



Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council

Employment and Social Policy issues

Thursday 15 March in Brussels

The Council meeting, starting at 9.30, will be chaired by Mr Biser Petkov, Minister for Labour and Social Policies of Bulgaria.

Most of the meeting will be public and can be followed by video streaming at <http://video.consilium.europa.eu/>.

The Council will hold a policy debate on the **future of social Europe post-2020**.

It will also hold a policy debate on how to **close the gender pay gap**, contributing thus to the achievement of the goals of the European Social Pillar.

On **European Semester 2018**, the Council is expected to adopt conclusions on the 2018 growth survey and the joint employment report. The Commission will present to the Council an overview of the 2018 country reports.

The Council will adopt a recommendation setting a **European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships**.

It is due to endorse Employment Committee's key messages regarding the implementation of the **Youth Guarantee**.

The Presidency and the Commission will inform the Council about preparations for the **Tripartite Social Summit** of 21 March. Its main theme will be "Delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights".

Over an informal lunch, ministers will discuss the topic of implementation of the European Pillar for Social Right with focus on equal labour market participation by women and men".

The Presidency will hold a press conference at the end of the meeting around 16.30 in the Europa building press room.

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Press conferences and public events by video streaming: <http://video.consilium.europa.eu>

Video coverage in broadcast quality (MPEG4) and photo gallery on: www.eucouncil.tv.

¹ This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the press office.

The future of social Europe post-2020

The Council will hold a policy debate on the future of social Europe post-2020 on the basis of a presidency note ([6326/18](#)).

Ministers will have the opportunity to express their views on the design of post-2020 employment and social policies before the Commission presents the next multi-annual financial framework in May. In particular, they will be invited to consider following questions:

- What are the policy priorities for upward employment and social convergence for the EU post 2020?
- How can we enhance the visibility of EU social investments? Is the current set of instruments investing in people fit for new needs and for new forms of work and protection?
- What should be the future investment priorities of the European Social Fund in order to deliver more social and employment convergence?

Employment and social strategic objectives

Up to 2020, the EU set in the past employment and social targets to be realised through a set of instruments. These targets constitute a unique political commitment by all member states to pursue quantified goals inter alia in the employment and social policy areas.

Now, the Union is preparing itself for a new political, financial and programming cycle by setting strategic objectives after the expiration of the current Europe 2020 strategy and discussing ways for funding these objectives.

Already last November, the European Pillar of Social Rights was proclaimed aiming at a employment and social convergence. The implementation of the Pillar is a shared commitment at national and EU level. Updating and complementing EU legislation can also help achieve convergence across the EU, when combined with adequate resources to create more jobs, enhance social cohesion, and spur mobility, education and training for all.

Social dimension and the next multiannual financial framework (MFF)

In the present MFF (2014-2020), the EU is investing around EUR 100 bn in the employment and social areas.

It invests in different programmes such as the European Social Fund (ESF), the Youth Employment Initiative, the Fund for European aid to the most deprived, the Employment and Social Innovation Programme or supporting the social dialogue at EU level.

In addition, Erasmus+, with a budget attending EUR 14.7 bn, makes significant investments in the mobility of learners, teachers and apprentices as well as in educational and training reforms.

All these programmes are meant to respond to new challenges, adapting human capital to the needs of the labour market and to new forms of work.

During the next MFF, the EU needs to deepen its social dimension and cohesion, especially by the full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. For that, adequate resources will be required to improve employment opportunities and the skills of our human capital, including those linked to digitalisation.

Closing the gender pay gap

The Council will debate how to close the gender pay gap, contributing thus to the achievement of the goals of the European Pillar of social rights. The discussions will be guided by a Presidency note ([6423/18](#)) and in particular by following questions:

- What national measures have been most effective for reducing horizontal and vertical gender segregation in the labour market?
- What is the best approach for improving pay transparency across the EU?

The ministerial debate is a follow-up to the implementation of the Pillar of social rights and the Commission [action plan on tackling the gender pay gap of last November](#).

The equal pay principle is to be found even in the Treaty of Rome in 1957; equality directives were first adopted in the 1970s.

Gender equality legislation in Europe concern not just equal pay and equal treatment at work but also equal treatment in social security and the access to goods and services. The Lisbon Treaty reaffirms the principle of gender equality as one of the fundamental values of the Union.

EU action to address the gender pay gap

The gender pay gap in the EU still averages around 16%. This is socially unfair as well economically inefficient. Equal pay is key to equal participation in the labour market.

The Council, the Commission and the European Parliament have acknowledged the need to address the problem. Last December, the Council called on the member states to deal with the gender-segregation-related causes of the gender pay and pension gap, including by increasing pay transparency. It also called on the Commission to implement the measures announced in its recent action plan on tackling the gender pay gap.

Adopted in November 2017, the action plan identified eight areas for action and was accompanied by a report evaluating the implementation of the 2014 Commission's pay transparency recommendation. In addition, the Commission has undertaken to review the legal provisions on equal pay contained in directive 2006/54/EC.

Pay gap and the Social Pillar

Measures to close the gender pay gap are necessary for the successful implementation of the European Pillar of social rights, as proclaimed by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission in November 2017. As for the *equal opportunities* and *access to the labour market*, the Pillar emphasises that women and men have the right to equal pay for work of equal value. Eradicating the gender pay gap is one of the key factors for ensuring gender equality on the labour market.

The Commission uses "the gender pay gap" as an indicator to monitor the implementation of the Pillar.

Determined action to close the gender pay gap is needed in order to fulfil the Union's commitment to equality between women and men.

[European Pillar of Social Rights: Proclamation and signing](#)

Root causes of the gender pay gap

The causes of the gender pay gap range from gender segregation, in particular in the labour market, to gender stereotypes which consign women and men to pre-determined roles, restricting their freedom to choose their educational and occupational paths.

Another cause is the lack of sufficient work-life balance policies: in the absence of a suitable mix of well-designed leaves, flexible working arrangements and care facilities for children and other dependants, women will not be able to participate in the labour market on an equal footing with men.

The insufficient enforcement of the equal pay principle also contributes to the gender pay gap. In addition, the lack of pay transparency has the effect of hiding pay inequality and gender bias, preventing women from demanding their rights.

European Semester 2018

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on the 2018 annual growth survey and the joint employment report (6427/18). The 2018 annual growth survey and the joint employment report take account of the European Pillar of Social Rights, proclaimed in November 2017.

The annual growth survey outlines priority actions to be taken by member states in order to ensure better coordinated and more efficient policies. The aim is to put the EU's economy on a path to sustainable growth.

As for the employment aspects, the Council will adopt the joint employment report ([6255/18](#)).

The Commission will present to the Council an overview of the 2018 country reports.

European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships

The Council will adopt a recommendation for a European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships (6348/18).

The objective of this recommendation is to contribute to a highly skilled and qualified workforce.

This could be achieved by setting common quality and effectiveness criteria of apprenticeships and taking these criteria into account when developing or maintaining the national apprenticeship schemes.

Apprenticeships are an essential element in the vocational education and training systems which benefit employers and learners. They reinforce the link between the world of work and the world of education and training.

Quality apprenticeships can also contribute to fostering active citizenship and social inclusion by integrating people of different social and personal backgrounds into the labour market.

The recommendation foresees different criteria for learning and working conditions, such as:

- a written agreement should be concluded to define the rights and obligations of the apprentice,
- a pedagogical support should be provided to teachers, trainers and mentors, specially in micro-, small and medium-sized companies,
- apprentices should be paid or otherwise compensated, in line with national or sectoral requirements or collective agreements where they exist,
- apprentices should be entitled to social protection,
- career guidance, mentoring and learner support should be provided before and during the apprenticeship to ensure successful outcomes.

Youth Guarantee

The Council is due to endorse Employment Committee's key messages regarding the implementation of the youth guarantee ([6149/18](#)).

According to the key messages, the implementation context of the youth guarantee had improved in 2017. The number of young unemployed and NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) has decreased though with persisting differences across member states.

The review of the youth guarantee demonstrated considerable progress in implementation since the previous review in December 2015. It also highlighted a shift in approach in several member states, with a stronger focus on upskilling and young people facing multiple disadvantages.

In some member states, youth guarantee delivery is based primarily on individual projects and measures, rather than on an overarching strategy.

Most member states have developed new forms of partnerships, which are now central to youth guarantee implementation and should be further built upon.

Outreach to NEETs is still a challenge in many member states, but to a lesser extent for those that have developed strong incentives for young people to register. Additional efforts are needed in many member states to upscale existing outreach measures.

Any other business

– (poss.) Social Fairness Package

The Commission will inform the Council about this package which is likely to consist of the following proposals: a European Labour Authority (ELA) (directive), a European social security number (ESSN) (regulation), and a Council recommendation to improve access to social protection.

– Tripartite Social Summit

The Presidency and the Commission will inform the Council about the next Tripartite Social Summit on 21 March. Its main theme will be "Delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights" and the three subthemes are "Reinforcing innovation, job creation and social fairness in the Multiannual Financial Framework", "New forms of work: challenges and opportunities for employment and social dialogue" and "Economic and social convergence to strengthen growth and resilience".

– Employment Committee (EMCO) and Social Protection Committee (SPC) Work Programmes 2018

The respective Chairs will inform the Council about the Employment committee and Social protection committee work programmes for 2018.
