

5.4. Finally, the Committee points out that a good reception system does not depend solely on material conditions and efficient organisation, but also on a positive attitude on the

part of the general public, who must be properly informed and prepared to learn why people seek asylum, thereby fostering a climate of understanding.

Brussels, 28 November 2001.

*The President
of the Economic and Social Committee*
Göke FRERICHS

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Regulation (EC) No. 577/98 on the organisation of a labour force sample survey in the Community'

(2002/C 48/15)

On 2 July 2001 the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the above-mentioned proposal.

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 7 November 2001 by a unanimous vote. The rapporteur working alone was Mr Sklavounos.

At its 386th plenary session of 28 and 29 November 2001 (meeting of 28 November 2001), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 117 votes to one with one abstention.

1. Introduction

1.1. Council Regulation (EC) No. 577/98, on the organisation of a labour force sample survey in the Community, lays down the basic provisions for a labour force sample survey, designed to provide comparable statistical information on the level and pattern of and trends in employment and unemployment in the Member States.

1.2. Because of the difficulty in implementing a continuous labour force survey on the same date in all Member States, the Council Regulation (EC) No. 577/1998 provided in Article 1(2), that 'those Member States which are not in a position to implement a continuous survey may carry out an annual survey only, to take place in the spring'.

1.3. In the Commission report on the implementation of the regulation⁽¹⁾, adopted in January 2001, one conclusion was that a continuous survey is carried out only in ten of the EU Member States.

1.3.1. Another conclusion was that, at the time the regulation was adopted, the lack of an obligation on the part of Member States to move to a continuous survey is being exploited by those for whom this presents both a technical and political problem. As long as a Member State, which accounts for a sizeable proportion of EU employment, does not move to a continuous survey, the efforts made by the other Member States are unacceptably devalued in a European perspective.

⁽¹⁾ Commission report to EP and Council on 'Implementation on the Council Regulation (EC) No. 577/98 of a labour force in the Community', COM(2000) 895 final.

1.4. Sufficient time has now passed since Council Regulation (EC) No. 577/98 took effect (it entered into force in March 1998) to allow all Member States to make the arrangements and commitments needed fully to implement that regulation. However, as mentioned above, not all Member States have made such arrangements and commitments. Therefore, the derogation that allows Member States to limit themselves to an annual survey should be subject to a time limit.

1.5. The following amendment to the regulation is therefore proposed by the Commission:

Article 1, second paragraph is replaced by the following text:

'The survey shall be a continuous survey providing quarterly and annual results; however, during a transitional period not extending beyond 2002, Member States that are unable to implement a continuous survey shall instead carry out an annual survey, to take place in the spring.'

2. General comments

2.1. The Economic and Social Committee welcomes the Commission proposal and agrees that the derogation that allows Member States to limit themselves to an annual survey should be subject to a time limit. The Committee approves of the suggested time limit.

2.2. The Economic and Social Committee would like to reiterate what was said in its earlier opinion on the labour force survey⁽¹⁾.

2.2.1. The ESC considers that the availability of reliable and detailed information on the characteristics of the labour market, including the characteristics of employment and the nature and extent of the unemployment situation in the

(1) Opinion on the organization of a labour force sample survey in the Community, OJ C129, 27.4.1998, p. 65. Rapporteur Mr Walker (points 3.1 and 3.2).

various Member States, and on the different regions within individual Member States, is essential to the development of a coherent and coordinated strategy to reduce unemployment levels in the European Union. By the same token, it is obvious that such statistics need to be prepared on a comparable and consistent basis if they are to be of real value.'

2.2.2. 'The ESC feels that the comparability of the statistics would be greatly enhanced if all Member States were to conduct the survey on a continuous basis, as is currently the case in a majority of Member States. The Committee therefore hopes that the transitional phase during which Member States would be given the option to conduct an annual survey in the Spring will be curtailed as much as possible and that within the reasonably near future there will be a situation in which every Member State conducts a continuous survey. This should not impose an undue burden, either on the administrative departments of the Member States or on the interviewees.'

2.3. Unemployment is not an independent variable; it is a rather multifaceted socio-economic phenomenon. Hence, in addition to quarterly and annual 'accountings' of unemployment, adequate statistical instruments presenting the complex reality of unemployment are needed.

2.3.1. Statistical data collection has to be considered not simply as a neutral accounting instrument, but as an instrument of analysis and as an instrument of policy formulation.

2.3.2. We need constantly to evaluate the method and organisation of collecting statistical data, and not simply the sequence or the periodicity of data collection.

2.4. We also need to know, not only the causes, but also the effects of unemployment — the direct and indirect cost of unemployment, social and economic and cultural, and the causes and effects in the framework of sustainable development.

2.4.1. As sustainable development is becoming one of the main strategic goals of the EU, statistical data collection has to be supportive of sustainability, understanding social and economic phenomena, and preparing policies for their solution.

Brussels, 28 November 2001.

*The President
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