



Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs

Employment and Social Policy issues

Brussels, 15 March 2019

The Council meeting on 15 March 2019 will be chaired by **Marius-Constantin Budăi**, Minister of Labour and Social Justice of Romania.

The session begins at **10.00** with a policy debate in public session on the **European Semester 2019**. Ministers are expected to adopt the Commission's **Joint Employment Report (JER)** and **Conclusions on the 2019 Annual Growth Survey and Joint Employment Report**.

The Commission will present its **2019 Country reports** as part of the **European Semester**.

The Presidency will inform ministers on the upcoming **Tripartite Social Summit** and on the state of play of several legislative proposals.

After that, Ministers will discuss the proposal for a Regulation on the **European Globalisation Adjustment Fund** with the aim of reaching a partial general approach.

They will also hold a policy debate on the **Social dimension of Europe post 2020** based on a Presidency steering note.

A press conference with minister **Marius-Constantin Budăi** and Commissioner **Marianne Thyssen** will be held at **17.00** in the JL 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: <https://europa.eu/hM79kk>

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

Employment and Social Policy

European Semester 2019

Ministers will also hold a policy debate on the **European Semester 2019**, based on the Presidency steering note ([6623/19](#)) entitled "The European Pillar of Social Rights – an initiative for improving the functioning of the labour market and social protection systems across the EU".

The debate will help to identify new ways to promote reliable and flexible labour relations, combined with adequate support during transitions. The implementation of the principles set out in the European Pillar of Social Rights has to be supported by the allocation of adequate resources in order to increase employment opportunities, especially for those furthest away from the labour market. Meanwhile, Member States have to continue to implement policies aimed at maintaining an optimal level of employment by creating new jobs, preserving existing jobs and increasing the employability of the unemployed as well as by improving and adapting their skills to the requirements of the local labour market.

Against this background, Ministers will be invited to reflect on the following issues:

- What action could be taken in the context of the European Pillar of Social Rights in order to better link employment and social protection policies?
- What (new) instruments are needed at European level in order to strengthen national and local initiatives to create quality jobs leading to inclusive growth?
- Based on the experience gained in the European Semester cycles, which reforms are needed to effectively combat unemployment?

Joint Employment Report (JER)

The Council will adopt the **Joint Employment Report 2019 (JER)** ([6167/19](#)). After adoption, the **JER** will be submitted to the European Council on 21-22 March, in line with Article 148 (1) of the TFEU, to "consider the employment situation and adopt conclusions thereon".

The **JER** was presented by the Commission as part of the Annual Growth Survey package in November 2018. It provides an annual overview of the main employment and social developments, as well as Member States' reform actions, in line with the Guidelines for the Employment Policies of the Member States. The reporting on these reforms focuses on:

- boosting demand for labour
- enhancing labour supply and improving access to employment, skills and competences
- enhancing the functioning of labour markets and the effectiveness of social dialogue
- promoting equal opportunities for all, fostering social inclusion and combatting poverty

The Joint Employment Report also monitors Member States' performance in relation to the Social Scoreboard accompanying the European Pillar of Social Rights. The report looks at the main labour market and social trends in the European Union, the main results from the analysis of the social scoreboard associated with the European Pillar of Social Rights and provides a detailed cross-country description of key indicators (including from the Social Scoreboard) and policies implemented by Member States to address the Guidelines for Employment Policies.

Conclusions on the 2019 Annual Growth Survey and Joint Employment Report [\(6635/19\)](#)

Ministers will adopt **Conclusions on the 2019 Annual Growth Survey and Joint Employment Report**. The Conclusions are intended to contribute to conveying the main messages from the EPSCO to the European Council on 21-22 March.

The 2019 **AGS** 'For a stronger Europe in the face of global uncertainty' aims at encouraging sustained economic and social convergence on the basis of the so-called virtuous triangle of economic policy priorities: relaunching investment, pursuing structural reforms and ensuring responsible public finances. In the context of sustained but less dynamic economic growth in Europe, the 2019 AGS sets the following priorities to guide national reform plans and efforts at EU level:

- high-quality investment and targeting investment gaps in research and innovation, in education, training and skills and infrastructure
- reforms that increase productivity growth, inclusiveness and institutional quality
- ensuring macroeconomic stability and sound public finances

2019 Country Reports

As part of the European semester, the Commission will present the **2019 Country Reports** ([List of Country Reports](#)). This presentation will precede the Commission's proposal on the draft CSR's expected in May 2019.

European Globalisation Adjustment Fund

The Council will discuss a proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the **European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF)** (6842/19). The aim is to reach a partial general approach. The Council's position will not cover the budgetary aspects or provisions of horizontal nature, pending further progress on the next multiannual financial framework (MFF). In the context of the negotiations on the MFF, the decision on the proposal will be subject to the subsequent decision of the Council on whether to continue the EGF and its objectives in the proposed format.

The aim of the Commission's proposal from May 2018 ([9701/18](#)) is to renew the EGF as a special instrument allowing the Union to react to unforeseen circumstances. The fund will support Member States where unexpected major restructuring events occur, particularly events caused by globalisation-related challenges, such as changes in world trade patterns, trade disputes, financial or economic crises, the transition to a low-carbon economy or as a consequence of digitisation or automation.

The fund will provide financing which will be used to improve the skills and employability of workers who have lost their jobs. Among the new elements in the proposal are:

- a lower threshold of 250 dismissed workers for a case to be eligible;
- an extended scope to include additional reasons for restructuring as eligible for funding, e.g. automation, digitalisation;
- alignment of the co-financing rate with the highest ESF+ co-financing rate for a given Member State.

The position of the Council provides for the alignment of the period of functioning of the EGF with the period of the MFF from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2027. It also adds the important changes in the trade relations of the EU and the composition of the internal market to the globalisation-related challenges causing unexpected major restructuring events.

Developing adult skills

Ministers will hold a lunch debate on **Developing adult skills**, based on a Presidency steering note ([6761/19](#)). Taking into account that the rapid technological developments and the growing demand for different skills in the labour market present considerable challenges for the education and vocational training systems and for workers, that people can no longer rely on their initial education and training only and that they need to constantly update their knowledge, and that there is a growing need to retrain the skills of the adult population, including disadvantaged groups, Ministers will be invited to consider the following issues:

- In what areas is European cooperation necessary in order to strengthen adult learning with a view to meeting the needs of the rapidly changing labour markets?
- How could national funding systems be developed to support the massive upskilling and reskilling needs of the adult population? How can European funding best complement funding at the national level?
- Who are the key partners in bringing these efforts forward?

Social dimension of Europe post 2020

Ministers will hold a policy debate based on a discussion paper prepared by the Presidency ([6622/19](#)). The topic is the "**Social dimension of Europe post 2020**". The EPSCO Council will provide its input to the ongoing sectoral debates about the future of the European Union. These sectoral contributions will be tabled to the Heads of States or Government on 9 May 2019 at the European Council in Sibiu (Romania).

The debate will take place in the context of continued serious challenges, including the withdrawal of the UK from the EU. In view of the substantial remaining disparities between and within Member States and the persistent economic and social imbalances, which may put at risk economic and social convergence, the EU recognizes the clear need to strengthen the social dimension of Europe, building on the European Pillar of Social Rights. Against this background Ministers will be invited to share their views on the following questions:

- What are the key aspects which should define the future social dimension?
- Bearing in mind that the European Pillar of Social Rights provides a compass for a renewed process of upward convergence, what would be the priority action areas for the EU and the Member States in order to preserve and improve the European social model post-2020?

Any other business

Tripartite Social Summit

Ministers will be informed by the Presidency and the Commission on the **Tripartite Social Summit** which will take place on 20 March.

The main theme of the summit will be "For a stronger, united and forward-looking Europe".

The three more specific sub-themes will be:

- (a) 50 years of labour mobility – making the best of free movement of workers for well-functioning labour markets;
- (b) Delivering investments in a deeper and fairer Single Market; and
- (c) Building on the New Start for Social Dialogue to shape the new world of work.

The **Tripartite Social Summit** brings together the Presidents of the European Council and the Commission, the European-level social partners, as well as the representatives of the rotating Presidency and the two forthcoming presidencies (Finland and Croatia), at ministerial or prime minister level. Following the practice started in March 2016, the **Tripartite Social Summit** takes place in the afternoon on the day before the European Council.

Implementation of Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways

The Commission will inform the Council on the **Implementation of Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways** ([7199/19](#)), based on a recently published report.

Current legislative proposals

The Presidency will inform Ministers on a large number of **current legislative proposals** in the fields of employment, labour law, and health and safety at work:

- Directive on the accessibility requirements for products and services ([14799/19](#))
- Directive on Work-life balance ([8633/17](#))
- Revision of Directive on carcinogens and mutagens (3rd batch) ([7733/18](#))
- Directive on transparent and predictable working conditions ([16018/17](#))
- Regulation on establishing a European Labour Authority ([7203/18](#))
- Revision of the Regulations on the coordination of social security systems (883/04 and 987/09) ([15642/16](#))

Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information (EESSI)

The Commission will brief Ministers on the state of play of the **Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information (EESSI)** ([6986/19](#)).

The EESSI is an IT system that helps social security institutions across the EU exchange information more rapidly and securely. At the moment most exchanges are paper-based: these are going to be replaced by electronic exchanges in the coming months.

EESSI involves 32 European Countries (EU28 plus Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway and Switzerland). The Commission made the central EESSI system available to Member States in July 2017. Following this, Member States have two years to finalise their national implementation of EESSI and to connect their social security institutions to the cross-border electronic exchanges. The Members States have committed to finalise their national implementation of EESSI by July 2019.

High-Level Conference on the EU Framework on National Strategies for Roma Inclusion

The Presidency will inform Ministers on the outcome of the recent High-Level Conference on Roma Inclusion (7003/19) which took place in Bucharest, 4-5 March.

EMCO and SPC Work Programmes 2019

The Chairs of the **Employment Committee (EMCO)** and the **Social Protection Committee (SPC)** will present the work programmes of their respective committees ([6969/19](#) and [6356/19](#)).

Employment Committee

In accordance with Article 150 (TFEU), the tasks of the Committee are:

- to monitor the employment situation and employment policies in the Member States and the Union;
- without prejudice to Article 240, to formulate opinions at the request of either the Council or the Commission or on its own initiative, and to contribute to the preparation of the Council proceedings referred to in Article 148.

Social Protection Committee

In accordance with Article 160 (TFEU), the tasks of this Committee are:

- to monitor the social situation and the development of social protection policies in the Member States and the Union;
 - to promote exchanges of information, experience and good practice between Member States and with the Commission;
 - without prejudice to Article 240, to prepare reports, formulate opinions or undertake other work within its fields of competence, at the request of either the Council or the Commission or on its own initiative.
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