

More protection for seafarers' labour rights

The Council dealing with employment and social policy issues (EPSCO) agreed its position on an amending directive on seafarers. The directive aims to provide for a more uniform protection of seafarers' labour rights.

The new piece of legislation includes the right to information and consultation and gives seafarers the same rights as those enjoyed by workers on shore. It also takes into account the particular nature of the shipping sector.

Apart from ensuring a level playing field in the maritime sector, the directive aims to increase the quality of maritime jobs. The aim is to reverse the current decline in the numbers of young Europeans entering certain maritime professions and to retain skilled workers in the profession.

It also intends to remedy the current legal situation which gives rise to unequal treatment of the same category of workers by different member states. Currently this differs depending on whether or not they apply the exemptions and derogations allowed by the current legislation. Most member states have made little or no use of the exclusions.

The directive introduces more flexibility in the way five labour law directives are applied to seafarers, namely those on:

- insolvency
- European works councils
- information and consultation
- collective redundancies
- transfer of undertakings

These directives are aimed at land-based workers. Currently they either exempt seagoing workers and fishermen or allow member states to exclude them from their scope without express justification.

The European Parliament has not yet issued its opinion at first reading on this new piece of legislation.