Public Consultation: Discrimination – does it matter?

Background to the Consultation

In 2000, the European Union adopted legislation to ban discrimination based on race or ethnic origin in employment, training, social protection, health care, education and access to goods and service, as well housing. As a result of this law (Directive 2000/43/EC) employers, providers of social services and health care, schools and training institutions, shop owners, restaurants, discos and people letting and selling flats and houses to the public cannot discriminate against people because of their race or ethnic origin.

The European Union also adopted legislation (Directive 2000/78/EC) which bans discrimination based on disability, age, religion or belief and sexual orientation. This law applies only to work and training. For more information on these Directives and current EU anti-discrimination policy, please see: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/fundamental_rights/index_en.htm

There is currently no protection under the EU legal framework against discrimination on grounds of religion, belief, disability, age or sexual orientation which takes place outside the labour market.

The European Commission announced in April 2007 in its Annual Policy Strategy for 2008 that it planned to "… propose new initiatives designed to prevent and combat discrimination outside the labour market – based on gender, religion, belief, disability, age or sexual orientation".

The aim of this on-line consultation was to gauge public opinion on possible new initiatives in the field of anti-discrimination. The consultation ran from 4 July to 15 October 2007 and there were 5378 responses in total.

Key Findings

4881 of the responses came from individuals, with 497 from organisations. Of the individual replies, it should be noted that nearly half came from one single Member State, Germany. 35% of those who answered claimed to have suffered discrimination in education, social protection or health care on grounds of age, disability, religion or sexual orientation, the figure being 20% in terms of access to goods, services or housing. 62% of those who responded said that differences in the level of protection against discrimination offered by other Member States would influence their decision to visit or live there. In response to the question whether everyone in the European Union should have the same level of protection against discrimination on grounds of age, disability, religion and belief and sexual orientation, 90% said yes.
What next?
On 23 October 2007 the Commission adopted its Legislative Work Programme for 2008\(^1\), in which it announced its intention to propose a new legislative proposal to combat discrimination on grounds of age, disability, religion and belief and sexual orientation outside the workplace. This on-line questionnaire is one part of the consultation exercise, which includes targeted consultation of directly concerned bodies, the Commission is undertaking in preparation of its legislative proposal.