

Proposal for a Council Directive establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation

(2000/C 177 E/07)

(Text with EEA relevance)

COM(1999) 565 final — 1999/0225(CNS)

(Submitted by the Commission on 6 January 2000)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 13 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Parliament,

Having regard to the opinion of the Economic and Social Committee,

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of Regions,

Whereas:

- (1) The European Union is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, principles which are common to all Member States. In accordance with Article 6(2) of the Treaty on European Union, the Union should respect fundamental rights as guaranteed by the European Convention for the protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, as general principles of Community law.
- (2) Article 13 of the Treaty establishing the European Community empowers the Council to take appropriate actions to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or beliefs, disability, age or sexual orientation.
- (3) The principle of equal treatment on grounds of sex is well established by a considerable body of Community law, in particular in Council Directive 76/207/EEC of 9 February 1976 on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions⁽¹⁾. The Treaty establishing the European Community empowers the Council to adopt measures to ensure the application of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation.

(4) The right to equality before the law and protection against discrimination for all persons constitutes a universal right recognised by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UN Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, of which all Member States are signatories; whereas ILO Convention No 111 prohibits discrimination in the field of employment and occupation.

(5) The Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers recognises the importance of combating every form of discrimination, including the need to take appropriate action for the social and economic integration of elderly and disabled people.

(6) The Treaty establishing the European Community includes among its objectives the promotion of coordination between employment policies of the Member States. To this end, a new employment chapter was incorporated in the Treaty establishing the European Community, as a means of developing a coordinated European strategy for employment to promote a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce.

(7) The 1999 Employment Guidelines agreed by the European Council at Vienna on 11 and 12 December 1998 stress the need to foster conditions for a more active participation in the labour market by formulating a coherent set of policies aimed at combating discrimination on grounds of disability and race or ethnic origin. The European Council Conclusions of Vienna emphasise the need to pay particular attention to supporting older workers, in order to increase their participation in the labour force.

(8) Employment and occupation are key elements in guaranteeing equal opportunities for all and strongly contribute to the full participation of citizens in economic, cultural and social life.

(9) Discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation may undermine the achievement of the objectives of the Treaty establishing the European Community, in particular the attainment of a high level of employment and of social protection, the raising of the standard of living and quality of life, economic and social cohesion and solidarity, and the fostering of the free movement of persons.

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 39, 14.2.1976, p. 40.

- (10) To this end any direct or indirect discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation as regards the areas covered by this Directive should be prohibited throughout the Community. Harassment which produces an intimidating, hostile, offensive or disturbing work environment in relation to any discriminatory ground should be deemed to be discrimination.
- (11) The provision of measures to accommodate the needs of disabled people at the workplace play an important role in combating discrimination on grounds of disability.
- (12) A difference of treatment may be justified where a characteristic related to a discriminatory ground constitutes a genuine occupational qualification.
- (13) The European Union in its Declaration on the status of churches and non-confessional organisations, attached to the Amsterdam Treaty, has explicitly recognised that it respects and does not prejudice the status which churches and religious associations or communities enjoy in the Member States under national law and that it equally respects the status of philosophical and non-confessional organisations.
- (14) The prohibition of discrimination should be without prejudice to the maintenance or adoption of measures providing for specific advantages to prevent, reduce or eliminate inequalities associated with the abovementioned discriminatory grounds.
- (15) The provisions of this Directive lay down minimum requirements, thus giving the Member States the option of introducing or maintaining more favourable provisions. The implementation of this Directive should not serve to justify any regression in relation to the situation which already prevails in each Member State.
- (16) It is important to ensure that persons who have been subject to discrimination have adequate means of legal protection. Associations or legal entities must also be empowered to exercise the right of defence on behalf of any victim.
- (17) The effective implementation of the principle of equality requires adequate judicial protection in civil matters against victimisation and an adjustment of the general rules on the burden of proof.
- (18) Member States should provide adequate information on the provisions adopted pursuant to this Directive.
- (19) Member States should promote social dialogue between the social partners to address different forms of discrimination in the workplace and to combat them.
- (20) Member States should take the necessary measures to ensure that any laws, regulations, administrative provisions, collective agreements, internal rules of undertakings or rules governing independent occupations, professions, or trade organisations which are contrary to the principle of equal treatment should be declared null and void, or should be amended.
- (21) Member States should provide for effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions in case of breaches of the obligations under this Directive.
- (22) In accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality as set out in Article 5 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, the objectives of this Directive, namely the creation, within the Community, of a level playing-field as regards equality in employment and occupation, cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of the scale and impact of the proposed action, be better achieved by the Community. This Directive confines itself to the minimum required in order to achieve those objectives and does not go beyond what is necessary for that purpose,

HAS ADOPTED THIS DIRECTIVE:

CHAPTER I

GENERAL PROVISIONS

Article 1

Purpose

The purpose of this Directive is to put into effect in the Member States the principle of equal treatment as regards access to employment and occupation, including promotion, vocational training, employment conditions and membership of certain organisations, of persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

Article 2

Concept of discrimination

1. For the purposes of this Directive, the principle of equal treatment shall mean that there shall be no direct or indirect discrimination whatsoever between persons on any of the grounds referred to in Article 1.

2. For the purposes of paragraph 1:

(a) direct discrimination shall be taken to occur where, on any of the grounds referred to in Article 1, one person is treated less favourably than another is, has been or would be treated.

(b) indirect discrimination shall be taken to occur where an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice is liable to affect adversely a person or persons to whom any of the grounds referred to in Article 1 applies, unless that provision, criterion or practice is objectively justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving it are appropriate and necessary.

3. Harassment of a person related to any of the discriminatory grounds and areas referred to in Article 1 which has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, offensive or disturbing environment, shall be deemed to be discrimination within the meaning of paragraph 1.

4. In order to guarantee compliance with the principle of equal treatment for persons with disabilities, reasonable accommodation shall be provided, where needed, to enable such persons to have access to, participate in, or advance in employment, unless this requirement creates an undue hardship.

Article 3

Material scope

This Directive shall apply to:

- (a) conditions for access to employment, self-employment and occupation, including selection criteria and recruitment conditions, whatever the sector or branch of activity and at all levels of the professional hierarchy, including promotion;
- (b) access to all types and to all levels, of vocational guidance, vocational training, advanced vocational training and retraining;
- (c) employment and working conditions, including dismissals and pay;
- (d) membership of and involvement in an organisation of workers or employers, or any other organisation whose members carry on a particular profession, including the benefits provided for by such organisations.

Article 4

Genuine occupational qualifications

1. Notwithstanding Article 2(1) and (2), Member States may provide that a difference of treatment which is based on a characteristic related to any of the discriminatory grounds referred to in Article 1 shall not constitute discrimination where, by reason of the nature of the particular occupational activities concerned or of the context in which they are carried out, such a characteristic constitutes a genuine occupational qualification.

2. Member States may provide that, in the case of public or private organisations which pursue directly and essentially the aim of ideological guidance in the field of religion or belief with respect to education, information and the expression of opinions, and for the particular occupational activities within those organisations which are directly and essentially related to that aim, a difference of treatment based on a relevant characteristic related to religion or belief shall not constitute discrimination where, by reason of the nature of these activities, the characteristic constitutes a genuine occupational qualification.

Article 5

Justification of differences of treatment on grounds of age

Notwithstanding point (a) of Article 2(2), the following differences of treatment, in particular, shall not constitute direct discrimination on grounds of age, if they are objectively and reasonably justified by a legitimate aim and are appropriate and necessary to the achievement of that aim:

- (a) the prohibition on access to employment or the provision of special working conditions to ensure the protection of young people and older workers;
- (b) the fixing of a minimum age as a condition of eligibility for retirement or invalidity benefits;
- (c) the fixing of different ages for employees or groups or categories of employees for entitlement to retirement or invalidity benefits on grounds of physical or mental occupational requirements;
- (d) the fixing of a maximum age for recruitment which is based on the training requirements of the post in question or the need for a reasonable period of employment before retirement;
- (e) the establishment of requirements concerning the length of professional experience;
- (f) the establishment of age limits which are appropriate and necessary for the pursuit of legitimate labour market objectives.

Article 6

Positive action

This Directive shall be without prejudice to the right of the Member States to maintain or adopt measures intended to prevent or compensate for disadvantages concerning persons to whom any of the discriminatory grounds referred to in Article 1 apply.

*Article 7***Minimum requirements**

1. Member States may introduce or maintain provisions which are more favourable to the protection of the principle of equal treatment than those laid down in this Directive.
2. The implementation of this Directive shall under no circumstances constitute grounds for a reduction in the level of protection against discrimination already afforded by Member States in the fields covered by this Directive.

CHAPTER II

REMEDIES AND ENFORCEMENT*Article 8***Defence of rights**

1. Member States shall ensure that judicial and/or administrative procedures for the enforcement of obligations under this Directive are available to all persons who consider themselves wronged by failure to apply the principle of equal treatment to them, even after the employment relationship has ended.
2. Member States shall ensure that associations, organisations or other legal entities may pursue any judicial and/or administrative procedure provided for the enforcement of obligations under this Directive on behalf of the complainant with his or her approval.

*Article 9***Burden of proof**

1. Member States shall take such measures as are necessary, in accordance with their national judicial systems, to ensure that, when persons who consider themselves wronged because the principle of equal treatment has not been applied to them establish, before a court or other competent authority, facts from which it may be presumed that there has been direct or indirect discrimination, it shall be for the respondent to prove that there has been no breach of the principle of equal treatment.
2. Paragraph 1 shall not prevent Member States from introducing rules of evidence which are more favourable to plaintiffs.
3. Paragraph 1 shall not apply to criminal procedures, unless otherwise provided by the Member States.
4. Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 shall apply to any legal proceedings commenced in accordance with Article 8(2).

*Article 10***Victimisation**

Member States shall introduce into their national legal systems such measures as are necessary to protect employees against

dismissal or other adverse treatment by the employer as a reaction to a complaint within the undertaking or to any legal proceedings aimed at enforcing compliance with the principle of equal treatment.

*Article 11***Dissemination of information**

1. Member States shall ensure that adequate information on the provisions adopted pursuant to this Directive is provided to vocational training and educational bodies and is adequately disseminated within the workplace.
2. Member States shall ensure that competent public authorities are informed by appropriate means as regards all national measures taken pursuant to this Directive.

*Article 12***Social dialogue**

1. Member States shall take adequate measures to promote the social dialogue between the two sides of industry with a view to fostering equal treatment, through the monitoring of workplace practices, collective agreements, codes of conduct, research or exchange of experiences and good practices.
2. Member States shall encourage the two sides of the industry to conclude, at the appropriate level, including at undertaking level, agreements laying down anti-discrimination rules in the fields referred to in Article 3 which fall within the scope of collective bargaining. These agreements shall respect this Directive and the relevant national implementing measures.

CHAPTER III

FINAL PROVISIONS*Article 13***Compliance**

Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that:

- (a) any laws, regulations and administrative provisions contrary to the principle of equal treatment are abolished;
- (b) any provisions contrary to the principle of equal treatment which are included in collective agreements, individual contracts of employment, internal rules of undertakings or rules governing the independent occupations and professions and workers' and employers' organisations, are declared null and void or are amended.

*Article 14***Penalties**

Member States shall lay down the rules on penalties applicable to infringements of the national provisions adopted pursuant to this Directive and shall take all measures necessary to ensure that they are implemented. The penalties provided for must be effective, proportionate and dissuasive. The Member States shall notify those provisions to the Commission by the date specified in Article 15 at the latest and shall notify it without delay of any subsequent amendment affecting them.

*Article 15***Implementation**

Member States shall adopt the laws, regulations and administrative provisions necessary to comply with this Directive by 31 December 2002. They shall forthwith inform the Commission thereof.

When Member States adopt those provisions, they shall contain a reference to this Directive or be accompanied by such a reference on the occasion of their official publication.

Member States shall determine how such reference is to be made.

*Article 16***Report**

Member States shall communicate to the Commission, within two years of the date mentioned in Article 15, all the information necessary for the Commission to draw up a report to the European Parliament and the Council on the application of this Directive.

*Article 17***Entry into force**

This Directive shall enter into force on the twentieth day following that of its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*.

*Article 18***Addressees**

This Directive is addressed to the Member States.
