



UK Presidency of the EU 2005

Employment, social policy and
equal opportunities

Increasing employment and improving
social inclusion



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Increasing employment and improving social inclusion

Introduction

Now, more than ever, it is essential to focus efforts on raising employment levels across Europe and ensuring equal employment opportunities for all men and women.

Unemployment and economic inactivity in the EU remain unacceptably high. Unemployment means wasted lives and wasted opportunities.

Tackling unemployment and economic inactivity is therefore crucially important for restoring the confidence of our citizens in the EU. A job is the best protection against poverty and social exclusion, and, in the modern, globalised economy, employability is the best form of job security.

High levels of unemployment and inactivity also pose a direct threat to Europe's future economic growth and to the sustainability of our welfare state and social services.

Over the next 30 years, Europe will be an ageing society with a declining working-age population. The European Commission has estimated that the fall in the working-age population could cut the rate of economic growth in Europe from 2–2.5% today to 1.25% in 2040. In other words, demographic change threatens the economic growth that we need in order to sustain our welfare state and social services, and it does so at precisely the time when our ageing societies are putting increased pressures on them.

We therefore have only one choice: we need to get Europe back on the path to full employment and to raise the productivity of people in work. We need to help as many as possible of Europe's unemployed and inactive people to find productive employment. And we need inclusive labour markets, free of discrimination, which offer opportunities to all, men and women, young and old. We need to raise employment and improve social inclusion.



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This means that we need to renew our efforts under the Lisbon agenda to reform and modernise both our employment policies and our social protection systems to make them the drivers of the employment growth we need.

These are the priorities of the UK Presidency in the area of employment, social policy and equal opportunities. The two Ministerial Informal meetings – of Employment Ministers in Belfast on 7–8 July and of Gender Equality Ministers on 8–9 November in Birmingham – will focus on the practical steps we can take to give effect to these priorities.



David Blunkett

David Blunkett
Secretary of State
for Work and
Pensions



Alan Johnson

Alan Johnson
Secretary of State
for Trade and Industry



Tessa Jowell

Tessa Jowell
Secretary of State
for Culture, Media
and Sport and
Minister for Women



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Informal meeting of Employment Ministers, Belfast, 7–8 July 2005

The Informal meeting of Employment Ministers in Belfast on 7–8 July will provide an opportunity to exchange ideas and experience of policies and programmes for helping unemployed and economically inactive people to find and keep jobs. Ministers will be invited to visit two community projects in Belfast that provide specific help for people who are disadvantaged in the labour market. There will then be three separate Ministerial workshops to discuss the specific issues of:

- youth employment;
- older workers; and
- the economically inactive and the hard to reach.

We hope that this Informal meeting will stimulate new ways of learning from experience of what works and what doesn't work.

Informal meeting of Gender Equality Ministers and gender equality conference, Birmingham, 8–9 November 2005

2005 will mark the tenth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, which was agreed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. The Luxembourg and UK Presidencies have agreed to highlight this anniversary as the central theme of our gender equality presidency programmes.

The UK Presidency will host a conference in Birmingham on 8–9 November to highlight models of good practice and cutting-edge policies to help implement and develop the Beijing Platform for Action. The conference will involve a broad spectrum of partners, including non-governmental organisations, academics, senior policy officials and members of the European Parliament.

Following the conference, all EU Gender Equality Ministers are invited to attend an informal meeting to discuss how EU Member States have taken forward the agenda set in Beijing and what more still needs to be done.



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Economic inactivity and ill health: challenges and solutions conference, Cardiff, 23–24 November 2005

It will be impossible for Europe to meet the Lisbon employment targets without tackling economic inactivity. Even if the 19 million unemployed people across Europe all found work, we would fall short of the numbers required to achieve the 70% Lisbon employment target.

Many of those who find themselves economically inactive have worked in the past and would like to work again, but find themselves increasingly detached from the labour market. Often, economic inactivity is linked to a period of ill health. It therefore makes sense to explore the two issues of economic inactivity and ill health together. The conference in Cardiff on 23–24 November will provide a forum to explore the policy responses open to us.

Social Inclusion Round Table and Informal meetings of the Employment Committee and Social Protection Committee, Glasgow and Edinburgh, 17–19 October 2005

The annual Social Inclusion Round Table provides an opportunity for representatives of anti-poverty groups from all over the EU to meet for a wide-ranging discussion of social exclusion.

The Round Table in Glasgow on 17 October will concentrate on the seven key priorities set out in the *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion*: increasing labour market participation; modernising social protection systems; tackling discrimination in education and training; eliminating child poverty; ensuring decent accommodation; improving access to quality services; and overcoming discrimination and increasing the integration of people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and immigrants. Members of the Social Protection Committee and Employment Committee will be invited to attend the Round Table before they hold their own official meetings.



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The Round Table will be a mixture of plenary and workshop sessions. We plan to hold three workshop sessions, each consisting of six parallel workshops lasting for around two hours. The parallel workshops in each session will be organised into six strands, which are intended to broadly reflect the seven key priorities: work; children; older people; ethnic minorities; housing; and participation. In the first workshop session, we will seek to take stock of the current situation, including identifying the key issues and looking at the position of vulnerable groups and at some of the current approaches that appear to be effective. The second session will look in greater detail at how the problems have been addressed, both through site visits and discussions of good practice. In the third session, we will consider what is needed to make a decisive impact; this will include an examination of the relevant National Action Plan objectives, and questions of whether transnational programmes can be used more effectively and whether strategies and services can be more joined up at national, regional and local levels.

Improving life chances of disabled people conference, London, 8–9 November 2005

This conference will consider the value of adopting a mainstream approach to disability. It will draw on examples of good practice and discuss how to bring about behavioural change so that disabled people are accepted as full and equal members of society. It will explore how we can help to provide disabled people with the same opportunities as non-disabled people so that they can lead independent lives. To support this work, we will examine the benefits of engaging with disabled people and groups to ensure that policy makers understand their priorities and concerns.



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eAccessibility conference, London, 21 October 2005

The main theme of the conference will be the forthcoming Communication from the European Commission on eAccessibility. This will set out an action plan to ensure that disabled and elderly citizens in Europe get equal access to electronic ICT* products and therefore enjoy the social and economic freedom that these products and services provide.

Informed choices: retirement and savings conference, Brussels, 9 November 2005

There are concerns throughout Europe about the future sustainability of state spending on pensions against the background of ageing societies with declining working-age populations. Member States are exploring how best to address the challenges presented by these demographic changes. Individuals need to understand the choices available to them in making provision for their retirement. And governments need to understand the long-term funding requirements of their state pension systems.

The 'Informed choices: retirement and savings' conference on 9 November will focus on the key, shared challenges facing Member States, the steps Member States are taking to address these challenges, and how we can work together to meet them.

* Information and communications technology.



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Modernising employment services conference and meeting of the Heads of Public Employment Services, Birmingham, 30 November – 2 December 2005

The Heads of Public Employment Services (PES) meeting will be a round-table meeting of the chief executives (or equivalents) from all EU countries, plus Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. The Heads of PES group meets every six months in the country hosting the presidency and is chaired by the European Commission. The meeting will also incorporate the High Level Strategy Group on EURES.

European Social Fund conference, Manchester, 14 October 2005

The European Social Fund (ESF) conference in Manchester on 14 October will examine how the ESF in 2000–06 is supporting national policies to promote employment opportunities for all. It will showcase good practice from current ESF programmes – particularly their contribution to the Lisbon employment agenda – and how this is disseminated to domestic policy makers and planners. The aim is to help to inform the development of successor programmes after 2006.



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Workplace diversity conference, Brussels, 28–29 November 2005

This event will provide an opportunity to exchange experience and good practice in workplace diversity among a wide range of stakeholders across Europe. It will also present the results of the *European Compendium on Good Practice in Diversity*.

Health and safety at work

There are three conferences designed to highlight the importance of promoting a safe and healthy working environment.*

(i) **Committee of Competent Authorities' meeting, Buxton, 12–13 October 2005**

This conference will discuss Seveso Directive implementation (control of major accident hazards) and future strategies to enhance consistent compliance, including a demonstration to be held at the Health and Safety Laboratory in Buxton, Derbyshire.

* The closing event of the European Week for Safety and Health at Work 2005 will also take place during the UK Presidency. This year, the European Week focuses on noise at work. The Summit will be co-hosted by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work and the UK as the EU Presidency.



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(ii) Occupational health and safety conference, Liverpool, 18–19 October 2005

This conference will discuss health and safety as a key element of EU social policy and as a contributing factor to ensuring the success of the Lisbon agenda. Themes for the event will include occupational health, partnership working and delivering outcomes, in the context of developing the next community strategy on health and safety at work.

(iii) Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee conference, London, 9–10 November 2005

This conference will take place over two days and will cover various aspects of occupational health and safety. It will consist of a formal business meeting and a thematic day on health at work.

High-performance workplace conference, London, 15 September 2005

Promoting innovation and increasing productivity are central to the Lisbon goals of making Europe more competitive globally. The conference in London on 15 September will examine what contributes to a high-performance workplace.

High-performance workplaces come in many shapes and sizes – from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to large multinational organisations – but there are some common features, including high levels of employee involvement together with human resource practices and reward and commitment practices. These are demonstrated through management skills, commitment to flexible working policies, innovative reward schemes, information for and consultation of employees and skills development, as well as an awareness of diversity and a gender balance throughout the organisation.



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Small business in the social dialogue in an enlarged Europe conference, London, 17 November 2005

Social dialogue is a key strand of EU policy making. With European enlargement, some new Member States have identified a lack of effective national social dialogue structures, particularly where sectors consist mainly of small firms, as a factor that inhibits their contribution at the European level and the implementation of agreements. This conference is designed to be a meeting of experts on the social dialogue process to explore practical solutions and to provide a forum to identify and share best practice, with participants from the European Commission, Member States, business and social partner organisations.

Corporate social responsibility conference, London, 1–2 December 2005

Practical steps by business to enhance a better working environment and increase diversity in the workforce help to motivate staff and to recruit employees. This is essential for the growth, stability and competitiveness of companies. Companies can make a difference when they take initiatives that provide for partnership working with local communities, such as volunteering and employee-led programmes.

The corporate social responsibility (CSR) conference will consider how CSR can help drive forward progress towards broader international goals. It will pay particular attention to the role of financial institutions in CSR and will develop a number of themes, including ways in which the financial sector can contribute towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. This event will also link to the UK's G8 agenda and its priority for work on Africa and will explore the role of CSR in reducing poverty in the region.



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Full calendar of events

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|---------------|---|-----------------------|
| 7–8 July | Employment Ministers’ Informal meeting | Belfast |
| 15 September | High-performance workplace conference | London |
| 12–13 October | Committee of Competent Authorities’ meeting | Buxton |
| 14 October | European Social Fund conference | Manchester |
| 17–19 October | Social Inclusion Round Table/Employment Committee and Social Protection Committee Informal meetings | Glasgow and Edinburgh |
| 18–19 October | Occupational health and safety conference | Liverpool |
| 21 October | eAccessibility conference | London |
| 27–28 October | MISSOC meeting | Oxford |
| 8–9 November | Gender Equality Ministers’ Informal meeting | Birmingham |
| 8–9 November | Improving life chances of disabled people conference | London |
| 9 November | Informed choices: retirement and savings conference | Brussels |



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Full calendar of events *(continued)*

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|--------------------------|---|------------|
| 9–10 November | Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee conference | London |
| 17 November | Small business in the social dialogue in an enlarged Europe conference | London |
| 17–18 November | EURES working party | Edinburgh |
| 23–24 November | Economic inactivity and ill health: challenges and solutions conference | Cardiff |
| 28–29 November | Workplace diversity conference | Brussels |
| 30 November – 2 December | Modernising employment services conference and Heads of Public Employment Services' meeting | Birmingham |
| 1–2 December | Corporate social responsibility conference | London |
| 8–9 December | Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council | Brussels |

Website

www.eu2005.gov.uk

Details and dates of events were correct at the time of publication but may be subject to change.

