

**Background brief***27 November 2025*

# Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council

1-2 December 2025, Brussels

**PRESS****EN****Chairs:**

- Monday 1 December: Kaare Dybvad Bek, Danish Minister for Employment; Sophie Hæstorp Andersen, Danish Minister for Social Affairs and Housing
- Tuesday 2 December: Sophie Løhde, Danish Minister for the Interior and for Health

**Commission representatives:**

- Roxana Mînzatu, Executive Vice-President for Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness; Hadja Lahbib, Commissioner for Equality, Preparedness and Crisis Management
- Olivér Várhelyi, Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare

**Starting time:**

- Monday 1 December: 9.30
- Tuesday 2 December: 10.00

**Media opportunities:***Doorstep:*

- Monday 1 December: +/- 8.45 with Minister Dybvad Bek; +/- 10:45 with Minister Hæstorp Andersen
- Tuesday 2 December: +/- 8.45 with Minister Løhde

*Press conference:*

- Monday 1 December: +/- 18.00 with Minister Dybvad Bek, Minister Hæstorp Andersen, EVP Mînzatu,
- Tuesday 2 December: +/- 16.25 with Minister Løhde, Commissioner Várhelyi.

**Main agenda topics:**

On Monday, **employment and social affairs** ministers will be invited to approve conclusions on the future European Affordable Housing Plan, as well as to agree the Council's position on the revision of legislative files relating to carcinogens, mutagens and reprotoxic substances at work (CMRD), and the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF). An exchange of views will take place on simplification, implementation and enforcement in the employment and social fields. The equal treatment directive and the European Semester are also on the agenda.

On Tuesday, **health** ministers will seek to agree the Council's position on the critical medicines act (CMA). An informal lunch debate will take place on novel tobacco and nicotine products and their impact on children and young people.

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[Meeting page on the Council website](#)

[Press conferences, doorsteps and other public events in video streaming](#)

[High quality photo and video material](#)

## Employment and social affairs

### *Affordable housing (public session)*

Ministers will be invited to approve the Council's conclusions on the future European Affordable Housing Plan, which the Commission plans to publish in December 2025.

The issue of affordable housing has come under increased scrutiny at EU level in recent years. In its political guidelines for 2024-2029, the Commission draws attention to the dramatic rise in the cost of housing. The first ever commissioner responsible for housing, Dan Jørgensen, has also been appointed. The European Council discussed the housing challenges faced by many EU citizens, including lack of access to affordable housing, at its summit in October 2025.

The European Affordable Housing Plan is expected to:

- focus on measures to reduce rising house prices and rental costs
- develop a strategy for housing construction
- provide technical assistance to member states and cities
- boost investment and relevant skills

The draft conclusions submitted to the Council note that while the EU can play a significant supporting role in alleviating the shared housing challenge, housing policy remains a member-state competence. The Council also calls on the Commission to prioritise four key areas: financing, construction and sustainability, planning, and social inclusion.

[Draft Council conclusions on the future European Affordable Housing Plan](#)

[One roof, many realities: Europe's complex housing crisis](#) (Council research paper, October 2025)

### *European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (public session)*

The Council will seek to agree its position ('general approach') on a proposed regulation that aims to broaden the scope of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) to include workers people at imminent risk of displacement.

The EGF was initially established to help workers and self-employed people who had become unemployed as a result of restructuring, allowing them to access services such as training courses, help with job searches or careers advice. The proposed revision is being introduced to reflect the fact that lay-offs due to restructuring often occur in waves, and would allow workers who are at imminent risk of losing their jobs – but not yet unemployed – to also benefit from such support.

The proposed revision was put forward on 1 April 2025 alongside a proposal to amend the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), which is the EU's main instrument for investing in people and supporting the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. On 15 July 2025, the Council and the Parliament reached a provisional agreement on the revision of the ESF+ as part of the ongoing mid-term review of the EU's cohesion policy.

[Regulation amending Regulation \(EU\) 2021/691 as regards support to workers affected by imminent job displacement in enterprises undergoing restructuring](#) (Council's general approach)

[Labour rights in the EU](#) (background information)

[Cohesion policy mid-term review: Council and Parliament strike a deal to better address current and emerging challenges](#) (Council press release)

### *Carcinogens, mutagens and reprotoxic substances at work (public session)*

The Council will seek to agree its position ('general approach') on the sixth revision of the carcinogens, mutagens and reprotoxic substances directive (CMRD).

The CMRD sets out measures to prevent and protect against risks linked to exposure to carcinogenic, mutagenic or reprotoxic substances at work, and includes an obligation to establish limit values where possible. Following an evaluation of the EU's occupational safety and health directives in 2017, the CMRD has undergone regular updates; five revisions have so far been adopted, addressing more than 40 key hazardous chemicals.

The Commission's proposal:

- sets limit values and relevant notations for cobalt and its inorganic compounds, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and 1,4-dioxane
- adds welding fumes to the list of substances, mixtures and processes in Annex I
- includes an amendment to correct the existing entry on mercury and divalent inorganic mercury compounds in Annex III to fully align the term used for this substance with the scope of the CMRD

[Directive amending Directive 2004/37/EC as regards the addition of substances and setting limit values in its Annexes I, III and IIIa](#) (Council's general approach)

[Protecting workers: health and safety at work](#) (background information)

### *[Delivering simplification, implementation and enforcement in the employment and social fields \(public session\)](#)*

Based on the first annual report presented by Commission Executive Vice-President Mînzatu on simplification, implementation and enforcement for the policy areas in the remit of the EPSCO Council, the Council will hold an exchange of views on the topic of 'Delivering simplification, implementation and enforcement in the employment and social fields'. The ministerial debate will focus on the best ways to implement the EU's simplification agenda at both EU and national levels.

[Presidency steering note](#)

### *[Equal treatment directive \(public session\)](#)*

Ministers will be invited to take note of a progress report on the proposed equal treatment directive, which would prohibit discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation in areas relating to social protection, social advantages, education, and access to goods and services, including housing.

The proposal for a Council directive on equal treatment was published in 2008 and requires unanimity in the Council. The Commission initially announced its intention to withdraw the proposed directive as part of its 2025 work programme; however, it has since reversed this decision. A policy debate on the proposal took place at the EPSCO Council on 19 June 2025.

[Progress report](#)

[Directive on equal treatment](#) (Commission proposal)

[Non-discrimination](#) (background information)

### *[European Semester 2026 \(public session\)](#)*

In the context of the 2026 European Semester, the Commission will present the autumn package, which was published on 25 November 2025 and includes the Joint Employment Report and a proposal for a Council recommendation on human capital. The Council will then exchange views on the promotion of social inclusion and cohesion through coherent social and housing policies. Ministers are also expected to endorse:

- [Key messages from the Social Protection Committee \(SPC\) on the implementation of the Council recommendation on adequate minimum income ensuring active inclusion across EU member states](#)
- [Key messages from the Employment Committee \(EMCO\) on the implementation of the action plan on labour and skills shortages in the EU](#)

- [Key messages from the SPC on the implementation of the action plan on labour and skills shortages in the EU](#)
- [Key messages from EMCO and the SPC on the implementation of the Council recommendation on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality](#)
- [EMCO opinion on improving the scope and relevance of data collection at EU and national level on social dialogue](#)

The European Semester is the EU's framework for coordinating and monitoring economic and social policies. The annual cycle begins in November, when the Commission sets the priorities for the year to come, and ends in October of the following year, when national governments submit their draft budgetary plans.

[European Semester 2026: Promoting social inclusion and cohesion through coherent social and housing policies](#)  
(presidency steering note)

[The European Semester explained](#)

### *Informal lunch debate*

Over lunch, ministers will take part in an informal debate on the topic of 'Fair recruitment: decent working conditions for all posted workers and a level playing field for companies in the EU'.

### *Other items*

- Traineeships directive and Council recommendation on a reinforced quality framework for traineeships: state of play (information from the presidency) (public session)
- [Tripartite Social Summit](#) (information from the presidency and the Commission) (public session)
- [Events and high-level conferences](#) (information from the presidency) (public session)
- [EU Talent Pool](#) (information from the Presidency and the Commission)
- Main conclusions and key messages of the Porto Social Forum (information from Portugal)
- Work programme of the incoming presidency (information from Cyprus) (public session)

## Health

### *Critical medicines act (public session)*

Ministers will be invited to approve the Council's position ('general approach') on the critical medicines act, a proposed regulation that aims to improve the security of supply and availability of critical medicines in the EU.

In recent years, the EU has increasingly faced severe shortages of key medicines such as antibiotics, insulin and painkillers. The measures proposed in the CMA seek to address these issues by providing incentives for the diversification of supply chains and boosting the production of medicines in the EU.

The proposed act, which was published by the Commission on 11 March 2025, complements the proposals to revise the EU's pharmaceutical legislation (the 'pharmaceutical package'), which also contain provisions on shortages and management of supply of medicinal products.

[The pharma package: new EU rules on medicines](#) (background information)

### *Informal lunch debate*

Over lunch, ministers will take part in an informal debate on the topic of 'Novel tobacco and nicotine products: impact on children and young people'.

### *Other items*

- Pharmaceutical package (information from the presidency) (public session)
  - 2025 Annual progress report on Simplification, Implementation and Enforcement (information from the Commission) (public session)
  - WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC): Eleventh Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 11) Geneva, 17-22 November (information from the presidency and the Commission) (public session)
  - Health conferences organised during the Danish presidency (information from the presidency) (public session)
  - Pandemic agreement (information from the presidency and the Commission)
  - Union prevention, preparedness and response plan for health crises (information from the Commission)
  - EU cardiovascular health plan (information from Czechia)
  - [Cost study of the Water Treatment Directive \(UWWTD\)](#) (information from Czechia)
  - EU strategy on climate and health (information from the Netherlands)
  - [European Health Union as a core pillar in enhancing competitiveness and security of the Union](#) (information from Slovenia and Spain)
  - Work programme of the incoming presidency (information from Cyprus)
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