

Brussels, 27 June 2007

Flexicurity: getting more people into good jobs

The Commission today proposes the establishment of common principles of flexicurity to promote more and better jobs by combining flexibility and security for workers and companies. Flexicurity strategies can help modernise European labour markets and better address the opportunities and challenges of globalisation. They include at the same time flexible and reliable contractual arrangements, active labour market policies, comprehensive lifelong learning strategies and modern social protection systems providing adequate income support during periods of unemployment. The Commission also sets out a number of typical pathways to help Member States draw up their own national strategies for flexicurity and learn from each other's experiences and best practices. In line with the EU's Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs, the common principles of flexicurity aim to ensure that more Europeans get the most out of today's fast-changing global economy.

Vladimír Špidla, EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities said, "Flexicurity is the best way to ensure that European citizens can enjoy a high level of employment security so they can find a good job at every stage of their active life in a rapidly changing economic environment." He added: "Flexicurity provides a balance between rights and responsibilities, for workers and companies as well as for public authorities. The flexicurity approach is about creating the positive interplay between flexibility and security. We now need social partners to work together on making sure this is a winner for Europe's economies, workers and businesses."

Europe needs to find new ways of making its labour markets more flexible while providing employment security at the same time. Flexicurity is a comprehensive approach to labour market policy which combines sufficient flexibility in contractual arrangements – to allow firms and employees to cope with change - with the provision of security for workers to stay in their jobs or be able to find a new one quickly with the assurance of an adequate income in between jobs. The Communication highlights that it can be positive for both workers and companies. Flexibility is about making sure workers can move easily into a job, and between jobs; it covers external and internal flexicurity within the same company. Security is not just for workers but for businesses too: improving workers' skills also provides additional security and benefits for an employer. Flexibility and security can be mutually reinforcing.

The Communication, based on extensive consultations with key stakeholders, identifies the main flexicurity policy areas (flexicurity components) and sets out proposals for eight common flexicurity principles. These principles are reference points that Member States should agree on. They include:

1. Reinforcing the implementation of the EU's strategy for Jobs and Growth and strengthening the European social models;
2. Striking a balance between rights and responsibilities;
3. Adapting flexicurity to different circumstances, needs and challenges of the Member States;
4. Reducing the gap between those in non-standard, sometimes precarious contractual arrangements on the one hand (so-called 'outsiders'), and those in permanent, full-time jobs on the other (the 'insiders');
5. Developing internal and external flexicurity, by helping employees move up the career ladder (internal) as well as across the job market (external);
6. Supporting gender equality and promoting equal opportunities for all;
7. Producing balanced policy packages to promote a climate of trust between social partners, public authorities and other stakeholders;
8. Ensuring a fair distribution of the costs and benefits of flexicurity policies, and contribution to sound and financially sustainable budgetary policies.

The Communication also presents four typical "pathways" for Member States to develop their own flexicurity strategies suited to their national challenges. Clearly there is no one size fits all - labour market situations vary greatly across the EU. For example, in some countries, efforts might focus on solutions within companies, in others the focus could be more on transitions between jobs. These pathways are designed on the basis of the actual real experiences and policies of the Member States, which were analysed by a Group of Experts on flexicurity and its rapporteur, Professor Ton Wilthagen.

The separate policy aspects covered by flexicurity and its components are not new - but flexicurity strategies present a new, integrated approach whereby the different elements can be mutually supporting.

The EU financial instruments for Cohesion – and in particular the European Social Fund for the 2007-2013 programming period – can contribute significantly to the budgetary aspects of flexicurity, for example through training at company level, lifelong learning programmes, or the promotion of entrepreneurship.

A recent Eurobarometer survey (Autumn 2006) showed that European citizens understand and accept the need for adaptation and change that characterises flexicurity: 72% feel that employment contracts should be more flexible so as to create more jobs; 76% believe a job for life is a thing of the past; and 88% share the view that lifelong learning improves chances of finding a job quickly.

Flexicurity has a prominent place in the Integrated Guidelines agreed unanimously by Member States and which underpin the implementation at both European and national level of the Lisbon Growth and Jobs Strategy. Flexicurity can only succeed with the involvement of all stakeholders. The Commission encourages Member States to work with social partners with a view to including their approaches to flexicurity in their National Reform Programmes under the Strategy.

For more information see:

Link to communication

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52007DC0359:EN:NOT>

Link to Expert report which has examples of flexicurity in 27 Member States

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/employment_strategy/flex_meaning_en.htm

Background:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/employment_strategy/flex_meaning_en.htm

Stakeholder conference on flexicurity, April 20th 2007:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/employment_strategy/flex_stakeholderconference_en.htm