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NOTE

from: Presidency

to: Delegations

Subject: Results in the fields of employment, social affairs and gender equality during the Danish Presidency

- Information from the Presidency

(Any other business item)

Delegations will find attached an information note prepared by the Presidency.

Presidency Conferences

1) **Opening Conference for the 2012 European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, 18-19 January 2012, Copenhagen**

As Presidency of the Council of the EU in the first six months of 2012 Denmark inaugurated the Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations with an opening conference in Copenhagen. The Conference focused on how innovation can bring new solutions to future challenges of an ageing society in Europe within the fields of employment, health and social affairs.

Active ageing is all about getting more out of life and staying active and in good health as you age. This is important for individuals, for the labour market, and for society at large.

Active ageing and a good health give European senior citizens the opportunity to:

- Remain active in the labour market for longer.
- Keep playing an active role in society for longer.
- Be independent and included in society.

The Presidency recommendations of the conference can be summed up as follows:

We must aim at:

- Creating inclusive, elder-friendly societies.
- Recruiting more seniors in to the labour market and retaining workers for longer.
- Creating more flexible working conditions for older people and safe and healthy workplaces.

- Supporting older people in participating actively in civil society.
- Supporting European citizens in living healthy, physically active lives.
- Combating stereotypes and empowering older people.
- Enhancing independent living by offering training and rehabilitation.
- Creating age-friendly environments.
- Making these initiatives contribute to sustainable economic growth in Europe.

2) Expert conference on Disability: "Accessibility and Participation – full inclusion of People with Disabilities in Society," 5-6 March 2012, Copenhagen

The main focus of the conference was the importance of accessibility as a means to ensure full inclusion for persons with disabilities. The conference was organised in close cooperation with the European Commission.

The conference showed examples of how to pave the way for a more inclusive society in Europe by using assistive technology and empowering approaches. We can use technology to achieve equal participation in employment and equal participation in society. The conference illustrated what can be done in the fields of inclusive education and political participation.

The Presidency recommendations of the conference can be summed as follows:

- We must work towards creating inclusive societies.
- We must work towards an accessible Europe.
- We must support participation in school, employment and society as a whole.

- We must combat stereotypes.
- We must take full advantage of the many opportunities new technology gives us.
- We must create friendly environments for everybody.
- We must aim at empowering people with disabilities.

3) Expert Conference on children's rights and the prevention of child poverty, 19 March 2012, Copenhagen

In cooperation with the European Commission, the Danish Presidency organised a conference on children's rights and the prevention of child poverty.

The majority of children in Europe grow up in safe surroundings, cared for by their parents and a network of people that help and support them during childhood. However, too many children across Europe live in poverty and are at risk of being socially marginalized. Unfortunately, child poverty is often passed down from one generation to the next, with serious implications for the individual and for society due to lost social and human capital. In this context, the Danish Presidency invited all Member States to reflect on these issues and in particular on social protection as a means to prevent the social exclusion of children at risk of poverty.

The Danish Presidency gave special attention to the following issues:

- Child poverty in EU Member States.
- Mainstreaming the child's rights approach in key policies.
- Access to family support measures, early childhood education and care (ECEC) and child participation.

The Presidency recommendations of the conference can be summed up as follows:

- We must reinforce efforts to fight child poverty.
 - We must ensure proper social protection through well described and well evaluated programmes in order to ensure that vulnerable children and families profit from the help and support they are given.
 - Early identification of families and children at risk must be a priority.
 - Professional frontline staff in schools and early childcare must play an important role in early intervention and prevention programmes.
 - We must recognise the role of the family and the need for family and network support in matters of social protection of vulnerable children.
 - We must ensure that child participation also includes the most vulnerable children.
 - We must provide adequate and well designed family benefits with access to social services and empowerment and participation of children and families.
- 4) Expert Conference on "Youth: Employment and Inclusion in Times of Crisis",
26-27 April 2012, Horsens**

In cooperation with the European Commission, the Danish Presidency organised a conference to focus on three key elements essential for European youth:

- Access to the Labour Market.
- Developing Skills and Maintaining Readiness.
- Social Inclusion.

The conference addressed three overall questions. Based on the discussions – both in workshops and in the plenary sessions – the questions can be answered as follows:

1. What measures need to be taken in order to ensure access to the labour market for young people in times of crisis?
 - A flexible education system combined with decent jobs is key to creating a balanced labour market and to improving young people's access to employment. In order to improve access, the divide between insiders and outsiders in the labour market must be reduced.
2. How can social inclusion measures enable better transitions into the labour market?
 - Our societies must do more to ensure that persons in vulnerable situations can fulfil their potential. Social inclusion should be seen as a long-term investment rather than a short-term investment – results will not show overnight. Early intervention and a strong focus on the individual are necessary tools. Social integration also leads to higher self esteem. Local schools and organisations are the key to success.
3. How do we enhance skills among young people without a job in times of crisis?
 - Vocational training and education are a pathway to ensuring the right skills. Tailored programmes and services for young people are also instrumental for success. Subsidised employment can help SME's in hiring young people. Employing young people should be seen as an investment in their future as well as an investment in society – societies that invest in job creation are also the ones that overcome the crisis.

The Presidency recommendations of the conference can be summed up as follows:

- We must prioritise early intervention.
- We must promote equal opportunities for all.

- We must all take responsibility.
- We must support young people's transition from school to work, for example through dual training systems.
- We must prevent a mismatch of skills.
- We must ensure intelligent implementation.
- We must all show flexibility and combine efforts.
- We must do everything to prevent the intergenerational transmission of social exclusion.
- We need to increase the employment rate of young people with disabilities.

5) Homelessness and Housing Rights in the Context of the Crisis - 11th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty, 10-11 May 2012, Brussels

The Presidency organised the 11th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty with the support of the European Commission and the assistance of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) and the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA). The event brought together over 150 delegates (people with direct experience of poverty and/or homelessness) from 30 countries.

Key messages on the reality of poverty, homelessness and housing exclusion:

- Poverty and homelessness can happen to anyone.
- Discrimination is a major problem.
- The crisis has created additional profiles of people at risk.

- Authorities should stop fighting the poor.
- Homelessness and housing exclusion are a cause of poverty, social exclusion, unemployment, health problems etc. as well as a symptom.
- There is a dramatic lack of access to social housing.
- The private rental market is currently insufficiently regulated or incentivised to offer a solution.
- Shelters do not provide a long-term solution to homelessness.

Key messages on the approaches and solutions needed:

- Access to housing is a basic human right, which needs to be enforced.
- Housing first approaches are worth developing.
- The complexity of homelessness and housing exclusion requires integrated solutions.
- End the disgrace of unoccupied buildings that could house millions.
- Services must be joined up at the point of contact with homeless people.
- People experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion must be involved in the decisions that affect their everyday lives.
- There is need for further development of integrated housing and homelessness strategies at local, regional, national and EU levels.

The delegates called for real homelessness and inclusion strategies in the EU, including improved data collection and a better understanding of the realities facing people at risk of homelessness and housing exclusion and backed by a strategic use of European Structural Funds. A central message from delegates was that they have had enough of measures to combat the economic crisis that create more poverty and make the 'poor' pay the price for the crisis. To reinforce this message the delegations symbolically showed a red card to the EU Institutions.

6) Expert Work Seminar on gender segregation in educational choices, 16 May, Copenhagen

The Danish Presidency organized an Expert Work Seminar on gender segregation in educational choices, with particular focus on labour market inclusion and mobility for young people. The seminar was attended by several EU experts in the field, the Danish ministries in charge of education and learning as well as relevant organisations.

The staggering level of youth unemployment in the EU today poses a grave challenge. Both women and men need to be willing to make unconventional choices in education and in the labour market – to the benefit of society as well as themselves. The EU needs to make better use of all talents – be it women or men – if we are to sustain competitiveness in the global economy. More men must obtain skills and qualifications and it must be ensured that both women and men can make free educational choices, unhampered by gender stereotypes. The seminar based their discussions on the following two points:

1. Statistics indicate that young men dominate the group of early school leavers. 16.3% of young men in the EU leave school without any qualifications as compared with only 12.5% women. Studies show that in the future the EU will have a shortage of skilled workers and those with a higher education, whereas there will be a surplus of unskilled persons. There is hence a risk of creating "a lost generation" of boys if the dropout trend is not stopped, and in order to ensure future growth and prosperity, the EU must not let this happen.

2. Additionally, women in the EU are generally under-represented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) – educational fields that hold the key to a greener and more sustainable future. In 2009, less than one third of the STEM graduates were women. This imbalance persists over time and shows very little variation between countries. Attempts to alter the situation have not succeeded. There is an urgent need to boost the number of women graduates in science, technology and mathematics if they are to be equally represented in decision-making on important issues such as climate change and sustainability.

The Seminar started with a series of presentations from the experts aimed at mapping the extent of gender segregation in educational choices across the EU. Two main topics were discussed: 1) the consequences of gender segregation in educational choices, and 2) best practises in breaking down the segregation. The two topics were debated in separate sessions with the aim of preparing recommendations on how to reduce gender segregation in educational choices, thereby improving the gender balance in the STEM fields and thus making way for a more inclusive and flexible labour market.

After a full day of presentations and discussions, the following recommendations were tabled:

- Reduce stereotypical educational choices by offering incentives and developing new and more diverse narratives about boys and girls, including in STEM and caring-related fields.
 - E.g. public awareness campaigns and recruitment campaigns.
- Increase educators' and teachers' knowledge and awareness of gender as a social category, in order to challenge stereotypical practices and gender roles.
 - E.g. include gender in the curriculum of training for educators and teachers.
- Raise awareness among parents about non-stereotypical educational and career choices through strengthened dialogue between parents and teachers.

- Promote evidence-based and non-stereotypical career and educational counselling for boys and girls so as to inform them about the full range of job options in different sectors.
 - E.g. include gender in the training material for educational and career advisers.
 - Make efforts to gender mainstream textbook material in order to reduce gender stereotypical portrayals of women and men.
 - Establish collaboration between educational institutions and labour market actors so as to encourage non-stereotypical career choices.
 - E.g. "the girls' and boys' days" organised in several EU member states.
 - Collect and systematise data on potential early school leavers in order to develop retention policies.
 - Establish male and female role models within the fields of science and technology with a view to illustrating the variety of untraditional personal and professional possibilities for women and girls within STEM fields.
- 7) Conference on "Review of the EU OSH Strategy 2007-2012 and priorities for the future", 28 and 29 June, Copenhagen.**

The conference will take stock of the results of the current EU strategy on health and safety at work and seek to establish the priorities for the future.

The participants will include European Social Partners, Government officials from EU Member States and Officials from the EU institutions.

The participants will discuss the experiences from the current strategy and receive input from representative enterprises from EU Member States. The output of the Conference will be a set of joint recommendations for priorities for the future strategy for Health and Safety at Work which will be produced in creative workshops during the Conference.

Background

The current EU OSH strategy runs until the end of 2012 and the European Commission has announced in its work programme for 2012 a communication regarding Health and Safety at work. The aim of the conference is to take stock of the results of the current EU strategy on health and safety at work and to discuss the priorities for the future. For this purpose the Conference is organized in three sessions. In the first session the preliminary results from the evaluation of the current strategy will be discussed. In the second session a number of enterprises will inspire the conference participants with their good examples on innovative OSH activities. In the last session the conference participants will discuss recommendations for new OSH priorities for the future in three parallel workshops.
