



Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council **Luxembourg, 15 October 2021**

The Council meeting will take place on Friday 15 October 2021 and will be chaired by Janez Cigler Kralj, Minister of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

The Council meeting will start at 10.00. Ministers will hold a policy debate about the future of the European Semester. Also related to the European Semester, ministers will endorse the key messages from the Employment Committee on the Annual Employment Performance Report and the Employment Performance Monitor as well as the key messages from the Social Protection Committee on the Annual Review of the Social Protection Performance Monitor. They will also adopt a Council Decision on Guidelines for the employment policies of the member states. Ministers are also expected to approve conclusions on gender mainstreaming in the EU budget.

Over lunch, ministers will debate the 'Follow-up to the Green Paper on Ageing: are social protection systems across the EU fit for population ageing?'.

The afternoon session, which will start at 15.00, will include a debate on safety and health at the heart of the future of work.

Any other business will include a presentation by the Commission on a long-term vision for rural areas and information from the Presidency and the Commission about the Tripartite Social Summit (20 October 2021).

The meeting will be held in public session, except for the adoption of the agenda, the approval of non-legislative A items and the lunchtime debate.

Press conference (also attended by Commissioner Schmit): at the end of the meeting around 17.00.

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¹ This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the Press Office.

European Semester

Ministers are due to endorse the [Key messages](#) from the [Employment Committee](#) (EMCO) based on the Annual Employment Performance Report and the Employment Performance Monitor as well as the [Key messages](#) from the [Social Protection Committee](#) (SPC) based on the Annual Review of the Social Protection Performance Monitor.

EMCO and SPC advise ministers on matters relating to the employment, skills and social policy dimensions of the European Semester. They prepare reports monitoring member states' progress in implementing reforms within the Semester.

Member states are also due to adopt a Council decision on Guidelines for the employment policies of member states. In the EU, member states consider their economic and employment policies to be a matter of common concern, which they coordinate within the Council. The Council adopts guidelines, on a yearly basis, for the employment policies of the member states.

The European Semester is a cycle of economic, fiscal, labour and social policy coordination within the EU.

Following the publication of the [Commission Communication](#) 'The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan', the European Semester has also provided a framework for coordinating and monitoring member states' efforts in implementing the principles and rights set out in the pillar, on the basis of recent EU legislative proposals, initiatives and strategies.

Policy debate: The future of the European Semester

COVID-19 led to a number of changes to the 2021 European Semester process (e.g. no Country Reports or non-fiscal Country Specific Recommendations). Ministers for employment and social affairs [raised their voice](#) at an early stage, calling for a return to a fully-fledged Semester process with a strong social dimension. The European Pillar of Social Rights and the Pillar's Action Plan, with its 2030 EU headline targets on employment, skills and poverty reduction, should provide guidance in this respect.

Based on a Presidency [steering note](#), ministers will discuss how the Action Plan, and in particular the three EU headline targets, can best be reflected in the future European Semester and which elements and features are essential for the future European Semester process, so as to ensure a strong social dimension. They will also debate the role of the Council (EPSCO) and its preparatory bodies EMCO and SPC in the future Semester process.

Conclusions on Gender Mainstreaming in the EU budget

The Council is expected to approve [conclusions](#) on the above subject. The European Court of Auditors recently [assessed](#) whether gender mainstreaming had been applied in the EU budget to promote equality between women and men. Promoting equality between women and men is an EU treaty obligation. The Court has defined gender mainstreaming as 'actively promoting equality between women and men at all stages and in all areas of policy-making and implementation' and 'concluded that the Commission had not yet lived up to its commitment to gender mainstreaming in the EU budget'.

In its conclusions, the Council notes the report's recommendations and calls upon the Commission - among other things - to step up efforts to systematically mainstream a gender perspective in future EU strategies and policies, to further examine the Member States' Recovery and Resilience Plans and their implementation from a gender equality perspective, and to support and promote the systematic production, collection, analysis, reporting and dissemination of sound and comparable sex-disaggregated data regarding EU funding programmes.

Policy debate: Safety and health at the heart of the future of work

Sustainable work assists people with working and remaining in work throughout their working lives and thus contributes to their wellbeing at all ages and to the productivity and sustainability of our economies. This human-centred approach to the future of work is vital for addressing challenges that the world of work is facing, such as population ageing, digitalisation, climate change and transformations in work organisation. In turn, a high level of occupational safety and health is a key factor in enabling sustainable work for all. The EU's [Strategic Framework](#) on Health and Safety at Work 2021-2027 defines the priorities and actions for improving workers' health and safety in the years ahead.

In its [background note](#), the Presidency stresses that efforts are needed at all levels to deliver on the objectives of the new EU strategic framework. It asks ministers to reflect on the main challenges in implementing the new EU framework and on the EU-level activities they consider necessary to deliver on its objectives. Ministers will also discuss to what extent health and safety policies in their countries are actively contributing to work becoming more sustainable over the life-course.

Any other business

Under any other business, the Commission will present its long-term vision for rural areas and both the Presidency and the Commission will inform ministers about the Tripartite Social Summit which will take place on 20 October 2021.
