

Brussels, 4 July 2007

Commission launches public consultation on new anti-discrimination measures

The European Commission has today launched an online consultation on combating discrimination in the Member States and at EU level. The public consultation will help the Commission plan new measures to tackle discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, belief, disability, age or sexual orientation in areas beyond the job market. It comes as the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All – which aims to raise people's awareness of their rights to equal treatment and promote a broad debate on the benefits of diversity to society – enters full swing.

"We want to hear the views of as many people as possible on how to take on discrimination effectively in areas such as healthcare, education and housing," said Vladimír Špidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. "The EU already has some of the most extensive anti-discrimination laws in the world. But we want to make sure that protection against discrimination is focused where it is most needed and that the right balance is struck between everyone involved – be they individuals, employers, public authorities or associations."

A study of national anti-discrimination laws carried out for the Commission in 2006 concluded that all Member States have legal rules going beyond what is already required by European law – the Race Equality Directive and the Employment Equality Directive. However, there is a considerable variation in the type of rules in place and their scope. Higher protection tends to be granted against discrimination on the grounds of religion and sex, while discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, disability and age is less covered outside the field of employment.

A recent Eurobarometer survey (January 2007) showed that 64% of Europeans believe discrimination is widespread in their country and 51% think that not enough is being done to combat the problem.

The Commission has announced that it will put forward new initiatives in 2008 to prevent and combat discrimination outside the labour market based on gender, religion, belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Commission initiatives have to be accompanied by an Impact Assessment, which analyses the pros and cons of the various options available. The results of the public consultation will feed into this process.

The consultation is made up of a general online consultation, as well as a consultation targeted at business. It will run from July 4 to October 15 and will be accessible at the following address:

http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/consultations/index_en.htm

For more information:

Study on national measures to combat discrimination outside employment
http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/fundamental_rights/public/pubst_en.htm#stud

Anti-discrimination website
<http://ec.europa.eu/antidiscrimination>

European Year of Equal Opportunities for All
<http://equality2007.europa.eu>