Social Agenda (2006-2010)

European Parliament resolution on the Social Agenda for the period 2006-2010 (2004/2191(INI))

The European Parliament,

— having regard to the communication from the Commission (COM(2005)0033),

— having regard to the European Social Charter,

— having regard to the Report of May 2004 of the High Level Group on the future of social policy in an enlarged European Union,

— having regard to its resolution of 3 September 2003 on the scoreboard on implementing the social policy agenda (1),


— having regard to the Communication of 2 February 2005 from President Barroso in agreement with Vice-President Verheugen to the Spring European Council, ‘Working together for growth and jobs — A new start for the Lisbon Strategy’ (COM(2005)0024),

— having regard to the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe,

— having regard to the Green Paper entitled ‘Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations’ (COM(2005)0094),

— having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,

— having regard to the report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and the opinion of the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (A6-0142/2005).

A. whereas to attain the Lisbon Objectives of more and qualitatively better jobs and social cohesion, the European social model needs to be modernised and enhanced in order better to withstand the changes in the structure of the population and make available the knowledge and skills required by a society whose technologies have changed,

B. whereas social cohesion among citizens in the European Union will be well served if everyone who is capable of working has the opportunity to have an adequately paid job and working conditions which permit a reasonable work-life balance, and those who are not available to the labour market have an adequate income which lifts them out of poverty,

C. whereas the development and promotion of European human and social capital are not only vital in order to build a knowledge-based economy but are also a key element in social integration and in adjustments in response to structural changes on the labour market,

D. whereas SMEs throughout the Union are significant contributors to growth and employment rates as they employ a large number of employees and whereas particular emphasis is now placed on the creation of jobs by start-ups and, in general, by SMEs; to this end, the Member States should promote, in particular, entrepreneurial spirit, innovation and a business-friendly environment,

E. whereas employment rates in Europe must rise, which means that greater efforts and practical, forward-looking measures are needed to help women, young people, people with disabilities, older workers, unskilled workers, the long-term unemployed and members of minorities to find jobs matching their qualifications,

F. whereas there is too little labour mobility in Europe, and the labour potentially available is therefore put to insufficient use,

G. whereas, despite the pioneering role played by Europe in the field of equal treatment and in combating discrimination, there are still considerable problems, such as the difficulties which women sometimes face in gaining access to the labour market, disparities in salaries, differences in opportunities in education and in terms of career prospects and promotion, difficulties in combining work and family responsibilities and women’s lack of involvement in decision-making processes in society,

H. whereas incisive action is needed to combat poverty,

I. whereas social policies constitute a central factor in generating social cohesion and ensuring access to fundamental rights and a central factor in the EU’s economic growth,

J. whereas combining a job with a family must be made a practical proposition which enables men and women to be active on the labour market, to develop their career and to lead a harmonious, fruitful family life,

K. whereas in accordance with the responsibility which they shoulder from a social-policy point of view, businesses should offer the best possible learning conditions for their employees:

— during the periods set aside for the practical acquisition of initial training;

— during periods of regular training for their employees;

— in connection with the recognition and validation of what is learned through on-the-job experience,

and in order to achieve these objectives, all large businesses should draw up training and skills development plans and assessments to be negotiated between, on the one hand, the social partners and, on the other, the institutions which award vocational qualifications,

**General points**

1. Considers that the Commission gives a good analysis of the problems and tasks facing Europe with a view to preserving and reinforcing the unique European social model; considers that this European Social Agenda must contribute to balanced implementation of the four pillars of the Lisbon Strategy, namely economic coordination, employment policy, social policy and sustainable development;

2. Regrets that, because the proposals are so general and/or because of the lack of practical measures in the Social Agenda, the attainment of the ambitious Lisbon Strategy is not being tackled as vigorously as has been claimed elsewhere; notes in this connection the strategic objectives of the Union: ‘Renewed growth is vital to prosperity, can bring back full employment and is the foundation of social justice and opportunity for all. It is also vital to Europe’s position in the world and Europe’s ability to mobilise the resources to tackle many different global challenges’ (1);

3. Stresses the importance of each individual Member State’s responsibility in terms of implementing and applying current legislation and introducing reforms in order to achieve the Lisbon targets;

4. Considers that the European Social Agenda must contribute to ensuring respect for the fundamental rights enshrined in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe; proposes, therefore, that the Agenda should provide for the annual monitoring of the safeguarding of fundamental social rights by the Union;

5. Calls on the Commission and Council, on the basis of this Social Agenda, to draw up a genuine social policy agenda, building upon the Social Policy Agenda for 2000-2005, with specific policy proposals, a timetable and a specific procedure (scoreboard) for monitoring its implementation; calls on the Commission to enhance the Social Agenda by means of the proposals listed subject-by-subject in this resolution;

6. Welcomes the Commission's commitment to strengthening the social dimension of globalisation and expects to be consulted on practical measures to be proposed by the Commission and its inter-departmental group working on this area;

7. Considers that the integration of the various Community programmes into the Progress programme must not lower the profile or reduce the funding of the action programmes from the five fields concerned; calls for all parties concerned in organised civil society to be involved in monitoring the implementation of the various programme components;

8. Notes the Commission's intention regarding a communication on social services of general interest; urges, in this connection, that these services be excluded from the requirement of notification under State aid policy and calls for a proposal for a framework directive on services of general interest which safeguards the principles and financing of these community services;

9. Considers that there is a need for comprehensive and detailed statistics and analyses, and that an adequate social public support system must be set up, providing information on job opportunities, corresponding health services and counselling; stresses the added value of the partnership between authorities, social partners and civil society; points out the wider meaning of 'best governance'; notes that annual meetings are important as a means of following up and evaluating the Social Agenda; considers, however, that in an enlarged Europe a continuous and defined network strategy should exist; sees no evidence of any proper determination to share responsibilities and competencies between the Community, Member States and NGOs;

10. Is aware of the fact that local economies and SMEs are key factors for economic development and employment, and that they account for over 90% of business activity in European economies; notes that the creation of new jobs can be promoted by helping SMEs and developing favourable conditions, special programmes and benefits for new jobs;

11. Calls for the intention to assess the social and employment impact of every European measure to be accompanied by a practical instrument to implement it and by evaluation and close monitoring measures;

**Demography and access to employment**

12. Considers that the current demographic evolution puts pressure on the labour market and social security; highlights the urgent need for positive measures to improve the position of older workers on the labour market and adequate policy responses that not only reverse that development but open up new opportunities, more flexibility in the choice of pension and retirement schemes, and positive incentives for increasing the years of active employment; considers that, with regard to the coordination of pensions, a broad debate should be initiated concerning the right of all to pensions of an acceptable level including workers in atypical employment or people from high-risk groups;

13. Welcomes the Green Paper on demographic change as a useful contribution to the analysis of the multifaceted challenges facing the European Union and considers that Parliament should contribute to the overall reflection on the consequences of the demographic decline and formulate proposals on the appropriate policy instruments available to the Union and the Member States to address it;

14. Notes that certain groups in society still suffer discrimination as regards their rights to high-quality employment; calls for practical proposals to specifically help women, senior citizens, young people, people with disabilities and members of minorities to become integrated into the world of work and to join programmes for employment and social solidarity;
15. Hopes that action to combat discrimination (which is linked in particular to membership of a minority) will be stepped up and that the Member States will be encouraged to exchange information concerning best practices; and calls for particular attention to be paid to the promotion of the family across the board at European and national level;

More and better jobs

16. Considers it necessary for practical measures to be adopted in order to set up programmes, in consultation with the social partners and in dialogue with specialised public and/or private sector bodies, to promote education and vocational training and to genuinely bring about lifelong learning with the aim of improving the use of knowledge and the information society, in keeping with the needs of the labour market;

17. Calls for support to be provided for multilateral projects designed to improve the Member States’ education and training systems and, therefore, for European education and training projects under which access to education and vocational training would be regarded as a basic social right, and therefore considers that lifelong education and training should focus on the convergence and recognition of professional qualifications and expects companies to participate, in accordance with the responsibility they shoulder from a social-policy point of view, in professional training and the development of skills, in cooperation with the responsible bodies;

18. Calls on the Commission, with regard to the new strategy for the period 2007-2012 for health and safety at work, to adopt a more effective approach to the causes and consequences of accidents at work; calls in this connection for:

— a revision of Council Directive 92/85/EEC of 19 October 1992 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding (1);


— a broadening of the scope of Council Directive 89/391/EEC of 12 June 1989 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work (3) to include measures against harassment at work and to cover the self-employed, subcontracted workers, tele-workers and home workers,

— a proposal for a directive concerning disorders of the musculoskeletal system at the work-place, devoting attention to the problem of repetitive work;

19. Believes it to be essential that the Member States improve the environment for start-ups and support existing SMEs through forward-looking measures at national, regional and local level; considers that these measures should be aimed particularly at the information and communication sector as well as the services sector since these sectors possess a particularly high job creation potential;

20. Calls on the Commission to reinforce and clarify the original Lisbon target of eradicating poverty by the adoption of a clear headline target for the EU to reduce the levels of poverty measured against GDP by 2010 and to develop a set of social inclusion standards against which to judge the results of the social inclusion strategy;

21. Calls on the Council and the Commission to maintain and reinforce the social inclusion strategy as a distinct and visible strategy in its own right within the streamlined social protection and social inclusion process;

22. Believes it to be particularly important that the Member States make greater use of measures to convert unreported gainful activity into regular employment;

(2) OJ L 158, 30.4.2004, p. 50.
Mobility

23. Calls for a detailed report on the economic impact of denying workers from the new Member States access to employment elsewhere in the EU and for that report to be accompanied by proposals for solving the problems encountered;

24. Calls for the improvement and extension of Directive 96/71/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 1996 concerning the posting of workers in the framework of the provision of services (1); considers that cross-border cooperation between inspectorates should be stepped up, and calls on the Commission to investigate the scope for establishing a European platform for cooperation between them — a ‘social’ Europol;

25. Calls for account to be taken, in the detailed provisions of the annexes to Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 (the new coordinating regulation further to Regulation (EEC) No 1408/71) (2), of the need and desire for mobility, in such a way that the implementation measures make mobility a reality, rather than paying mere lip service to it as is the case in the text of the regulation itself;

26. Reiterates, in this connection, its call for a legislative instrument relating to the introduction of advance, binding tests of cross-border effects in the field of social and fiscal law ('Europe test'), as set out in its resolution of 28 May 1998 on the situation of frontier workers in the European Union (3);

27. Welcomes the Commission’s intention to present proposals to remove obstacles to labour mobility, notably those arising from occupational pension schemes, and calls for such proposals to be presented this year if possible;

Promoting social inclusion and cohesion

28. Considers that, while having employment is the most important element in people’s integration into society, in addition a sound social policy is needed to safeguard the right of all to social protection and the cohesion of the societies of the Member States;

29. Welcomes the Commission’s intention to declare 2010 the European Year of combating exclusion and poverty; deplores the fact that the European Council of March 2005 in Brussels narrowed the objectives of social inclusion and combating poverty to measures against child poverty; calls on the Commission and the Employment and Social Affairs Council to ensure the attainment of the original Lisbon objectives, particularly the reduction of poverty in the Union, and to safeguard the implementation of all the elements laid down in the framework of the open method of coordination for measures against poverty and social exclusion;

30. Supports the Commission’s intention to undertake an intensive consultation exercise concerning the shortcomings of existing social protection systems; considers that all parties should be involved in this;

31. Supports the Commission’s intention to expand the open method of coordination, which was initiated in December 2004, into a fully-fledged procedure for long-term care and health care; considers that, in this context, qualitative criteria should be adopted which guarantee the right of all to affordable care based on solidarity; considers, in the light of this, that health care cannot be subordinated to the rules of the internal market and competition;

Combating discrimination

32. Recalls that the gender issue must be included in all Community policies, as this is the sole way to guarantee the three key pillars of equal quality of life for women: awareness, opportunities and success;

33. Expresses disappointment over the lack of effective proposals to promote, monitor closely and evaluate the progress of gender equality and the lack of policy measures aimed at facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life, helping those who support persons who are unable to work and generally increasing the flexibility of working time; calls on the Commission to monitor compliance with existing legislation more strictly and, where necessary, to make proposals for its amendment, including the imposition of penalties; calls on the Commission to draw up a specific action plan for equality between men and women with a specific emphasis on eliminating the wage gap; calls on the Commission, in this context, to declare 31 March the European day of action for ‘equal pay for equal work’;

34. Strongly supports the plan to organise a European Year on equal opportunities;

35. Welcomes the setting up the European Gender Institute, aimed at filling the information gap on gender matters, takes the view that this development could enhance the visibility of gender equality; considers that, in an enlarged Europe, it would be an asset, and that the gap between the old and new Member States could be bridged by locating the Institute in one of the 10 new Member States;

36. Urges the Commission to supplement the Social Agenda with a directive banning discrimination against people with disabilities; calls for more political significance to be given to the European Action Plan on equal opportunities for people with disabilities and for the Action Plan to be used as an instrument of real change; calls for the Action Plan to be used as the principle tool for disability mainstreaming, which must include reporting by the Member States on the transposition of disability provisions contained in EU legislation; demands that Member States actively involve disabled people’s organisations at national level in this process and that the Action Plan require political visibility and debate with the Parliament and the Council and recommendations for future actions;

37. Calls for a specific directive aimed at banning discrimination against people on the basis of age in relation to access to goods and services;

Social dialogue and social legislation

38. Notes the Commission’s intention to submit a Green Paper on the development of labour law with the aim of simplifying its rules; considers that a European policy must not result in any erosion of social achievements; draws attention, in this connection, to Article III-209 of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, which provides for the harmonisation of measures relating to employment and to living and working conditions while the improvement is being maintained;

39. Welcomes the Commission’s proposal regarding the transnational cross-border social dialogue; calls on the Commission also to support this social dialogue by assigning staff to it and hopes that the social dialogue partners will support this proposal;

40. Calls on the Commission to submit a proposal for revising Council Directive 94/45/EC (1), as promised for 2002, the most important aims being to: (i) expand the scope of, and enhance the right to, information and consultation in the event of reorganisations, and (ii) improve working facilities for employees’ representatives in European Works Councils;

41. Considers that the Lisbon objective of more and better employment which provides a stable income above the poverty threshold will be attained when Member States take on responsibility in terms of implementing and applying current legislation and when structures are sufficiently modern and dynamic and afford the people of Europe social security and legal certainty; calls on the Commission, therefore, to submit proposals for

— a directive to protect the rights of workers in the event of restructuring,

— a directive concerning individual redundancies,

— a directive concerning social protection in connection with new forms of employment,

— a directive on monitoring compliance with minimum regulations,
— a directive on a minimum standard of social security;

42. Notes that the Social Agenda provides for the setting-up of a forum on business restructuring; calls on the Commission, in this context, to include in the Agenda the proposal of the Gyllenhammar Group regarding an annual social report to be drawn up in large companies;

43. Calls on the Member States to deepen cooperation and exchange best practice through the open method of coordination, which is an efficient instrument of policy making in the field of employment, social protection, social inclusion, pensions and health care;

44. Calls on the Council and the Commission to ensure the adequate social protection of temporary agency workers by moving forward on the current proposals for a directive on temporary agency workers;

45. Believes that the links between the two sides of industry in the form of agreements must be strengthened at all levels; therefore, calls on the Commission to put forward proposals for a voluntary framework for transnational collective bargaining covering both the intersectoral level and the company and sectoral level;

46. Calls on its committee responsible to monitor the implementation of the Social Agenda at regular intervals;

47. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.