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Summer 2008 e-newsletter

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Introduction

Welcome to the latest edition of my e-newsletter. Please feel free to forward this to friends, family and colleagues. Should you wish to stop receiving email updates please reply directly to this email with "unsubscribe" in the subject header.

This month's newsletter focuses on what achievements have been made at EU level so far, from improving your holidays to social security coverage abroad.

My office will be closed for parliamentary recess from the Monday 28th July and will re-open on Monday 18th August.

Have a good summer!

Catherine

Happy Holidays

Summer has arrived, and thoughts have turned to travel arrangements, destinations and temperatures. Whether travelling by plane, train or automobile it is easy to forget what could have been if it had not been for improvements made by our MEPs at the European Parliament.

Packing for a holiday involves accounting for all of those essential items. An up-to-date passport and acknowledging whether we require any visas is at the top of the list.

Now that all UK citizens have a British passport which follows a European formula this makes it easier for customs and police officers to recognise it EU-wide. These passports ensure that no more visas are required to cross borders within Europe. As citizens of the European Economic Area (EEA) we can now enjoy the freedom to travel and work in any EEA country without a visa.

There are no plans to replace the Queen's crest on the passport front cover with the EU stars, and at the end of the day this would not be possible without the agreement of the UK government. However, the Commission does want to make sure that EU nationals are not stranded abroad and would like to include more information about the passport holders' rights to access consular protection from another EU state if their own government is not represented in the country they are in.

If a holiday is unbearable without man's best friend, pets can now join their owners on their break in the sun – as long as they meet the health and safety criteria, thanks to the EU's Passports for Pets.

Overbooking by airlines and delays are always a menace. Thanks to EU legislation profiteering airlines face a fine for deliberate overbooking, and there are now more rights for passengers such as compensation if denied boarding, and catering if facing uncertain delays. Disabled and reduced mobility passengers can now also rely on the appropriate assistance and highest quality of care to help them through EU airports, and on flights.

If going abroad by car the new European driving license has helped to make the roads safer and to prevent fraud. It is also very useful in preventing a banned driver from one country picking up a license upon arrival in another. In all EU countries children under three are now required to travel in a car with a safety seat. Driving insurance claims outwith the UK are now easier to process, and accident protection for victims outside the UK is also improved.

Travel insurance is always a necessity, alongside a European Health Insurance Card. The health insurance card replaces the former E111 form.

The European Health Insurance card ensures free or reduced-cost medical emergency treatment if ill whilst on holiday in the EU. Just show the card to the local health officials and in almost every case you will be treated free of charge – however this does not apply if it is a private health centre.

Always take valid travel insurance when abroad, as this will ensure cover if there is only access to a private health centre, and charges for treatment. Travel insurance is also necessary to cover any flights home due to illness, accident or death as these will not be covered by the Health Insurance Card.

Parents can now be safe in the knowledge that new EU rules have stopped children being prescribed reduced doses of adult medicines. Drug companies are also obliged to carry out proper clinical trials on children.

The likeliness of being sick due to poor food hygiene is now less thanks to clearer rules and regulations regarding food storage and the origin of produce. Food labelling is also clearer, meaning those with allergies and intolerances now have the information to make an informed decision. We also have more protection from pesticides in food due to strict regulations.

Phoning home on holiday is a lot cheaper and easier. Instead of finding the closest payphone and lots of change, it is now easy to use a mobile phone in another country and to call home at a fraction of the price than previously. Thanks to the European Parliament mobile phone operators are continuing to bring down the cost of using a mobile abroad.

Finally, leaving the UK to escape the strong arm of the law and moving to another European country is no longer an option. A European Arrest Warrant now makes it more difficult for fugitives to escape arrest by moving between EU countries – reducing the Costa del Crime situation.

Social Europe the Story so Far...

Employment:

Nearly 6.5 million jobs were created in the EU over the past two years, and another 5 million are forecast by 2009.

This showing that the EU's strategy to boost growth and jobs in Europe is working. Of the 12 million new jobs created since 2000, 7.5 million - well over half - went to women.

The EU investing in people:

The European Social Fund is the EU's main tool for investing in people. Set up when the EU was launched, it now represents around 10% of the EU budget and invests around 10 billion Euro in people's skills every year across the 27 Member States.

The Social Fund annually helps...

- 2 million unemployed or inactive people move into employment
- 11% of Europe's unemployed move directly into employment
- 200,000 socially excluded or disadvantaged people move into employments
- Trains 4 million people through lifelong learning to help them adapt to an evolving labour market

Dealing with globalisation:

Globalisation brings new opportunities in terms of economic competitiveness and the creation of high-quality jobs. But it can also create difficulties for some sectors or regions.

The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) helps workers who lose their jobs as a result of globalisation, and since 2007, the EU has spent almost 22 billion Euro to help 7,224 workers in different Member States. These workers have found other jobs through either retraining, founding start ups or moving to areas with better job opportunities thanks to money from the EGF.

Social security coverage abroad:

Pensions, unemployment benefits and family benefits are the responsibility of the UK government. However, the EU coordinates national social security rules in Europe so that people are still covered when they move countries – meaning that someone who moves to work in another European country is also covered by the local unemployment benefit scheme and will still receive a pension upon retirement.

Equal treatment of women and men:

Gender equality is a key principle of the EU, and since 1957 the Union has adopted 13 laws on gender equality to ensure equal treatment in access to work, training, promotions and working conditions – including equal pay, social security benefits and guaranteed rights to parental leave.

7.5 million of the 12 million new jobs created in the EU since 2000 have been taken by women, who now represent 59% of university graduates.

Fight against discrimination:

Around 1 in 3 Europeans say they have witnessed a case of discrimination in the past year, and around 1 in 7 say they have personally experienced it.

Under EU legislation everyone has the right to equal treatment in the workplace whatever their race or ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, or whether or not they have a disability.

This protection will now be extended to areas outside employment such as social protection, healthcare, education and access to commercial goods and services for all these forms of discrimination.

Social partners - improving working conditions:

Dialogue between trade unions and employers at a European level complements the national practices of social dialogue and industrial relations that exist in all Member States.

Over recent years, the social partners at European level have negotiated specific agreements to:

- Improve working conditions for seafarers
- Manage problems of bullying, sexual harassment and physical violence in the workplace
- Reduce exposure of workers to crystalline silica dust which can lead to a potentially fatal lung condition
- Manage new forms of work such as telework

Tackling poverty together:

Child poverty is an example of an issue that has taken centre stage in all Member States thanks to the EU.

Since the EU launched its system for coordinating national policies to tackle child poverty and social exclusion, all 27 Member States have developed national action plans – in comparison to 2001 when only three member states had strategies in place.

Healthy workplaces:

The number of serious and fatal accidents at work has fallen steadily thanks to EU health and safety laws.

The EU has now launched a five-year strategy aiming for a further 25% reduction in occupational accidents by 2012.

Dates for Your Diary:

European Fundraiser:

I will be holding a fundraiser hosted by Helen Eadie on Saturday 30th August from 1pm – 6pm at 3 Hopeward Mews, Dalgety Bay, KY11 9TB, where there will be fun, food and festivities.

It would be fantastic if you could possibly attend. Tickets are £5 per person. BYOB.

To RSVP please contact:

Yvonne - 01383 417 799

Ellie - 01383 412 856

European Forums:

18th September – Edinburgh – 7-9pm – venue tbc

22nd November – venue and time tbc

European Elections:

The European elections are taking place in June 2009, and should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact my office on 01383 417 799.

For more information please do not hesitate to contact me at:

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