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STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION - SYNOPSIS REPORT

Accompanying the document

REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

on the evaluation of the Council Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market

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CONTEXT – COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION ON LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

The 2016 Council Recommendation on the integration of long-term unemployed into the labour market stipulates that the Commission shall *'evaluate, in cooperation with the member states and after consulting the stakeholders concerned, the actions taken in response to this recommendation and report to the council by 15 February 2019 on the results of that evaluation'.*[1]

The goal of the stakeholder consultation was to collect data, experiences and opinions on the Recommendation's key criteria from relevant groups and the public. This is in line with the Better Regulation guidelines[2]. This report summarises the consultations and their main results.

Evaluation Roadmap

The Commission invited interested parties to provide feedback on the Evaluation Roadmap[3], available online from 29 June 2017 to 27 July 2017. This yielded six responses: four from NGOs, one from a business' association and one indicated 'Other'. Comments related to the Recommendation itself, and included calls to focus more on quality job creation, to involve Work Integration Social Enterprises, civil society organisations and to increase Member State cooperation and were reflected in the evaluation work.

Open Public Consultation

An open public consultation (OPC) for interested citizens and stakeholders was open on Commission's online consultation platform in all 24 official EU languages except Irish, from 2 May 2018 to 31 July 2018. It yielded 482 responses, from 205 individuals and 277 organisations. Respondents from Bulgaria were overrepresented in the OPC as they represented 48% of the total sample. 75% of respondents answered that the Recommendation is still relevant in addressing long-term-unemployment (where agreement was higher among organisations than among individuals). When excluding the Bulgarian sample, the relevance of the Recommendation was viewed more positive. Including Bulgaria, 40% of respondents replied that the EU should also pursue other measures to help the long-term unemployed find a job, while when excluding the Bulgarian responses, this changes to 66%.

The majority of respondents thought the measures of the last two years improved for people with low skills or qualifications and those with mental and/or psychological disabilities. The majority of respondents disagreed that improvements were made for other vulnerable groups among the long-term unemployed.

A third of respondents replied that there were synergies between EU policies helping long-term unemployed. 89% of the respondents found it useful having an EU policy targeted to long-term-unemployment. Most respondents said that the Recommendation resulted in some changes in policies (prioritisation/funding/acceleration of measures). 23 complementary documents were received, mostly resembling position papers of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). Three stressed the importance of integrated services and four noted that outreach

[1] Council Recommendation on the integration of the long term unemployed into the labour market of 15 February 2016 (2016/C 67/01)
[2] Better Regulation Guidelines, SWD (2017) 350
[3] https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/initiatives/ares-2017-3234290_en

towards people with disabilities could be improved. Three others mentioned that in-depth intervention should happen as early as possible, and that the 18 months cut-off period is too late. Three CSOs noted that implementation could have been more effective with dedicated funding, and one criticised that civil society organisations were not assigned a role. Two mentioned the importance of including a skills element. One Finnish paper resembled a good practice and was used as an example in the Staff Working Document.

Seminars with national long-term unemployment contact points

Three seminars with national contact points were held. These contact points were nominated by Member States following the 2016 EMCO review on long-term unemployment. The objectives of the seminars were to obtain informal input on the evaluation, in particular the supporting study, and to share lessons learned in implementation. The first seminar, held on 19 March 2018, focused on the supporting study and the data collection method. The second seminar, held on 28 June 2018, presented the mapping exercise of the study, and two examples of socially innovative projects from civil society. The last seminar, held on 6 November 2018, facilitated discussion on challenges in implementation. The seminars helped refine the mapping exercise and clarify definitions used for the evaluation.

Strategic Dialogue Meeting with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

A strategic dialogue meeting was held with EU level CSOs on 15 November 2018[4] to receive feedback from organisations directly or indirectly working with or representing the long-term unemployed. The meeting included group discussions on the role of CSOs, current practices, and recommendations for the future.

All participants agreed on the relevance of guiding service providers in helping long-term unemployed. The Recommendation's approach was seen as holistic and inclusive. The recurring challenges were that the Recommendation lacked dedicated funding, thus limiting its effectiveness, and that the cut-off time of 18 months for JIAs was too long. Participants also stressed that the Recommendation left little room for innovation as its approach was quite strict. They called for more qualitative indicators for monitoring, on the services provided and the quality of jobs. They also stressed the lack of after-placement mentoring and training. Lastly, participants expressed concern that CSOs were not given any role.

Strategic Dialogue Meeting with Social Partners

On 28 June 2018 EU level Social Partners discussed the Recommendation. Business Europe called for more focus on employing the inactive. ETUC emphasised their disappointment that the role of trade unions was not recognised, emphasising their role in providing training and support in the workplace.

Consultation of the European Network of Public Employment Services

The PES Network contributed extensively to monitoring and conducted a capacity survey among their PES offices dedicated to the implementation of the Recommendation, as detailed

[4] Strategic Dialogue Meeting with CSOs held on 15 November 2018, report forthcoming

under in Annex 1. Between 29 June and 9 July the Advisers For European PES Affairs were consulted on the report presenting the results of this survey, which eventually led to an ex-post testing of the interpretation of its findings.

Consultation of the European Social Fund Committee

The ESF Committee's Informal Technical Working Group was consulted on 5 October 2018. An ad-hoc report[5] on the use of the ESF to support the long-term unemployed was produced, feeding into the evaluation.

Consultation of the Social Protection Committee

The Social Protection Committee (SPC) was consulted on 30 October 2018 and gave its consent to using its 2018 thematic report[6] for the evaluation.

Targeted interviews on EU level

Interviews on EU level were executed in the framework of the supporting study with nine stakeholders, including three civil society organisations[7], four social partners[8], and two public authorities.[9] Interviewees were asked their opinion on the Recommendation's relevance, effectiveness, coherence and EU added value.

There was consensus among all interviewed stakeholders that the Recommendation was and is still relevant in fighting long-term unemployment. Employers' organisations and CSOs emphasised the relevance of the individualised approach and coordination of services. Two CSOs criticised the 18 months cut-off point as mentioned in the JIA, and one CSO and one social partner noted that an assessment of the specific labour market situations causing long-term unemployment within Member States was lacking. Trade unions underlined that they were given no role in the Recommendation.

Most interviewees argued that implementation of the Recommendation is a task for Member States and that the EU has a limited role. The majority argued that the EU should monitor and follow up on implementation, also pressuring Member States where limited progress has been made. Other suggestions were that the EU should help break down social stigma towards long-term unemployed (one CSO) and facilitate exchange on practices between Member States (one social partner).

One trade union thought that the Recommendation had put long-term unemployment higher on the policy agenda. CSOs argued that the Recommendation has had a positive impact. One public authority said it had harmonized approaches related to the integration of long-term unemployed persons. The majority of interviewees argued that the Recommendation was coherent with other EU policies tackling unemployment. It was noted that the use of EU funds

[5] Thematic note on the ESF and YEI support to long-term unemployed (LTU) and the implementation of Council Recommendation on integration of LTU into the labour market

[6] Social Protection Committee Thematic Reporting on 'Social services that complement active labour market inclusion measures for people of working age who are furthest away from the labour market', 2018

[7] European Network of Social Integration Enterprises (ENSIE), Eurocities and Eurodiaconia.

[8] Employers' organisations: SMEUnited, CEEP and BusinessEurope. Trade unions: ETUC

[9] Committee of Regions and European Commission – DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

could be improved, for example by using ESF to overcome PES capacity issues, as suggested by one social partner. The EU added value of the Recommendation had been to place the issue of long-term unemployment (higher) on the policy agenda and provide guidance on measures, according to most of the interviewees. One CSO argued that it could contain more minimum standards for those member states with low-developed support systems. Nevertheless, hypothetically repealing the Recommendation was seen as negative by all interviewees.

Targeted interviews conducted for the case studies

Eight case studies were conducted as part of the external supporting study[10] for Croatia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Romania and Slovakia. Information was gathered through fieldwork by the appointed national experts, supplemented by targeted interviews with stakeholders from Member States. The national long-term unemployment contact points were consulted on the results. For further information please see Annex 5: Case Studies.

Croatia

National level interviewees reported that the Recommendation was a breaking point for national policy, leading to changes in legislation and redesigning of internal procedures. This was seen by most as the EU added value of the Recommendation. However, its effectiveness varied across the measures proposed. The interviewed employers were positive on the use of financial support, but in general were not interested in partnerships related to hiring the long-term unemployed. Most stakeholders thought that the costs of implementation of the Recommendation would not be excessive, as most measures were already in place, particularly when comparing to the assumed benefit of the Recommendation (lowering long-term unemployment). Most saw synergies with national policies. More mutual learning was welcomed.

Finland

The relevance of the Recommendation was not assessed to be high apart from an increase in awareness of the opportunities for employers to hire long-term unemployed persons. The effectiveness of the Recommendation was seen as low in Finland, as all measures proposed were already in place. PES staff mentioned that there have been some incremental changes in some operational measures, but that these were not an effect of the Recommendation. All elements are in line with Finnish employment policy.

Germany

The Recommendation was deemed not relevant for Germany as it did not initiate any policy changes (all measures proposed were already in place or even more advanced). Only half of the national interviewees were aware of the Recommendation prior to the interview. Case managers in PES mentioned that there should be more freedom in ESF projects. As no measures were introduced, their effectiveness cannot be assessed.

[10] Study supporting the evaluation of the Council Recommendation on the integration of long-term unemployed into the labour market, Ramboll Management consortium for the European Commission, 2019

Greece

It seems that measures taken under the Financial Assistance Programme 2012 are in line with the policies set out in the Recommendation. They included a restructuring of PES services through modernisation, retraining of staff to provide more individual support and the set-up of Community centres. PES beneficiaries were satisfied with services provided and the individual action plan that was used. PES counsellors stressed that an individual approach is crucial, and that implementing the JIA would be beneficial. Employers and employers' associations expressed reluctance to use PES services, due to perceived bureaucratic burden or lack of flexibility. Businesses expressed disappointed at not being involved in ALMP development. Stakeholders saw EU added value in ESF funding and in knowledge sharing. At national and local level, it was noted as a concern that policies were designed top-down without much targeted measures.

Ireland

The interviewees agreed that the Recommendation remained relevant. It led to a better understanding of the target group and the identification of vulnerable groups among long-term unemployed. National level stakeholders mentioned that it confirmed measures taken prior to the Recommendation and led to increased cooperation and a more integrated approach. This was confirmed by regional level interviewees. Stakeholders felt that employer support had strengthened. Stakeholders did not report any financial consequences of the Recommendation. It was argued to be in line with other EU initiatives. The EU added value was identified as bringing a common goal to different institutions that support long-term unemployed. Stakeholders also suggested more mutual learning between Member States.

Italy

The Recommendation was seen as relevant as it raised awareness of existing issues and helped design a policy agenda to address them. However, its effectiveness was argued to be low. Local level interviewees in both regions argued that outreach and thus registration with employment services has remained low. Views from the regional and local level confirmed that customised support service differs territorially[11], with regional interviewees ascribing this to a lack of staff. Interviewees expressed that cooperation with other service providers is informal and unstructured and that employers have low incentives to build strong relationships with the PES. The measures set out in the Recommendation were reported to be coherent with national policies on labour and anti-poverty, introduced between 2012 and 2018.

Romania

The Recommendation was deemed relevant especially in terms of providing support to the most disadvantaged groups in the labour market. Its effectiveness was seen as high. Local level interviewees mentioned that although work is ongoing to develop a SPOC, none of this

[11] A regional PES officer from Lombardy stated that the individualized approach has been part of their operations since 2007, whereas actors from Marche noted that new guidelines were set out in the Customized Service Pact (Italian Job Integration Agreement) and were very novel.

has operationalised. An employer found the post-placement support offered by employment services to be relevant. People working with long-term unemployed persons noted that mediation services were effective. Stakeholders said that the Recommendation created new opportunities to better support clients. Efficiency was said to have increased due to a better coordination of services through the removal of redundant processes, improved feedback and increased customer satisfaction. Some coherence was identified with the Youth Guarantee, but not with other EU policy initiatives within Romania. The EU added value was in the mobilisation of national efforts to support long-term unemployed individuals.

Slovakia

Apart from the measure on registration, all measures proposed in the Recommendation appeared relevant for Slovakia and were viewed to be effective. According to PES staff, the most effective change was the shortening of the activation period from 24 to 18 months, although this was not acknowledged by PES clients. Interviewees stated that existing measures to register jobseekers have been further developed. Measures have been taken to introduce a SPOC, but its effectiveness is debatable, with opposing views from clients and PES officers. Employers and employers' associations were satisfied with services. The Recommendation was coherent with national policies, and helped to implement these policies on a wider scope.