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JUNE 2009

Discrimination issues during the Swedish Presidency

Current issues for the Swedish Presidency include a new Anti-Discrimination Directive, a Directive on Equality in Self-Employment and a Maternity Leave Directive, as well as a conference – the Equality Summit.

Anti-Discrimination Directive

In July 2008 the EU Commission presented a proposal for a directive to implement the principle of equal treatment for individuals regardless of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The purpose is to counteract discrimination outside the field of employment by providing the same level of protection regardless of the ground of discrimination. The current EU legislation against discrimination on the ground of sex, race or ethnic origin is today more far-reaching than the equivalent protection against discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

Directive on equal treatment of men and women who are self-employed

In October 2008, the EU Commission presented a recommendation on equal treatment of men and women who are self-employed and assisting spouses. The Commission's goal is to make it easier for women to start and run businesses and to improve the situation for assisting spouses.

The background of the proposal is that the Commission has concluded that the current Directive (86/613/EEC) on the equal treatment of men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity (including agriculture) and on the protection of self-employed women during pregnancy and motherhood, has had no significant impact. For example, the position of assisting spouses has not improved to any great extent. The EU Parliament has therefore asked the Commission to review the current Directive. The proposal is a part of the measures identified by the

Commission to make it easier to reconcile professional life, personal life and family life.

Maternity Leave Directive

At the same time, there are also ongoing negotiations to amend the Maternity Leave Directive (92/85/EEC), which addresses measures to improve security and health at the workplace for women who are pregnant, have recently given birth or who are breastfeeding. One part of the recommendation is an extended maternity leave from 14 weeks to 18 weeks, of which six are obligatory. The proposal is a part of the measures recommended by the Commission to make it easier to reconcile professional life, personal life and family life.¹

Equality Summit

The Equality Summit, a conference dealing with anti-discrimination, will be held at the Norra Latin Conference Centre in Stockholm on 16-17 November. Around 300 participants, including ministers, national equality organisations, non-government organisations on the EU level, and the social partners, are expected to attend. The Equality Summit – initiated by the EU Commission in June 2005 and previously held in Berlin and Paris – is an annual event and is being held for the third time.

The purpose of the conference is to strengthen and make more effective activities geared at eliminating all forms of discrimination and to promote equal rights and possibilities within the EU through the exchange of knowledge and experience. The overall theme for the third Equality Summit is "Cooperation for Equality". The event will include in-depth discussions on equality mainstreaming, multiple discrimination and legislation, among others.

¹ The Ministry of Employment has primary responsibility for the Maternity Leave Directive.

Roma issues

Sweden will host a meeting on Roma issues in Brussels. The situation of the Roma people will be highlighted at Equality Summit, 16-17 November in Stockholm.

Roma issues will also be highlighted at a meeting arranged in Sweden in December by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.

Background information

The Anti-Discrimination Directive, the Maternity Leave Directive and the Directive on Equality in Self-Employment are negotiated within the EU Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO).



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