

14.5 million employees to benefit from improved information and consultation rights

The European Commission today adopted a legislative proposal to improve the role of European Works Councils in informing and consulting employees. European Works Councils (EWCs) currently operate in 820 major companies across the EU, covering some 14.5 million employees.

Vladimír Špidla, EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities said: "We need to make sure European Works Councils can play their full role in managing the process of globalisation in a balanced way and help citizens benefit from the opportunities it offers. This is one of our priorities in the context of the renewed Social Agenda."

"For the sake of both workers and companies, European Works Councils need to be an effective instrument to foster transnational social dialogue in large enterprises, to improve corporate governance and to anticipate and manage change in a socially responsible way. With this proposal, they will be consulted in more cases of transnational restructuring," he added.

The proposal aims to add value to European Works Councils while making employees' transnational information and consultation rights more effective. The proposal also aims at increasing the take-up of European Works Councils while ensuring legal certainty during their set-up and the execution of their tasks. Moreover, simplification, better coherence and interplay between Community legislative instruments on workers' information and consultation will result from the initiative.

The proposed amendments to Directive 94/45/EC, which are to be examined by the European Parliament and the Council under the co-decision procedure, are aimed at:

- Further specifying the concepts of information and consultation;
- Defining the competences of European Works Councils and linking the national and European levels of information and consultation;
- Adapting the fall-back rules, which are used as benchmarks in defining negotiated and adapted rules at company level;
- Providing training for employee representatives, introducing a duty for them to report back to the workers and recognising the role of trade unions;
- Adapting European Works Councils in the event of significant change in the structure of companies.

Company agreements

Meanwhile, the Commission has also issued a new report today on transnational company agreements. These are texts concluded between management and workers' representatives in companies located in several countries for which no legal framework currently exists.

The report finds that the number of these initiatives is rapidly increasing: around 150 such texts have been concluded in 90 companies covering around 7.5 million employees since 2000, on issues ranging from managing restructuring to equal opportunities, fundamental rights, training and health and safety standards.

While the Commission believes that these agreements can help anticipate and manage change in a socially responsible way, questions have been raised about their transparency, legal nature, involvement of stakeholders and dispute resolution mechanisms. The report therefore is intended as an input for an open debate on the issue with all relevant stakeholders, namely by setting up an expert group and providing supporting measures.

Social partners' agreement on telework

Meanwhile, the Commission has also issued a report today on a major agreement by European employers' and workers' representatives on telework – or distance working.

The framework agreement, signed in 2002, put in place a series of rules and guarantees both for teleworkers and employers. Six years later, the agreement has been a success: social partners in most European countries have developed rules and tools to use this new form of work to the advantage of both workers and employers.

The agreement has a real added value, as only two Member States already had a comprehensive set of rules on telework prior to the EU agreement. The key provisions of the agreement have now been implemented in 19 Member States and partially in a further two. Work will continue in the remaining six, most of which have relatively recent structures for social dialogue.

Around 8% of the European workforce reported in 2005 that they were teleworking from home for at least a quarter of their working time, while 2% do it full-time.

Further information: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/labour_law

[IP/08/1070](#): Commission proposes Renewed Social Agenda to empower and help people in 21st century Europe

[MEMO/08/468](#)

Proposal for a Directive:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=458&langId=en>

Staff working document on transnational company agreements

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=462&langId=en>

Framework agreement by European social partners on telework

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/news/2002/oct/teleworking_agreement_en.pdf

Commission report on implementation of the agreement

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=463&langId=en>