



HEADLINES

EU / Employment: Negotiations on the Revision of Working Time Directive continue

On 17 March, representatives from the Council and Parliament met in the Conciliation Committee to reach an agreement on the revision of the Working Time Directive. The Directive, aimed at improving the overall conditions of workers throughout the European Union, came to a standstill when European Parliament voted against the existing opt-out clause with regards to the 48 hour working week. The opt-out is used by roughly 15 Member States and functions as a flexible solution to sectors facing difficulties maintaining the maximum working hours, e.g. healthcare. Although the Czech Presidency stressed the importance of coming to a balanced Directive, with regards to all issues, European Parliament sees the abolition of the opt-outs as the key issue. So far, agreement between Council and European Parliament has not been reached.

ESBA OPINION

In the past, ESBA expressed serious concern about the European Parliament's decision to prevent people from working the hours they choose and describes the Directive as a further restriction on how businesses run. Particularly in light of the current economic crisis, ESBA believes it is important for the labour market to retain its flexibility and for small businesses to be able to work as hard as they need to put the economy back on track. Putting in place prohibitions to the number of hours employers will not lead to these ends.

Removing the opt-outs from the working time directive constitutes a serious blow to small businesses, which are at the forefront responding to the current crisis. The opt-out is a sensible way of allowing decisions about working patterns to be made nationally, and currently 14 countries use the opt-out allowing employees and employers make the decision which is right for them on working hours and working culture.

To read more about the Working Time Directive, please click [here](#)

IN BRIEF

EU / Employment: Short Time Working in times of economic crisis

In light of the economic crisis, short time working is increasingly becoming a realistic option for companies as an alternative for redundancies. A cut in wages as well as working hours enables people to keep their jobs, albeit at lower pay, the solution seems to be acceptable to the majority of the workers who have to deal with the cutbacks. A numbers of governments subsidize the schemes, allowing the loss in wages to be compensated by unemployment benefit for hours not worked. Although this might be considered as a form of state-aid, both Industry unions and the European Commission approve of the schemes as a good alternative to unemployment, stressing that these are extraordinary times. Critics of the scheme express fears that lack of full compensation of workers in some countries may reduce consumer spending which may extend the crisis.

To access data on shares of economic short-time workers among total employment, please click [here](#)

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EU / European Council: Heads of State present measures against economic crisis

On 19 and 20 March, Heads of State and Government gathered in Brussels to discuss measures against the economic crisis. In its conclusions, the European Council underlined the importance of a fully operational single market. It urged all Member States to act promptly and take concrete measures concerning the removal of barriers, as well as the prevention of new ones coming into existence. Furthermore, focusing on SMEs, improved framework conditions for industry and further reduction of administrative burdens were high on the Council's agenda.

To read the Presidency Conclusions, please click [here](#)

EU / Employment: Commission campaign to reduce gender pay gap

In the context of International Women's Day on 8 March, the European Commission has launched a campaign attempting to combat the existing gender pay gap throughout the European Union. Although 'equal pay for equal work' is one of the EU's founding principles, the gender pay gap, reflecting discrimination and inequality in the labor market, has not yet been closed. Women's work is often valued less than work done by men which is reflected in terms of payment and has serious implications such as a risk of poverty at pension age. The campaign seeks to raise awareness of and tackle the issue of the gender pay gap in the European Union.

To read more about the gender pay gap, please click [here](#)

PUBLICATIONS

European Commission: "Practical Guide to EU Funding Opportunities for Research and Innovation"

The "Practical Guide to EU Funding Opportunities for Research and Innovation", published by the European Commission, informs interested parties how to obtain support for research, innovation and entrepreneurial ideas. The guide presents a route to relevant funding sources, offers a checklist for EU innovation & research funding, provides information on the 7th research framework programme, the competitiveness & innovation framework programme and structural funds.

To download this publication, please click [here](#)

OECD: "Human Capital. How what you know shapes your life"

The OECD publication "Human capital. How what you know shapes your life" sheds light on the increasing economic and social importance of human capital - our education, skills, competencies, and knowledge. The study argues that economic success for individuals and national economies is increasingly reliant on the quality of human capital, as economies in developed countries shift away from manufacturing. In addition, the new OECD book explains how countries across the OECD area are responding to the challenge of raising their levels of human capital.

To download this publication, please click [here](#)

OECD: "Principles for Integrity in Public Procurement"

The set of principles which is outlined in the new OECD publication "Principles for Integrity in Public Procurement" serves as an instrument to promote good governance in the entire procurement cycle, from needs assessment to contract management. In addition to the principles, the publication includes a checklist for implementing the framework throughout the entire public procurement cycle.

To download the publication, please click [here](#)

CONSULTATIONS

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NEW

Online consultation on the future of financial markets supervision

Consultation closes 10 April 2009

The European Commission is launching a consultation on the improvement of supervision for the financial services sector. Following the report of the high-level group on financial supervision in the EU chaired by Jacques de Larosière, published on 25 February 2009, the Commission has announced in its Communication of 4 March 2009 "Driving European Recovery" that it intends to come forward by the end of May 2009 with a Communication setting out its proposals on the future of the EU supervisory architecture followed by specific legislative measures in autumn 2009. Before doing so, it wishes to take into account the views of all interested parties.

To access the consultation, please click [here](#)

ONGOING:

Online consultation on Administrative Burdens Reduction

Ongoing

The European Commission has launched an online consultation on the reduction of administrative burdens. Inspired by examples of Best Practice in Belgium and the Netherlands, the consultation invites entrepreneurs to identify unnecessary red tape in order to help the EU improve the quality of its legislation. The consultation is part of the Action Programme to reduce admin burdens on businesses in the EU by 25% in 2012.

To access the online consultation, please click [here](#)

COMING UP

EU Institutions: Important dates

1-2 April 2009	European Parliament Plenary Session, Brussels
5 April 2009	Summit EU-USA
21-24 April 2009	European Parliament Plenary Session, Strasbourg

Other SME related events

20-21 April 2009	In the context of the European Year of Creativity and Innovation 2009, the Committee of the Regions and the European Commission will organise a two-day forum on "Europe's Creative Regions and Cities", taking place in Brussels. For more information, please go to: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/itemlongdetail.cfm?item_id=2021&tpa_id=201&lang=en
27 April 2009	European Commission conference on "Making IPR work for SMEs"; taking place in Brussels. For more information, please go to: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/enterprise_policy/industry/ipr_conference.htm
6-14 May 2009	First European SME Week to promote entrepreneurship across Europe and to inform entrepreneurs about support available for them at European, national

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and local level. For more information, please go to:
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/entrepreneurship/sme-week/index_en.htm

7-8 May 2009

“Research conference to forge links between science and industry”, organised by the European Commission; taking place in Prague. For more information, please go to:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/itemlongdetail.cfm?item_id=2918&tpa_id=201&lang=en

14 May 2009

Conference on “The Small Business Act for Europe: Business Without Barriers” & “European Enterprise Awards Ceremony 2009”, organised by the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions; taking place in Prague; for more information, please go to: <http://www.sme-conference-prague.eu/>