Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the ‘Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on quarterly statistics on Community job vacancies’

COM(2007) 76 final

On 4 April 2007, the Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the abovementioned proposal.

On 24 April 2007 the Committee Bureau instructed the Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion to prepare the Committee's work on the subject.

Given the urgent nature of the work, the European Economic and Social Committee appointed Ms Florio as rapporteur-general at its 436th plenary session, held on 30 and 31 May 2007 (meeting of 31 May 2007), and adopted the following opinion unanimously.

1. Background

1.1 Access to reliable and good quality statistics is an indispensable instrument for enabling institutional, economic and social operators to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of specific legislative choices and take future decisions.

1.2 Indeed, having an overview that is as accurate and as close as possible to present realities is essential for adopting the best possible policies.

1.3 This is particularly true in the case of statistics on the employment situation in Europe, for the purpose of analysing progress made by Member States towards the Lisbon objectives.

1.4 In order to understand the labour market situation in the European Union, it is extremely important to know the sectors and regions where there are job vacancies. Unfilled vacancies are indicators for structural variations by economic sector and can provide a useful framework for identifying European regions with labour shortages, or — conversely — with significant economic and employment growth.

1.5 Job vacancies are included in the set of Principal European Economic Indicators (PEEIs) and are an indicator that, if made available rapidly, can also be useful to the European Central Bank and the Commission for assessing the impact of economic trends in specific sectors, and weighing up monetary policy decisions.

1.6 The re-launched Lisbon Strategy, which dates back to the European Council of March 2005, made creating more and better jobs one of its key priorities. This has inevitably reinforced the need for better statistical information on labour demand.

1.7 The Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs 2005-2008 and the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines (BPEGs), in the context of the European Employment Strategy (EES), require aggregated structural data, for the entire European Union, on job vacancies according to economic sector for the purpose of analysing the level and structure of labour demand.

1.8 The availability of reliable and frequently updated statistical data also enables individual Member States to assess the labour market and then adopt labour policy decisions, sometimes on a regional basis.

2. The Commission proposal

2.1 National data on job vacancies and occupied posts have been collected since 2003 under a gentlemen’s agreement. Although this agreement guaranteed the Member States’ flexibility and independence, it did not entirely meet the data users’ needs.

2.2 At present, four Member States have not sent data to Eurostat and the data provided are not always perfectly comparable. As for quarterly data collection, ECB and Commission requirements in terms of coverage, timeliness and harmonisation are not being satisfied at all.

2.3 Through the proposal for a regulation (COM(2007) 76 final), which was drawn up on the initiative of the Employment Committee, the Commission therefore hopes to introduce a regulation that will make it possible to obtain timely and comparable statistics on job vacancies.
2.4 During the preparation of the proposal, which also included consultation with experts and the Statistical Programme Committee (SPC), various options were considered. Under the option finally adopted, annual structural data will continue to be dealt with in the short term on a gentlemen’s agreement basis.

2.5 Thus, the proposal focuses mainly on provisions governing the collection of quarterly statistics on vacancies. Based on the experience of this regulation, consideration will be given to the future possibility of drawing up a new regulation to cope with the demands for annual data.

2.6 The level of detail required for each economic activity is to be determined on the basis of the version of the common classification system for economic activities in the Community (NACE) that is currently in force.

2.7 While maintaining established quality standards wherever possible, Member States are free to use administrative data or to restrict the range of economic sectors to be considered, in order to reduce the burden on businesses (Article 5).

2.8 The Commission (Article 8) proposes to establish a series of feasibility studies to be undertaken by Member States that have difficulties in providing data for:

a) units with fewer than 10 employees; and/or

b) the following activities:

i) agriculture, forestry and fishing activities,

ii) public administration and defence; compulsory social security,

iii) education,

iv) human health and social work,

v) arts, entertainments and recreation, and

vi) activities of members organisations, repair of computers and personal and household goods and other personal service activities.

2.9 During the initial phase (the first three years), Member States may receive a financial contribution from the EU. The financing will be covered by the Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity — PROGRESS (1) (Article 9). Thus, innovations and improvements in data collection can be launched in addition to the completion of the gentlemen’s agreement phase.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

3.1 The EESC emphasises the importance of having EU employment statistics that are as coherent and reliable as possible. For this reason, it values and supports the Commission’s efforts to set up a legal framework for obtaining up-to-date, comparable and relevant job-vacancy statistics at EU level.

3.2 In order to achieve the economic, and especially employment-related, objectives of the Lisbon Strategy, reliable and efficient statistical support must be available for all statistics users and economic, social and institutional operators at EU and national levels.

3.3 The EESC also endorses the choice of instrument, i.e. an EU regulation, insofar as the purpose of the proposal, as is usually the case for the majority of statistical activity, requires detailed and uniform application throughout the European Union.

3.4 The decision to include only quarterly data collection in the proposed regulation and to continue to apply the gentlemen’s agreement to the annual structural data is undoubtedly dictated by a well-founded desire for a gradual transition from an informal agreement to an EU regulation on data collection. The results obtained during the transitional period will have to be closely monitored, and the EESC hopes that a more complete and reliable framework will be achieved in the near future for both annual and quarterly data on EU labour-market potential.

The EESC regrets that there is no impact assessment as yet, but expects the Commission to produce one before a secondary implementing regulation could be adopted, as there will, in principle, be an increase in costs and in burdens on European businesses without offsetting reductions for other survey activity.

3.5 Nevertheless, the EESC believes that due to the need to simplify and reduce the cost of data collection, a not entirely clear choice has been made to make data collection optional for sectors defined as ‘seasonal’, namely agriculture, fishing and forestry.

3.6 ‘Seasonal adjustment’ however raises a range of questions about the reliability of such statistics, since in other industrial sectors and/or the public sector, seasonal-type contracts have been in use for years (textile industry, agri-food industry, tourism, etc. …).

(1) Adopted by Decision 1672/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006. Under Section 1. Employment, the financing of measures relating to statistics is specifically mentioned: ‘[…] improving the understanding of the employment situation and prospects, in particular through […] the development of statistics and common indicators […]’.
3.7 Furthermore, in all EU countries, work contracts currently provide for dozens of different forms of employment relations. It would therefore be useful to know the types of job vacancy involved (open-ended contracts, fixed-term contracts, part-time contracts, projects, partnerships, etc).

3.8 A framework that was closer to the real potential of the labour market, its trends and weaknesses in certain sectors and regions, would make it possible to focus better on the strategies to be implemented in order to achieve the Lisbon goals.

3.9 This is another reason why the EESC believes that consultation with the European social partners and their direct involvement is particularly necessary in these areas.

The EESC welcomes the Parliament's powers of scrutiny over the proposal which will be subject to co-decision with the European Parliament. Implementing regulations will be subject to comitology under the regulatory procedure with scrutiny, in accordance with the procedure laid down in Council Decisions 1999/468/EC and 2006/512/EC.


The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Dimitris DIMITRIADIS


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On 25 April 2007 the Council of the European Union decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the abovementioned proposal.

The Committee Bureau instructed the Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion to prepare the Committee’s work on the subject.

Given the urgent nature of the work, the European Economic and Social Committee appointed Mr Burani as rapporteur-general at its 436th plenary session, held on 30 and 31 May 2007 (meeting of 30 May 2007), and adopted the following opinion unanimously.

1. Introduction

1.2 An initial amendment was made in 2005 following the accession of 10 new Member States. A further amendment has become necessary following the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, in order to insert tables concerning these new Member States into the annex to the regulation.

2. Comments and conclusions
2.1 The EESC takes note of the Commission’s proposal. Given that the need for the proposal has arisen following the accession of new Member States, and that it is of a purely technical nature, the Committee gives its full agreement.


The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Dimitris DIMITRIADIS