each country draws up a [National Action Plan](#) which describes how these Guidelines are put into practice in the way best suited to that country. This process should involve a wide range of partners: unions, employers, local and regional authorities, etc.
3. The Commission and the Council jointly examine each National Action Plan and present a Joint Employment Report to the December European Council. The Commission also presents a recommendation to revise the Employment

Guidelines for the following year, and may also make proposals for further action.

4. The Council, on the basis of the conclusions by the Heads of State or Government, approves the set of Employment Guidelines for the following year. The Council may issue country-specific recommendations upon proposal by the Commission.

In this way the Luxembourg process proceeds as a rolling programme of yearly planning, monitoring, examination and re-adjustment.

The Luxembourg jobs summit in November 1997 agreed to a first set of nineteen Employment Guidelines for 1998. The Guidelines are based on four central ideas or 'pillars' of priority action and set three EU-wide quantitative targets, to be attained within five years.

One year later, in December 1998, the European leaders, meeting in [Vienna](#), welcomed the rapid progress made in so short a time and confirmed the scope of the Employment Guidelines. It also increased the number of guidelines to twenty-two and introduced further refinements, including a mainstreaming approach to equal opportunities and a new target on lifelong learning.



The Employment Guidelines – some highlights

In essence, the Employment Guidelines call on the Member States to undertake concrete and urgent action along the following lines:

EMPLOYABILITY

MAKING SURE PEOPLE CAN DEVELOP THE RIGHT SKILLS TO TAKE UP JOB OPPORTUNITIES IN A FAST-CHANGING WORLD

Every individual must be offered an opportunity in terms of job offers, work experience, training or other activating measures as soon as possible - no later than 12 months - after becoming unemployed (6 months for young people). At least 20% of the unemployed people must be offered access to training. Young people and others, such as disabled people, facing the greatest difficulties in getting work or who face discrimination, require specific help. Changes to tax, benefit and training systems will encourage people to take up work, and promote job creation overall, as well as the development of concrete national targets for lifelong learning opportunities.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

MAKING IT EASIER TO START AND RUN A BUSINESS AND TO EMPLOY PEOPLE IN IT

We need to nurture a culture of entrepreneurship. People have to be encouraged and assisted when starting new businesses and when they are about to take on new staff. This calls for reforms in tax systems, cuts in red tape, and training for entrepreneurs, especially in small businesses. Policies must also help to boost the jobs potential in the services sector and in the social economy.

ADAPTABILITY

DEVELOPING NEW FLEXIBLE WAYS OF WORKING TO RECONCILE SECURITY AND FLEXIBILITY

Competitive firms need to be flexible and up-to-date in the way they work in order to meet the changes of the economy while providing security for their workers. Reforms and agreements between the social partners must foster new forms of employment and innovative ways of work organisation. It needs to be made easier and cheaper for companies to invest in training for their staff.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

EQUAL ACCESS TO JOBS FOR WOMEN AND MEN, EQUAL TREATMENT AT WORK

Men and women must have the same training and support opportunities to participate in the labour market on an equal footing. Active policies need to make it less difficult to combine working life with family responsibilities, to return to work after a long absence, and should correct the gender unbalance in certain economic sectors. Beyond these specific lines of action, the principle of equal treatment must also be observed when implementing the other three pillars (mainstreaming)

In addition, the Member States have to take into account issues such as the development of the information society, the need to bring undeclared work into the open, promoting local employment and the social economy, the development of quantitative targets and indicators, and better integration of ESF funding to help implement the European Employment Strategy.



The ESF and the European Employment Strategy

The **EU Structural Funds**¹ have the key role of promoting economic and social cohesion, that is to ensure that the benefits of prosperity are enjoyed by everyone.

The **European Social Fund (ESF)** deals, in particular, with employment and human resources both within the regions and across the EU as a whole. Since its inception in 1957, the ESF has funded, in partnership with the Member States, programmes to develop people's skills and their potential for work. This means investing in people, especially those who face the greatest obstacles in finding or keeping work, with the basic aim of improving employability and the adaptability of the workforce.

The ESF has traditionally supported, by its own rationale, many of the policy objectives later incorporated in the Employment Guidelines. Indeed, the four pillars of the Guidelines are clearly recognisable in the current priorities of the Fund and many Member States have already taken action to better integrate ESF support into their mainstream labour market policies.

¹ The ERDF (European Regional Development Fund), the ESF (European Social Fund), the EAGGF (European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund), and the FIG (Financial Instrument of Fisheries Guidance).

A direct link to the European Employment Strategy is established in the new Structural Fund Regulations covering the years 2000 - 2006, and for the ESF in particular. In the new Regulation, the ESF will become the main financial instrument, at Community level, of the Employment Strategy and will gear its huge potential - both in terms of financial scope and policy focus - to support the accompanying National Action Plans.

The new ESF Regulation for the period 2000 - 2006 sets out five areas of intervention for the ESF, which are consistent with the four pillars of the Employment Guidelines:



ESF policy fields 2000 - 2006

- develop active policies to combat unemployment, to prevent the unemployed moving into long-term unemployment, to help the long-term unemployed back into the job market, and to provide support for those entering the job market - either young people starting work for the first time, or those returning to work;
- promote social inclusion and equality of opportunity for everyone to access work;
- develop education and training as part of a policy for lifelong learning to enhance and sustain employability, mobility, and integration into the labour market;
- promote a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce, foster innovation and adaptability in work organisation, support entrepreneurship and employment creation, and boost human potential in research, science and technology;
- improve the participation of women in the labour market including their career development, their access to new job opportunities and to entrepreneurship, and to reduce vertical and horizontal segregation in the labour market.



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