EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Executive Committee

REPORT BY THE TASK FORCE MANDATED TO EVALUATE THE EMPLOYMENT, LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
I. INTRODUCTION

1. The review of the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee (ELSAC) is the third of four committee reviews to be undertaken by the Executive Committee in 2000. The Task Force established to undertake the review comprised Ambassador Ilkka Ristimaki, Permanent Representative of Finland (Chair), Mr Ray Kyles, Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom (Rapporteur), and Mr Sang-Ki Park, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea. The Task Force received invaluable support from Ms Voula Mega in compiling and analysing the completed questionnaires.

2. In conducting this review, the Task Force has been guided by the structure of the model questionnaire approved by the Executive Committee. A modified version reflecting the specific characteristics of ELSAC was sent to all delegates and observers participating in the work of the Committee, to BIAC and TUAC, and to the chairs of the four Working Parties. In the course of its work, the Task Force received 36 replies (some countries sent two replies covering their separate Employment and Social Policy/Health Ministries; 5 member states did not respond). The Task Force also had meetings with DSG Thorvald Moe; the Chair, Jean Pierre Voyer, and the bureau of ELSAC; the Director, Mr John Martin, and his Deputy, Ms Odile Sallard; the heads of BIAC and TUAC; and a number of other individuals familiar with or linked to the work of the Committee. The Task Force also attended the Spring session of ELSAC.

3. At the start of the process, the Task Force saw itself as having several main goals: first, to establish through the questionnaire and interviews whether member states were broadly satisfied with the work of the Committee; second, to learn what changes and improvements the majority wished to see implemented; third, to examine other suggestions put forward; and fourth, to look from its own independent perspective at the effectiveness of the Committee in all respects. Annex I of this Report contains a summary analysis of delegates’ replies to the questionnaire.

4. The Committee itself was formed (under a different title but similar mandate) in 1961. It currently has four Working Parties (see Section II). Its areas of work – then as now - are at the heart of Government policy-making, and account for a significant proportion of Government expenditure. In member countries, employment and social issues typically come under the responsibility of a number of Government Ministries; this requires a high degree of policy coherence to ensure their effective management and implementation. In recent years, much of the Committee’s work has been focussed on and guided by the Jobs Study and the conclusions of two Committee meetings held at Ministerial level: Employment and Labour Ministers in October 1997, and Social Policy and Health Ministers in June the following year.

5. These various documents have also been central to determining the Directorate’s – and hence the Committee’s - work programme for 2000, the core elements of which are to assist member countries in reducing high and persistent unemployment, and to address problems arising from social exclusion and poverty, particularly through reforms of systems of social protection.

II. MANDATE OF THE COMMITTEE UNDER REVIEW AND ITS SUBSIDIARY BODIES

6. The Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee was created in 1961 under the title Manpower and Social Affairs Committee. Its main task then, as now, was to deal with employment and labour issues connected with the general objectives of the Organisation and those social questions which are closely linked with employment and labour problems. The Education dimension was recognised formally in 1991 through the Council decision to hold joint meetings of the Bureaux of the bodies concerned as well as by setting up Joint Working Parties on an ad hoc basis. ELSAC has an unspecified duration. Its observers include the Russian Federation and the Slovak Republic, the Council of Europe and the ILO.
7. ELSAC currently has four active working parties. A further one dealing with “Industrial Relations” was abolished in 1998 and another on “The Role of Women in the Economy” was suspended in 1999.

8. The Working Party on Migration was created in 1967. Its mandate contains a number of objectives, the principal one being to serve as a forum for OECD Member countries to exchange information on national policies and practices and to discuss matters related to migration, with the emphasis on labour market and other economic and social aspects. The mandate was renewed recently until 31 December 2000. The Council of Europe, ILO, IOM and UNHCR are observers.

9. The Working Party on Employment was created in 1976, to follow up the implementation of the 1976 Recommendation on General Employment and Manpower Policy and to fulfil a number of related tasks including the periodic review and assessment of the changing employment situation facing Member countries, and the employment and manpower policy responses appropriate to the current situation. Since the late eighties, the WP on Employment has increasingly devoted itself exclusively to preparing the Employment Outlook, while broader policy discussions now take place in ELSAC. The WP has an unspecified duration. The Slovak Republic is an observer.

10. The Working Party on Social Policy was created in 1983. Its current mandate expires at the end of 2001. It addresses those issues of social policy (including health) which arise in the context of demographic, social and economic change in the Member countries, bearing in mind the effective functioning of labour markets. It develops, on behalf of the Committee, a framework for the assessment of social policy and oversees the development of a comprehensive database enabling comparative trends to be tracked. In order to achieve these goals, the Working Party should supervise, on behalf of the Committee, the implementation of activities under the Social Affairs section of Chapter XII of the Programme of Work and Budget of the Organisation. The mandate also foresees comment on studies and analyses undertaken for the ELSAC on the above topics and, in view of the specialised expertise from Member countries, may authorise the Secretariat to convene ad hoc meetings of national experts from time to time on specialised topics for the consideration of the Working Party and the Committee. The Slovak Republic, Council of Europe, ILO, International Social Security Association and WHO are observers.

11. The Working Party on Employment and Unemployment Statistics was created in 1975 to promote exchange of experience on existing statistical information and to identify the areas in which work could usefully be undertaken, bearing in mind the activities of other organisations in this field. The Slovak Republic is an observer. It brings together those responsible for analysing the employment situation, and the statisticians responsible for collecting data on employment. Its mandate requires the WP to:

   • Ascertain and remedy shortcomings in systems of collecting the data needed for evaluating the employment situation and for working out measures to deal with it;

   • Exchange ideas and experience with respect to definitions and methods used to measure employment, unemployment and other ways in which manpower is utilised or under-utilised; and

   • Develop, on the basis of existing sources, or by recourse to other sources, methods of evaluating (by quantifying) the results of measure taken in connection with employment policy (creation of jobs, occupational training, placing, etc.) in the light of the resources used.

12. The Task Force has reviewed the Committee’s main mandate and sees no case at present for any revision. It is similarly content in relation to the semi-autonomous WPs dealing with Migration and Employment and Unemployment Statistics. It also supports the existing majority view that social policy
should remain under the wing of the main Committee. The Task Force would however question whether the WP on Employment continues to meet all the tasks set when it was established in 1976. Its mandate should therefore be reviewed. It has also been suggested that future meetings of the Working Party should be held before the Spring meeting of ELSAC. The Chair could then brief ELSAC on the outcomes of the WP meeting and solicit their views on future topics for the Employment Outlook.

13. The Task Force has also reflected on the Secretary-General’s note to Council on “Current and Future Work on Health at the OECD” (C(2000)87), and has noted Council’s positive response. The OECD Ministerial also supported an enhanced strategic focus by the OECD on health issues. When implemented, the programme will represent a gear-change in the work on health at the OECD. This in turn will have implications for how ELSAC best handles discussion on this subject and points, in the view of the Task Force, to the establishment of a separate WP on Health. Such a WP would, inter alia, also need to be responsible for ensuring coherence across the horizontal aspects of the Secretary General’s proposal, and advising the Committee accordingly. It will also have a number of practical and procedural consequences. First, it will necessitate some modification to the current mandate of the WP on Social Policy which currently has responsibility for overseeing OECD work on Health. Second, given that part of the impetus for the WP’s creation comes from the new horizontal project, it will be important to give the WP a time-bound mandate for the duration of the project (recognising, of course, the possibility of extension). Third, creating a new WP will place additional resource demands on the Secretariat.

14. Finally, the Task Force agrees with the views expressed by all respondents except one that the efficiency and effectiveness of the Committee would not benefit from a transfer to another section of the Organisation or a merger with another programme.

R1. The Task Force recommends that ELSAC review the current mandate of the WP on Employment to ensure that it matches the current needs of ELSAC in this area; and consider whether future meetings of the WP should be held before the Spring meeting of ELSAC

R2. The Task Force recommends that the Secretariat should consult the Committee and make a proposal to Council on the possible creation of a separate WP on Health for 2001. It also recommends that, if funds are not available in DEELSA, the WP should be funded out of the Central Priorities Fund, particularly in view of recent Ministerial endorsement for such work.

R3. The Task Force recommends that the mandate of the WP on Migration should, on expiry, be prolonged for a further three years.

III. POLICY RELEVANCE OF THE COMMITTEE’S ACTIVITIES

15. The Task Force decided at an early stage that its mandate related primarily to advising on the effectiveness of ELSAC as a Committee, and that it should not seek to make recommendations on its work priorities or programme. Inevitably, however, the questionnaire responses cover such issues and have been faithfully incorporated into the highlights paper (Annex I). The Task Force was struck by the level of dissatisfaction among a number of respondents about the balance between employment/labour issues, on the one hand, and social policy, on the other. Moreover, while the results of this Task Force’s questionnaire showed a high degree of satisfaction with the relevance and usefulness of the work to policymakers in capitals, the finding was at odds with that from ELSAC’s own questionnaire of last October when some 17 respondents claimed that the autumn meeting was only partially relevant to their country’s needs. This perhaps reflects the contrasting content of these autumn and spring agendas.
16. It is also the case that an issue can be “policy relevant” in several different ways: first, in relation to an individual Ministry’s priorities; second, in terms of that Government’s overall policies; and third, in relation to meeting an OECD horizontal objective.

17. The Task Force has therefore concluded that the methodology by which the work programme is established could be improved. The problem - as identified by some respondents and supported by the Task Force – is that there is a built-in bias in favour of the issues dealt with by the delegates from Employment/Labour Ministries. In the view of the Task Force, this could usefully be addressed by also seeking comments on the work programme from policymakers at the centre of Government. This could be done through Permanent Delegations with full transparency in relation to Committee members. The Task Force recognises, of course, that Council has the final say on the Programme of Work.

**R4. The Task Force recommends that Permanent Delegations to the OECD and ELSAC Delegates should consult their own centre of Government or other appropriate authorities with a view to verifying the extent to which the work programme determined by Committee Delegates matches that preferred by those with responsibility for Employment and Social Affairs policy direction and prioritisation at the centre.**

18. The Task Force broadly supports the view of the majority of respondents that ELSAC responds quickly and well to new developments, assuming availability of the necessary resources. But there is scope for some improvement, enhanced by the establishment by Council of the Central Priorities Fund for use in-year to accommodate unforeseen projects. Some delegates expressed particular concern that ELSAC had not so far tackled economic insecurity linked to globalisation and technological change, or the social dimensions of the knowledge-based economy.

19. It has also been suggested that, in order to improve coherence between the Committee and its four WPs, there should be some reform of the composition and role of the ELSAC bureau. This might be achieved by making the Chairs of the four WPs ex officio members of the ELSAC bureau. The bureau would, in turn, be tasked with the co-ordination of ELSAC’s work programme across its subsidiary bodies.

**R5. The Task Force recommends that the Directorate should consult systematically with the bureau to ensure that the Committee continues to respond promptly to new developments; that the Committee considers the proposal set out in paragraph 19 of this Report; and that the membership in turn recognises its responsibility to flag up new and emerging issues in good time to secure the necessary additional funding.**

**IV. STRUCTURE, FUNCTIONING AND PARTICIPATION**

20. Most delegates gave high marks to the Secretariat for the relevance and balance of the agendas and considered that the Chair and bureau performed from very good to excellent. However, the bureau - while geographically balanced - represented mainly the employment side. In terms of ELSAC debate, the majority considered that there was an “acceptable” level of participation by delegates. It was proposed by delegates that there should be more debate and fewer set statements in ELSAC. The Secretariat performed from good to excellent and consulted well with the bureau and delegates during meetings. There was however only limited contact at other times. Back-to-back meetings between ELSAC and the WP on Social Policy were deemed a success and should be extended to cover the WP on Employment. The timeliness of documentation, particularly important for the long distance delegates, was improving.

21. Only two-thirds of delegates said that they were responsible for advising Ministers on policy issues covered by the Committee. National positions were invariably co-ordinated through informal consultations among officials. Ministers were rarely consulted in advance or informed of the results. The output from
the debate was fed back through similar channels. Many thought that the operation of the Committee could be improved by better use of position papers and Electronic Discussion Groups (EDGs).

22. The Task Force believes that this provides an opportunity for major improvement. While being impressed by the overall performance of the Secretariat and Chair, the agenda appears to be too heavily dominated by procedural discussion. Last October’s session was a case in point. Most of these issues could be handled on paper or through EDGs at much less expense thus freeing up time for genuine debate. But it will only be worthwhile sharpening up the level and quality of the debate if member states are, themselves, prepared to send delegates able to interact and contribute as opposed to making set-piece interventions. This points to member states being represented by policy advisers rather than officials from International Directorates. If so, the debates must also be properly prepared. Indeed, the Task Force notes that the Secretariat has already gone some way to meeting that objective with its annotated agenda. Moreover, it is important that delegates should feel a real sense of ownership of the agenda. This could be facilitated by closer interaction between the membership and secretariat both directly and through the bureau.

23. More could also be done in terms of identifying lead speakers. Short position papers would also help, but documentation should be kept readable and to the point of the debate. The Chair has a particular responsibility to facilitate free-flowing debate through contact with various key delegates prior to the meeting. The quality of the debate should be judged by the outcomes and a clear identification of how they will help policy-making back in capitals. In turn, these outputs should be of interest to Ministers in view of the political significance of much of the work programme.

24. The Task Force is also concerned at the degree of policy coherence in much of the debate. This is largely explained by delegates representing one Ministry whereas most of the issues cross Ministerial boundaries. This should be tackled but without necessarily dismantling the existing Committee structure which continues to have a useful role to play. The Secretary-General letter to Ambassadors of 6 June on OECD Reform II points the way forward with the proposal for greater involvement of officials from the centres of Government to debate the mix of economic and social policy. The Task Force had already come to a similar conclusion with regard to ELSAC – see Recommendation 8. At the same time, however, the Task Force recognises that, in their government structures, some OECD Member States do not have strong centre-of-government institutions and may not immediately see the benefit of such an approach. It would be helpful therefore if PUMA could prepare a report on the merits of strong centre-of-government institutions and its implications for committee work at the OECD.

R6. The Task Force recommends that the Directorate and Committee should ensure that a significant proportion of ELSAC’s agenda is allocated to policy debate. The Task Force further recommends that the Secretariat, in consultation with the bureau, should ensure that all procedural issues are, where possible, dealt with through EDGs and Permanent Delegations. The pre-ELSAC meeting of Permanent Delegations (perhaps held closer to the event) should be used to help prepare and focus the discussion and resolve any outstanding procedural issues.

R7. The Task Force recommends that the Secretariat, in consultation with the bureau, should before each ELSAC meeting identify lead speakers for each policy debate.

R8. The Task Force recommends that the Secretary-General prepare a proposal to Council on the establishment of a high-level policy group to debate Employment, Education, Labour, Health and Social Affairs. The group might meet once a year and be prepared by ELSAC consulting other relevant OECD committees. Its goal would be to develop further a coherent and consistent employment and social strategy across OECD countries. It would represent the third element of the triangular paradigm. To help take this forward, Council could ask PUMA to prepare a brief report as described in paragraph 24.
above, bearing in mind different political approaches in Member States to centre-of-government policy development.

V. HORIZONTAL RELATIONS WITH OTHER PARTS OF THE OECD

25. An important aspect for all delegates. ELSAC is one of the three Committees playing a leading role in the Growth project and should be directly involved in the work on labour productivity, employment and unemployment, the impact of structural policies on growth and the employment content of growth, as well as the role of human and social capital in growth and productivity. ELSAC should also continue to be a major player on the Jobs Study, Ageing and other issues under the banner of social capital. On sustainable development, respondents want ELSAC to have a key role in the analysis of the relationship between socio-economic and environmental issues, health care and social safety and social exclusion. The Committee could also serve as a forum for discussion of all social aspects related to Sustainable Development and be instrumental in the production of social indicators in this area.

26. A number of delegates suggested that the Trade and Labour standards project (joint responsibility with the Trade Committee) should include the analysis of the impact of enforcing core labour standards, a comparative study of minimum OECD and non-member labour standards, the prevention of social dumping, welfare and health service production, insurance questions, health and safety at work, and implications for employment growth and distribution of jobs.

27. There is rightly a strong relationship between ELSAC and the Education Committee. All respondents also suggested that ELSAC should have a close tie with the Economic Policy Committee, e.g. through joint WPs and back to back meetings. One delegate thought that ELSAC should have responsibility for the social chapter in ERDC. Opinion was more divided concerning relationships with the Environment Policy Committee and the Public Management Committee. They were however more enthusiastic about co-operation with the Trade Committee and the Committee for Scientific and Technological Policy.

R9. The Task Force recommends that ELSAC, in conjunction with the Directorate, devise a strategy to enhance its interaction with other committees and directorates in the above areas in order to provide a consistent input into the human and social elements of the triangular paradigm.

VI. RESOURCES

28. The Task Force considers that the Committee’s activities are conducted efficiently in relation to their cost. But, as is apparent from its comments under section IV, it believes strongly that the membership could be getting a better return from its policy dialogue and achieving its procedural goals more economically through the closer involvement of Permanent Delegations and EDGs. Delegates were fairly neutral about the degree to which off-budget (voluntary) funding should be used to finance committee work. They also consider (notwithstanding the Secretary-General’s latest proposal on Health) that the Secretariat has adequate resources to carry out the assigned tasks.

VII. OUTREACH

29. As a non-member observer, Russia scored low marks with delegates in terms of the quality of its attendance and input. Opinion was divided over whether ELSAC should be opened up to others at this stage, though their importance in relation to the WP on Migration was noted. The Task Force would encourage a review by the Committee as to what it ideally wants out of its relationship with non-members. At the one level, they can observe, absorb the exchanges and take back key messages and best practice. At another, they could be invited to enter more fully into debates whereby the OECD membership can be
better informed about the employment and social issues facing emerging economies and countries in transition. But at the very least, observers should report annually (but briefly) on the extent to which ideas coming out of ELSAC are helping them to formulate domestic policy.

**R10. The Task Force recommends that ELSAC should review the basis of its relationship with non-member observers in relation to Committee attendance, input and output. The Task Force also recommends that in order better to organise its outreach activities with non Member Countries, the Committee should consider the possible Employment, Labour and Social Affairs related elements in the proposed OECD Global Forum (CCN(2000)5/ADD1).

30. Delegates were generally content with the level and range of participation from other International Organisations – which varies between the Committee and WPs. (see Section II) While the Task Force agrees that ELSAC should maintain close links with the ILO through observer status, it was surprised that there was not more enthusiasm for strengthening relations with the WTO in view, inter alia, of the international debate on Trade and Labour standards.

31. Most delegates are generally content with the current level of dialogue and consultation involving BIAC and TUAC. Although the membership would wish to see more joint BIAC/TUAC consultations, this proposal has hitherto been resisted by the two parties. The Task Force respects that view. Many of the points made in paragraphs 38 and 39 of the Task Force report on the Industry Committee (CE(2000) 9) also apply here. In TUAC’s case, at least, this area of OECD work is amongst the most important to its membership. Both BIAC and TUAC would therefore welcome the opportunity to attend Committee meetings as observers, or at least be invited to participate in certain debates of particular interest to their respective memberships. If that is not possible, it is important that the joint meetings with the bureau in advance of ELSAC should take the form of a genuine dialogue and not be regarded as a perfunctory exercise.

**R11. The Task Force recommends that ELSAC, consulting the legal service, should review how its interaction with BIAC and TUAC might be further improved, including the possibility of inviting them to attend certain committee debates.

**VIII. VISIBILITY**

32. As in other areas of the OECD’s work, delegates mainly share the outcomes of their deliberations with others inside Government. In theory this is aimed at preserving the confidentiality of the discussion and enabling freer exchanges on policy options. Unfortunately, this level of confidentiality does not always appear to result in a more open, brainstorming-style of debate. As suggested in Section V above, the Task Force believes this is, in part, due to the composition of the Committee since the documentation and preparation by the Secretariat appear largely up to the mark.

33. That said, the majority of delegates also report that some of the work of the Committee is circulated to a broader audience, principally other decision-makers, academia and the media. In only a third of cases, however, is Parliament kept informed. In reality, however, it is the OECD’s product – rather than the Committee’s – that is visible, and principally its flagship production, the Employment Outlook (though there are, of course, a number of other important documents published each year). This is as it should be. But the Task Force believes that there is also more scope for publicising the OECD’s work in progress. It therefore welcomes the fact that a communications strategy is being prepared for the Directorate and this should be shared with the Committee. As a number of delegates have suggested, the OECD’s profile can be raised through in-country seminars and conferences (e.g. the Youth Employment Conference in London in 1999 and the Helsinki Conference on Unemployment in 2000). The Task Force would also wish to see the Secretary-General, his Deputies and the Director of DEELSA make a more
visible impact, through speeches, articles, etc, particularly in member countries which are behind the curve in terms of implementing best practice in areas such as the Jobs Study. A high-level policy group (recommendation 8) – if formed – would be a further such vehicle.

R12. The Task Force strongly supports the preparation by PAC and DEELSA of a communications strategy document to improve public understanding and dissemination of the Directorate’s/OECD’s work. This should be shared with the Committee. The Task Force recommends that the Secretariat should, in particular, consider how best to raise the profile of both its completed and on-going work - beyond the Employment Outlook - in a manner that promotes the OECD as being at the cutting edge of international debate and analysis in employment, labour and social issues.

IX. CONCLUSIONS

34. The work carried out by DEELSA in support of ELSAC is vital to the OECD. It forms a core element of the organisation’s work programme, and the mandate established some 40 years ago still holds good today. The Secretariat contains top quality minds and is impressively led. The questionnaire responses demonstrate clearly that there remains keen interest in the OECD secretariat’s cutting edge analysis and a desire for it to do considerably more, particularly on horizontal issues. Many examples were given of areas in which its output has helped to shape and influence domestic employment and social policies.

35. But the impression gained by the Task Force is of a Committee that needs to be freshened up and to ask itself some key questions:

- Has it got the balance right between procedural and policy debate?
- If not, and there is indeed a genuine desire to encourage a more dynamic policy exchange, would members seriously review the level and profile of their delegates?
- Are delegates prepared to put the effort into submitting national papers to aid discussion and to assume the role of lead speaker, if asked?
- Are they ambitious enough in terms of their objectives for such meetings to ensure that the outcomes will be of interest to Ministers?
- How can it best raise the internal (inside Government) and external (public) profile of its work?

36. Finally, the Task Force believes that there is a fundamental need to strengthen the relationship between the OECD and those at the centre of Government with responsibility for seeking a coherent, national economic, employment and social strategy. This objective should be further examined in conjunction with some of the issues raised in the Secretary-General’s recent OECD Reform II letter. The OECD’s reputation – and a clear understanding of what the organisation has to offer on horizontal issues– can, in the view of the Task Force, only be enhanced by such an approach.
ANNEX I

HIGHLIGHTS FROM REPLIES TO QUESTIONNAIRE

37. ELSAC Delegates have, in general, a positive appreciation of the Committee’s role and achievements. There is overall agreement that the Committee is applying the necessary urgency to taking work forward on the Conclusions of the 1997 Employment and Labour Ministerial and the 1998 Social Policy and Health Ministerial meetings. Only one respondent wanted more rapid implementation.

38. The last two Ministerial meetings of the Committee gave significant mandates for future work, figuring prominently among the priority areas for OECD work. Respondents suggested that the OECD should provide comparative international data, expert analyses and case studies on employment, labour and social affairs issues and be a think-tank promoting a more humanist approach to economic development. The quality of the analysis is highlighted as a critical factor. Delegates suggested that the Committee should work to improve our understanding of the dynamics operating in the labour market (who gets better jobs and why, who stays in poor jobs and why) and lifetime incomes (what are the consequences for incomes and standard of living of different employment scenarios), and analyse the relationship among various social outcomes (exclusion, morbidity, crime, family formation etc).

39. Nearly all respondents agreed that the Committee was (or should be) effective as a forum for assessing and exchanging national experiences. Many also agreed that the Committee was (or should be) effective as a vehicle for adopting recommended practices and shared rules; a smaller number suggested that it should be a forum for discussing issues under debate in other international organisations.

40. Less than half the delegates thought that the Committee covered all areas where work by the OECD would be relevant. Some indicated that there should be additional activity on determinants of labour market participation, the new economy and employment, emerging forms of work and the transformation of the workplace, the impact of demography on employment, social issues and family and community policy, social exclusion and articulation of integration policies. Child development issues, collective negotiations, migration and economic growth, co-operation between social welfare and employment authorities, analysis which differentiates across ethnic groups, welfare to work and social inclusion, as well as globalisation and labour standards were mentioned.

41. The majority agreed that the Committee’s work was very relevant and useful to policy-making in Member countries. This finding is however at odds with the Committee’s own questionnaire results from last October’s session when 17 participants claimed that the meeting was only “partially” relevant to their country’s needs. Substantive policy debates and outcomes have influenced policy decisions taken in Member countries, in areas such as make-work pay, human capital investment, public employment services, comprehensive employment strategy in combating high unemployment, youth unemployment and unemployment benefit policy, active labour market policy, regularisation and integration of immigrants, the development of in-work support programmes and reforms in the labour market.

42. Many respondents (coming from Labour Ministries) state that the Committee strikes the right balance between Employment/Labour issues and Social Affairs. There were, however, some opinions that labour issues are too dominant and that inadequate attention is given to health issues. Respondents wanted greater emphasis to be given to social questions (especially protection schemes) and reviews dealing with intersections of employment, economic progress and social protection, broader employment-related social policy issues and family and community policy, as well as learning issues. The division between “labour” and “social” may, however, be a false dichotomy. Respondents suggested that the two issues go hand-in-hand and that social issues should be treated “horizontally” throughout the OECD.
43. According to the majority, ELSAC reacts well (quality wise) and quickly (efficient) to new developments and incorporates them in the work programme, subject to available resources. Some delegates suggest, however, that crucial issues such as economic insecurity linked to globalisation and technological change or the social dimensions of the knowledge-based economy were not always addressed in the Committee at a sufficiently early stage. There was a need to respond more quickly and give greater priority to emerging issues.

44. A quarter saw potential for improving the internal architecture of the Committee. Suggestions include the enrichment of the ELSA with delegates with health credentials and the creation of special ad-hoc advisory groups and new working parties with precise mandates. Proposals included the creation of a joint (Education Committee and ELSAC) working party on learning or Human Capital Investment, the incorporation of more health related issues in the WP on social policy, the recreation of the abolished WP on Industrial Relations and the suspended one on “Women in the Economy”, and the creation of a WP on the social dimension of globalisation. There was only one suggestion for the WP on social policy to be given Committee status, while another delegate suggested creating ad-hoc working parties on horizontal themes.

45. Concerning the operation of the Committee, most delegates considered the agendas to be relevant and balanced and the performance of the Chair and the Bureau very good to excellent. The bureau was geographically balanced but only represented the employment side. There was an acceptable level of participation by delegates. The choice of external experts and commentators was positively appreciated overall and the use of peer review procedures judged relevant. There were suggestions that there should be more debate and less a series of statements by members. The support by the Secretariat is considered to be very good to excellent. There seems to be good co-operation between the Secretariat, the Chair, the Bureau and members of the Committee, but consultation appears limited to the discussions during the meetings. Back to back meetings between the ELSAC and the WP on Social Policy seem successful and there is a demand for this to be also extended to the WP on Employment.

46. Two thirds of the respondents are responsible for advising ministers on policy issues covered by the Committee. Most countries are always represented by officials from their capitals. National positions are invariably co-ordinated through informal consultations among officials. Delegates disseminate their report on the ELSAC work and discussion to officials mainly within their own Ministry. Few reports reach Ministers. Many respondents agreed that the operation of the Committee and its subsidiary bodies could be improved with the greater use of working/position papers from countries and electronic discussion groups.

47. Respondents seemed generally sufficiently informed about the OECD work. There were however, suggestions for more systematic information and consultation on interrelated work done by other Committees, especially when in progress and not only once finished. An activity list could be placed on the web and access could be provided to documents released by Committees with links to ELSAC. Most delegates believed that ELSAC was rather well integrated in the OECD. There were, however, suggestions that horizontal co-operation should be improved.

48. Delegates saw an important role for ELSAC in horizontal and joint projects. It was one of the three Committees playing a leading role in the Growth project and respondents suggested that this should include work on labour productivity, employment and unemployment, the impact of structural policies on growth and the employment content of growth, as well as the role of human and social capital in growth and productivity. ELSAC continues to be a major player in relation to the Jobs study and respondents are keen that this should continue. On sustainable development, respondents want ELSAC to have a key role in the analysis of the relationship between socio-economic and environmental issues, health care and social safety, social exclusion and related costs. It could also serve as a forum for discussion of all social aspects related to Sustainable Development and be instrumental in the production of social indicators in this area.
49. Some respondents suggested that the Trade and Labour standards project (Joint responsibility with the Trade Committee) should include the analysis of the impact of enforcing core labour standards, the exploration of minimum OECD versus developing countries labour standards, the prevention of social dumping, welfare and health service production, insurance questions, health and safety at work, implications for employment growth and distribution of jobs given different standards. Two delegates asked for the revision and update of the 1996 study on trade, employment and labour standards.

50. All respondents suggested that ELSAC should have a close working relationship with the Economic Policy Committee, e.g. through joint WPs and back to back meetings. One delegate suggested that the ELSAC should have key responsibility for the social chapter in ERDC. Opinion was more divided concerning relationships with the Environment Policy Committee and the Public Management Committee. They were however more enthusiastic about co-operation with the Trade Committee and the Committee for Scientific and Technological Policy. Finally, all respondents except one did not believe that the efficiency and effectiveness of the Committee would benefit from a transfer to another section of the Organisation or a merger with another programme.

51. Most respondents considered that the Committee’s activities were conducted efficiently in relation to their cost. They were also generally neutral about the degree to which off-budget (voluntary) funding should be used to finance Committee work but fairly negative about the potential for the Committee to manage more technical Part II activities. They consider that the Secretariat has the necessary resources to carry out the assigned tasks and favour the secondment of staff by member states to the Secretariat to support priority work.

52. Concerning outreach activities, the quality of input from non-members was considered to be less than satisfactory. Close links with non-members were essential for the work on migration. Respondents were divided over whether co-operation should be enlarged to include other non-members. Most do not see a need for “structural dialogue”, but rather discussions on a thematic basis, depending on the subject. Co-operation with international organisations that are currently observers seemed adequate and the majority of delegates did not want other international organisations or regional bodies to be invited as observers. Some, however, wanted to involve the UN, UNESCO, WTO and the World Bank in the works of the Committee.

53. Most delegates were content with the current level of dialogue with BIAC and TUAC. Some argued, however, that they should either be invited to participate in meetings, or, at least, involved in the debates on certain items. Some respondents suggested that the current level of consultation was adequate and that the best way to enhance their involvement was through access to documentation and through substantive back to back Committee meetings.

54. As a rule, the main outcomes of ELSAC’s work is widely shared inside governments but to a much lesser degree outside administrations. Decision-makers, academia, and the media are considered to be the main target groups for effective dissemination. Some Committee members also send reports to regional governments, NGOs, research institutes, banks etc. Among the ways to improve the Committee’s visibility, respondents suggested holding semi-annual meetings and conferences in various member countries and carrying out common projects and meetings in OECD Member States. In contrast, some delegates suggested that there was no need for more visibility; the OECD label itself was adequate in terms of profile and impact.
ANNEX 2

CONSOLIDATED LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. The Task Force recommends that ELSAC review the current mandate of the WP on Employment to ensure that it matches the current needs of ELSAC in this area; and consider whether future meetings of the WP should be held before the Spring meeting of ELSAC.

R2. The Task Force recommends that the Secretariat should consult the Committee and make a proposal to Council on the possible creation of a separate WP on Health for 2001. It also recommends that, if funds are not available in DEELSA, the WP should be funded out of the Central Priorities Fund, particularly in view of recent Ministerial endorsement for such work.

R3. The Task Force recommends that the mandate of the WP on Migration should, on expiry, be prolonged for a further three years.

R4. The Task Force recommends that Permanent Delegations to the OECD and ELSAC Delegates should consult their own centre of Government or other appropriate authorities with a view to verifying the extent to which the work programme determined by Committee Delegates matches that preferred by those with responsibility for Employment and Social Affairs policy direction and prioritisation at the centre.

R5. The Task Force recommends that the Directorate should consult systematically with the bureau to ensure that the Committee continues to respond promptly to new developments; that the Committee considers the proposal set out in paragraph 19 of this Report; and that the membership in turn recognises its responsibility to flag up new and emerging issues in good time to secure the necessary additional funding.

R6. The Task Force recommends that the Directorate and Committee should ensure that a significant proportion of ELSAC’s agenda is allocated to policy debate. The Task Force further recommends that the Secretariat, in consultation with the bureau, should ensure that all procedural issues are, where possible, dealt with through EDGs and Permanent Delegations. The pre-ELSAC meeting of Permanent Delegations (perhaps held closer to the event) should be used to help prepare and focus the discussion and resolve any outstanding procedural issues.

R7. The Task Force recommends that the Secretariat, in consultation with the bureau, should before each ELSAC meeting identify lead speakers for each policy debate.

R8. The Task Force recommends that the Secretary-General prepare a proposal to Council on the establishment of a high-level policy group to debate Employment, Education, Labour, Health and Social Affairs. The group might meet once a year and be prepared by ELSAC consulting other relevant OECD committees. Its goal would be to develop further a coherent and consistent employment and social strategy across OECD countries. It would represent the third element of the triangular paradigm. To help take this forward, Council could ask PUMA to prepare a brief report as described in paragraph 21 above, bearing in mind different political approaches in Member States to centre-of-government policy development.

R9. The Task Force recommends that ELSAC, in conjunction with the Directorate, devise a strategy to enhance its interaction with other committees and directorates in the above areas in order to provide a consistent input into the human and social elements of the triangular paradigm.
R10. The Task Force recommends that ELSAC should review the basis of its relationship with non-member observers in relation to Committee attendance, input and output. The Task Force also recommends that in order better to organise its outreach activities with non Member Countries, the Committee should consider the possible Employment, Labour and Social Affairs related elements in the proposed OECD Global Forum (CCN(2000)5/ADD1).

R11. The Task Force recommends that ELSAC, consulting the legal service, should review how its interaction with BIAC and TUAC might be further improved, including the possibility of inviting them to attend certain committee debates.

R12. The Task Force strongly supports the preparation by PAC and DEELSA of a communications strategy document to improve public understanding and dissemination of the Directorate’s/OECD’s work. This should be shared with the Committee. The Task Force recommends that the Secretariat should, in particular, consider how best to raise the profile of both its completed and on-going work - beyond the Employment Outlook - in a manner that promotes the OECD as being at the cutting edge of international debate and analysis in employment, labour and social issues.