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Belgian Presidency Event: “Access to Finance for SMEs: Assessment and Perspectives”

The SME Observatory of the Belgian Federal Public Service announced that, at the initiative of the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of SMEs of Belgium, Mr. David Clarinval, an event “**Access to Finance for SMEs: Assessment and Perspectives**” will be held the **13th of March from 8:45 am until 6:30 pm**. The event in question will take the form of a series of high-level panels and parallel sessions at the Egmont Palace (Place du Petit Sablon 8, 1000 Brussels) and is part of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.



What is at stake?

The Belgian Presidency is keen to engage entrepreneurs, institutional and financial stakeholders, academics and all interested attendees, with the hope to bring forward an open dialogue on a wide range of aspects tied to SME financing. In an open-minded setting, innovative solutions to challenges faced by SMEs throughout their life cycle will be explored, from self-employed individuals to start-ups and scale-ups.

This event will notably address the following topics:

- Starters, start-ups and scale-ups: Bridging the gap between diverse funding needs and availability
- How to act against late payments and their impact on SMEs?
- How can insolvency rules be improved to facilitate access to finance?
- Enhancing the intellectual property of SMEs to facilitate their access to finance.
- Sustainable finance and ESG reporting for SMEs.

Why attend?

This will be a unique opportunity to convene policymakers, experts and practitioners from both the public and private sector to evaluate the current state of EU SME access to finance policies and identify opportunities for future policies.

Registration is possible until the 6th of March.

For further information about this event, click [here](#).

European Commission gives young people a stronger voice in EU policymaking as a legacy of the European Year of Youth

Young Europeans will have greater influence on EU policies. Building on the achievements of the 2022 European Year of Youth, the European Commission announced the 10th of January

several actions that aim at giving young people a greater say in the decisions that affect them and deepen the youth dimension in a range of EU policies.

Putting the needs of young people center stage, these actions hope to engage them in a meaningful way ahead of the 2024 European elections and beyond.

Reflecting the youth perspective in EU policies

When designing EU policies, the Commission will apply a **“youth check”** which will ensure that their impact on young people is systematically factored in. This will be done by making sure that the existing Better Regulation tools, including consultations and impact assessments, are used to their maximum potential.



These tools will be complemented with several youth-specific instruments under the 2019-2027 EU Youth Strategy. Other initiatives that go hand-in-hand with the youth check include **policy dialogues between young people and Commissioners, a series of dedicated youth mainstreaming roundtables** and a **new youth stakeholders' platform that will facilitate a continuous exchange with youth organizations, youth researchers, Member State representatives and other EU**

institutions. The Commission will also strengthen the EU Youth Dialogue, the largest youth participation mechanism in Europe aligning the dialogue's focus more closely with the Commission's work programme.

Addressing young people's concerns in key policy areas

In addition, the Commission has put forward several concrete actions addressing young people's concerns in five policy fields that are of key relevance for them: **health and wellbeing, environment and climate change, education and training, international cooperation and European values, and employment and inclusion.**

As part of these measures, the Commission will, for example:

- Take forward the work towards a joint European degree in 2024, in line with the European Strategy for Universities;
- Set up a platform for regular dialogue and consultations with youth organizations worldwide through the Youth Dialogue Platform in EU external action;
- Update its quality framework for traineeships in 2024 to address issues including fair remuneration and access to social protection;
- Prepare guidelines on wellbeing in schools, to be published in 2024;
- Reach out to young people through the Commission's upcoming campaign on climate and democracy ahead of the 2024 European elections;

- Increase volunteering opportunities for young people to address the green transition, by topping-up the 2024 European Solidarity Corps call from Horizon Europe;
- Further implement the ALMA initiative (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve) to help disadvantaged young people aged 18-29 years to integrate into the society and labour market through a work-related learning experience abroad.

European Youth Week 2024

As part of the Commission's effort to bring the EU close to young people, **the 2024 European Youth Week will take place from 12th to 19th of April and will focus on democratic participation and elections, two months ahead of the European Parliament elections.** The week will celebrate and promote youth engagement, participation and active citizenship through a series of activities all over Europe.

For further information about this article, click [here](#).

Cyprus Set to Attract High-Skilled Workers with European Blue Card Scheme

In a move to bolster its workforce with skilled professionals, the government of Cyprus has given the green light to the implementation of the **European Blue Card scheme**. This strategic initiative is designed to attract high-skilled workers from non-EU countries. Blue Card, often juxtaposed with the U.S. green card, is aimed at incentivizing skilled professionals to shift base towards EU Member States.

Creating a Flexible Framework

The Interior Minister of Cyprus, Mr. Constantinos Ioannou, underscored that the new legislation would create a more flexible framework for the entry and residence of these workers. This flexible framework is key to ensuring a seamless transition for professionals seeking to establish their careers within EU borders. The Blue Card scheme is a testament to the EU's commitment to fostering a diverse and skilled workforce.



Key Elements of the Scheme

The scheme is grounded in several foundational elements that are aimed at **making the EU an attractive destination for skilled workers**. These include more relaxed admission conditions, enhanced rights for workers, and the facilitation of their movement and employment across the EU. To qualify as high-skilled, individuals must either possess a higher education qualification from a course of at least three years, or have at least three years of professional experience in the ICT sectors in the past.

Adoption Across the EU

The Blue Card scheme has been adopted by 25 of the 27 EU Member States, with Denmark and the Republic of Ireland choosing to stand apart. The broad adoption of the scheme underscores the EU's collective drive towards attracting and retaining top talent from across the globe. As the Blue Card scheme continues to be rolled out, it is slated to shape the future of the EU's labour market, with Cyprus playing a crucial role in this transformative journey.

For further information about this article, click [here](#).

News from our Members

Daily allowances: UNAPL opposed to extending the waiting period

Since the 1st of July 2021, liberal professionals in France benefit from a regime of daily allowances. This measure supported by UNAPL significantly improves the social protection of the liberal professions and restores its attractiveness.



But a little more than 2 years after the introduction of such allowances, the *Caisse nationale d'assurance vieillesse des professions libérales (CNAVPL)*, noting a deficit in the liberal professions (-€70 million in 2021 and -€30 million in 2022), decided at its Executive Board meeting on 7th December, to extend the waiting period for liberal professions to 15 days (against 3 days currently). An amendment to which UNAPL opposes, considering that a thorough analysis of statistics is necessary in order to understand the reasons for the surge in spending before any arrangement.

UNAPL calls for the opening of thorough, serious and concerted work with the representatives of the liberal professions, in order to preserve and sustain a fair and essential daily allowance system for the social protection of liberal professionals.

For further information about this statement, click [here](#).

ESLA Event: 2024 European Speech and Language Therapy Day

The 6th of March, the European Speech and Language Therapy Association (ESLA) is going to celebrate the European Speech and Language Day (SLT) at the European Parliament in Brussels. The theme for this year's SLT day is **"Collaboration with other professionals and caregivers"**.

During the event, ESLA will showcase the work of SLTs and the importance of the organization to the profession in Europe.

For further information about this event, click [here](#).

