



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Country Specific Recommendations - employment and social policy aspects

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I will focus on the employment and social policy aspects of this year's Country Specific Recommendations.

Clearly, the Commission wants Member States to take decisive action to tackle the current unacceptable levels of youth unemployment. This is one of Europe's most urgent economic and social problems.

More specifically, Member States must urgently take concrete steps to implement the Youth Guarantee, as agreed by the Council of Ministers. Under the Youth Guarantee every Member State should ensure that all young people under the age 25 receive an offer of a job, continued education, a traineeship or an apprenticeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

The Commission has proposed Recommendations to twelve Member States with the most serious youth unemployment problems to put in place the structures to make the Youth Guarantee a reality as soon as possible.

We have also proposed recommendations to nineteen Member States to facilitate school-to-work transitions. Specifically, we want these Member States to promote special incentives for companies to hire young people, to increase the availability of apprenticeships and work-based learning and to reduce excessively high school drop-out rates and early school leaving.

The sad fact is that if young people leave school early or without qualifications, they are less likely to find a job.

Another urgent economic and social problem is long-term unemployment. The longer people remain out of work, the more difficult it is for them to get a job. We have proposed Recommendations to a number of Member States to provide more effective, targeted support to the long term unemployed and to those furthest away from the labour market. Such active labour market policies should include personalised job-search assistance to bridge the gap between people that have particular skills and employers looking for those skills and organising training and apprenticeships adapted to the needs of the individuals concerned.

In order to implement our recommendations on both youth unemployment and long-term unemployment Member States have to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their Public Employment Services.

The current crisis has put more people, and especially children, at risk of poverty. We have proposed Recommendations to ten Member States to strengthen social safety nets in order to tackle poverty by enhancing the adequacy, efficiency and effectiveness of benefits and services.

For five Member States [RO, BU, SK, HU and CZ] we propose recommendations to improve the integration of the Roma population, notably by implementing their National Roma Integration Strategies.

Against the background of ageing populations, it is vital to reform health and long-term care. Member States should improve the cost-effectiveness of their health and care systems, refocus from institutional to home care and put more emphasis on prevention and independent living. These reforms should not only ensure financial sustainability, but also ensure adequate access to services or, as appropriate, improved coverage.

It is clear that EU Structural Funds, and in particular the European Social Fund, have a critical role to play when it comes to helping Member States to implement these proposed Recommendations. This is why we insist so much on the need to give the European Social Fund a substantial share of EU Structural Funds within the Multiannual Financial Framework. For example, the Member States called upon to implement a Youth Guarantee are also, very broadly, those with the most budgetary difficulties.

We now look to the Member States to act upon these proposed recommendations without delay. In particular, I am looking forward to a substantive discussion with the Council of Employment and Social Affairs Ministers on 20th June in preparation of their submission to the European Council.