



Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs

Brussels, 9 and 10 December 2019

The Council meetings on 9 and 10 December 2019 will both begin at **10.00** and be held in public session. The session on 9 December will deal with **Health** issues and will be chaired by **Krista Kiuru**, Minister of Family Affairs and Social Services of Finland. The session on the second day of the meeting will be devoted to **Employment and Social Policy** and will be chaired by **Timo Harakka**, Minister of Employment of Finland.

The session on 9 December will begin with a public debate on **investment in health as a key component of the Economy of wellbeing**. In the afternoon ministers will hold a debate on the **European pharmaceutical policy and how to improve access to medicines**. Ministers will also have a working lunch to exchange views on **how to strengthen the role of the EU and its member states in the area of global health**.

A press conference with Minister Kiuru and Commissioner Kyriakides will take place at +/- 16.30 in the JL press room.

The session on 10 December will begin with a public debate on the **future of gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the EU** with the participation of a guest speaker from the European institute for gender equality (EIGE). This will be followed by the adoption of conclusions on **gender equal economies in the EU** and on a **new EU strategic framework on health and safety at work**.

During a working lunch, ministers will have an exchange of views on the following topic: **'Promoting social and employment policies within the European Semester: future challenges and development needs'**.

In the afternoon, ministers will hold a public debate on the **future of the EU social acquis relating to employment and industrial relations** and will adopt conclusions on **inclusive labour markets**. The Council is also expected to endorse the messages from the Employment Committee's (EMCO) review of the implementation of the **Youth Guarantee**.

A press conference with Ministers Harakka and Blomqvist and Commissioner Schmit will take place at +/- 17.00 in the JL press room (tbc.)

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[Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs meeting page](#)
[Press conferences and public events by video streaming:](#)
[Video coverage in broadcast quality \(MPEG4\) and photo gallery:](#)

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

Economy of Wellbeing – next steps in investing in health as its key component - public debate

On the basis of a presidency discussion paper ([14303/19](#)), ministers will hold a discussion entitled 'Economy of Wellbeing – next steps in investing in health as its key component'. They will be invited to share their views on the following questions:

- When developing concrete measures to advance the Economy of Wellbeing approach, what actions are needed to ensure a strong health-policy input while fostering cross-sectoral dialogue at EU level?
 - More specifically, what critical elements should an EU mental health strategy include to best support the member states' efforts?
 - In the context of demographic change, what kind of actions should be put in place to promote active and healthy ageing, and to encourage prevention and anticipation-based ageing policies?
- Looking at the years to come, how could the member states and the Commission work towards the creation of a European Health Data Space through current and new initiatives to enable better use of health data in care, public health and research to benefit the wellbeing of all?

The debate follows on from the exchange of views on 24 October when the EPSCO Council also adopted conclusions on the economy of wellbeing¹. Those conclusions address several topics, some of which are related to health policy. The focus of the discussion on 9 December will be on those health-related topics, in particular mental health, healthy ageing and the digital transformation of health and social services.

The presidency discussion paper identifies mental health as one of the preconditions for wellbeing and states that much progress has been achieved since it was put on the EU's health agenda for the first time in 1999². It also recognises that mental health is becoming one of the defining health challenges of the future. On healthy ageing, the discussion is expected to touch upon suggestions for ageing policies that can enable active, healthy, inclusive and independent lives. The debate will also be an opportunity for ministers to discuss how the rapid digital transformation can be of benefit to people's wellbeing and improve the way health and social services are delivered.

¹ [Council conclusions on the Economy of Wellbeing](#)

² [Council resolution on the promotion of mental health](#)

European pharmaceutical policy – strengthened cooperation and coordination with the aim to improve access to medicines - public debate

Ministers will hold a debate on how to strengthen cooperation and coordination with the aim to improve access to medicines throughout the EU. To steer the exchange of views, the presidency discussion note ([14307/19](#)) sets out the following questions:

- What concrete measures could Member States and the Commission take to ensure access to both old and new medicines for national healthcare systems and patients, and to avoid problems caused by shortages?
- One of the reasons for shortages and supply disruptions is that the medicines' supply chain has become longer, more complex and fragmented as companies have located a large part of production of medicines outside the EU. In order to ensure a reliable supply, is there a need to call for EU legislative measures to require back-up manufacturing capacity, earlier notification of interruptions and stronger measures to ensure continuity of supply? In your view, would this help reduce the risk of supply disruptions and shortages?
- Strengthened cooperation between Member States and related coordination of activities, such as monitoring, could contribute to mitigating the problems related to shortages of medicines and the sustainability of budgets. How could such cooperation be further strengthened?

The debate will aim at discussing the recurrent problem of securing access to medicinal products in the EU. Medicinal products constitute a special type of goods regulated by a combination of objectives and policies decided both at EU and national level. Member states play an essential role in ensuring access to medicines and their availability. Against this background, the starting point for the discussion will be the need for cooperation to safeguard and improve access to medicines.

The issue of access to medicines has been addressed at Union level on several previous occasions. In June 2016 the Council adopted conclusions covering also this topic¹. A series of informal meetings were organised, with the latest taking place in Brussels in September 2019 under the title 'Addressing the challenges of the EU pharmaceutical system: what changes are necessary from the perspective of member states'.

¹ [Council conclusions on strengthening the balance in the pharmaceutical system in the EU and its member states](#)

The future gender equality policies and gender mainstreaming in the EU - public debate

Gender equality is among the top priorities of the Finnish presidency. In order to continue the efforts to promote high-level policy dialogue on gender equality issues, the presidency has proposed to hold a ministerial debate, based on a discussion paper ([14251/19](#)) and structured around the following questions:

- What should be the thematic priorities of EU gender equality policies in the next five years?
- Which actions and measures should the EU take to combat gender inequalities and strengthen gender equality policies in the next five years?
- How can we ensure that gender equality is more strongly integrated into key future EU strategies and policy processes, including economic and budgetary policies? What are the structures, means and forms of cooperation for doing this, including in the Council?

To set the scene for the exchange of views, a representative from the EIGE will present the findings in the latest EIGE report on the main trends, current progress, and major challenges in the field of gender equality in the EU¹. Ministers are then expected to discuss the priorities in the area of gender equality in the next five years, the actions and measures the EU should take, and the ways of integrating gender equality more strongly into the future strategies and policy processes of the EU.

The EU has committed to achieve gender equality through:

- integration of a gender perspective in all policies and
- specific measures to promote gender equality and combat discrimination

The EU has seen important achievements in this area in recent years, including increased gender balance in decision-making, the adoption of the work-life balance directive and the strengthening of gender mainstreaming in the EU's external action. However, many longstanding challenges remain, such as gender gaps in employment, pay, pensions and poverty levels.

Gender-equal economies in the EU: the way forward taking stock of 25 years of implementation of the Beijing platform for action - Council conclusions

Ministers are expected to adopt conclusions on gender equal economies in the EU ([14254/19](#)).

The adoption of these conclusions is in line with the established practice of reviewing the implementation of the UN agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment by the EU and its member states (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted in 1995).

The conclusions have been prepared in the light of a report by the EIGE, whose main findings will be presented at the beginning of the debate preceding their adoption (see above). The conclusions call on member states and the Commission to further promote gender equality, both as a political priority and through concrete measures.

¹ [EIGE Report](#)

A new EU strategic framework on health and safety at work: enhancing the implementation of occupational safety and health in the EU - Council conclusions

Ministers will adopt conclusions (14256/19) inviting the Commission to present a new EU strategic framework on health and safety at work for the period 2021-2027. The current one expires in 2020 and has led to important achievements. Based on orientations it has given to member states in the area of occupational safety and health (OSH) at work, most EU states have adopted national action plans.

The conclusions call on the Commission, member states and social partners to intensify their efforts in the context of the changing world of work and to tackle the related psychological risks, as well as material risks, such as work-related accidents and diseases, including dangerous substances in the work place. Another area for action, identified in the conclusions, is the inclusion of disabled and older workers.

OSH is considered as an important element of the economy of wellbeing. It is an established fact that investments in OSH serve to prevent work-related illnesses and accidents, and have an overall positive impact on the economy. The main piece of EU legislation in the field of OSH is Directive 89/391/EEC (Framework directive)¹, which is complemented by 24 individual directives covering specific hazards at work and specific sectors, activities and groups of workers.

Future of the EU social acquis relating to employment and industrial relations - public debate

On the basis of a presidency steering note ([14340/19](#)), ministers will hold a public debate on the future of the social legislation in the context of rapid changes in the labour markets. The discussion will be structured around the following questions:

- In addition to the initiatives planned by the new Commission, how should the social acquis relating to employment and industrial relations be developed in the future?
- What are the main challenges in the implementation of the social acquis and how could its enforcement be improved?

The aim of the discussion is to explore possible avenues for further developing EU legislation in the area of social affairs, to identify difficulties in its implementation, to share ideas on how to fill the remaining legislative gaps and to better enforce existing laws. The debate is prompted by the transformation of labour markets caused by digitalisation, climate change, globalisation and migration, among other factors. Meanwhile, a new legislative period has begun after the European elections in May 2019 and a new European Commission is in place, which is a good opportunity for ministers to discuss the future development of the EU social legislation.

The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Article 152) allows the EU to set minimum standards for working conditions and for informing and consulting workers. The European Pillar of Social Rights sets out minimum social rights, some of which are already part of EU legislation. The adoption in June 2019 of the Directive on transparent and predictable working conditions is the most recent step taken by the EU towards minimum harmonisation of rules on working conditions.

¹ [Directive 89/391/EEC](#)

Inclusive labour markets: Improving employment of people in a vulnerable position in the labour market - Council conclusions

Ministers will also adopt conclusions on inclusive labour markets (14646/19). The main aim of these conclusions is to highlight the economic value of providing better employment opportunities to people in a vulnerable position in the labour market. Among people in a vulnerable position, the conclusions identify persons with disabilities, older workers, low-skilled and long-term unemployed people, young people, especially including those not in employment, education or training (NEETs), people with caring responsibilities, people with a migrant background, etc. The persisting gender pay gap is also recognised as a serious challenge.

Providing and enhancing employment opportunities is an objective recognised in the Treaty on European Union (Article 3) and the right to seek employment and to work is enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Article 15).

Review of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee - messages from EMCO

The Council is expected to endorse the messages from the Employment Committee's review of the implementation of the **Youth Guarantee** ([14347/19](#)).

The review¹ shows that measures implemented at national level² in the framework of the Youth Guarantee are bringing results and that the labour-market situation of young people is improving. At the same time some serious challenges remain, in particular in relation to young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs), people with low skills or no work experience, with a migrant background or with health or social issues.

The Council established the Youth Guarantee in 2013³ recommending that member states design Youth Guarantee schemes with the aim to 'ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.' EMCO is tasked to monitor the implementation of the recommendation.

¹ [EMCO Review of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee - Summary results](#)

² [EMCO Review of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee - Country-specific conclusions](#)

³ [Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee](#)

Any other business (9 December 2019)

- The presidency will inform ministers about the current work on the Regulation on health technology assessment and amending Directive 2011/24/EU ([14619/19](#))
- The Commission will provide information about the state of health in the EU ([14722/19](#))
- The Commission will provide information on the state of play of the implementation of Regulation (EU) 2017/745 on medical devices and of Regulation (EU) 2017/746 on in vitro diagnostic medical devices
- Ministers will be briefed on the outcomes of conferences organised by the Finnish presidency
- The incoming Croatian presidency will present its work programme in the area of Health

Any other business (10 December 2019)

- The presidency will inform ministers about the state of play regarding several legislative proposals:
 - Decision amending Decision No 573/2014/EU on cooperation between Public Employment Services (PES)
 - Revision of Regulations on Coordination of Social Security systems (883/04 and 987/09)
 - Regulation on the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF)
 - Directive on Equal Treatment (Article 19)
 - Gender balance on company boards Directive
 - The presidency will also inform ministers about the state of play regarding Council Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed ([13785/19](#))
 - Ministers will be briefed on the outcomes of conferences organised by the Finnish presidency
 - The Swedish delegation will brief ministers on a mutual learning seminar on preventing domestic violence with men and boys (Stockholm, 16-17 September 2019) ([14516/19](#))
 - The chairperson of the Social Protection Committee will provide information about the main messages contained in the Committee's recent report on tackling homelessness and housing exclusion ([14671/19](#))
 - The incoming Croatian presidency will present its work programme in the area of Employment and Social Policy
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