

Background brief*13 October 2025*

Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council

17 October 2025, Luxembourg

PRESS
—
EN

Chairs: Magnus Heunicke, Minister for Environment and Gender Equality; Sophie Hæstorp Andersen, Minister for Social Affairs and Housing

Commission representative: Hadja Lahbib, Commissioner for Equality

Starting time: 10:00

Media opportunities:

- Doorsteps (Minister Heunicke, Minister Hæstorp Andersen): +/-9:15
- Press conference (Minister Heunicke, Minister Hæstorp Andersen, Commissioner Lahbib): +/-16:30

* * *

Main agenda topics:

The EPSCO meeting of 17 October will focus on equality issues.

The Council is expected to approve conclusions on violence against women and domestic violence, and will exchange views on combating hate, discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ persons.

Ministers will also focus on the topic of disability by approving conclusions on the social inclusion of persons with disabilities through the promotion of independent living, and having an exchange of views on advancing disability rights in the EU.

Over lunch, ministers will hold an informal debate on ways to combat sexual violence and promote consent in sexual relationships.

* * *

[Meeting page on the Council website](#)

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

[High quality photo and video material](#)

Violence against women and domestic violence (in public session)

Ministers are expected to approve conclusions on violence against women and domestic violence, with a focus on prevention, early detection and intervention.. The Council highlights the crucial role of bystanders in combating violence, and calls for awareness raising and education among the general population about how best to react or intervene in such cases.

Specifically, the conclusions call for:

- improved training of workers in relevant fields such as healthcare and social services
- measures to protect and support children affected by domestic violence
- better data collection on the prevalence and consequences of violence against women
- efforts to further engage men and boys in fostering gender equality
- inclusion of measures for prevention, early detection and intervention in the upcoming Gender Equality Strategy post-2025

[Violence against women and domestic violence: prevention, early detection and intervention](#) (draft Council conclusions)

[EU measures to end violence against women](#) (background information)

[Gender equality](#) (background information)

Combating hate, discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ persons (in public session)

Ministers will exchange views on ways to combat hate, discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ persons. Although the principles of equality and non-discrimination are enshrined in the EU's Treaties and its Charter of Fundamental Rights, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer (LGBTIQ) and other sexual and gender minority persons continue to face discrimination and harassment across the EU. Moreover, 2025 is seen as a pivotal moment in terms of LGBTIQ rights, as on 8 October the Commission launched an updated LGBTIQ Equality Strategy for 2026-2030.

During the discussion, ministers will be asked to address two questions:

1. What has been an effective best practice in your member state for combating discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ persons?
2. What additional actions could be taken at the EU level to ensure that LGBTIQ persons and families can live freely and openly, including across borders, free from discrimination and violence?

[Combating hate, discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ persons](#) (steering note)

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

[LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2026-2030](#)

Social inclusion of persons with disabilities (in public session)

Ministers are expected to approve conclusions on the social inclusion of persons with disabilities through the promotion of independent living. The Council's conclusions highlight ongoing barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from living independently in the community on an equal basis with others. The Council therefore calls for further action to be taken at national and EU level, including:

- promoting access to affordable person-centred support services
- improving the availability of accessible, affordable and non-segregated places of residence

- ensuring that services for the general population are accessible, affordable, inclusive and adaptable for persons with disabilities
- accessible information and communication technologies and services, including through the development of digital skills
- working towards systematic disability mainstreaming in all EU policies
- having a continued focus on independent living in the second half (2025–2030) of the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

[Social inclusion of persons with disabilities through the promotion of independent living](#) (draft Council conclusions)

[Disability in the EU: facts and figures](#) (background information)

Advancing disability rights in the EU (in public session)

An exchange of views will take place on advancing disability rights in the EU, focusing on challenges, progress and future directions. While significant steps have been taken at EU level to advance disability rights, most notably within the framework of the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030, key barriers remain. According to recent studies, self-reported experiences of discrimination have increased over the past five years in several EU countries, while the number of persons with disabilities residing in institutional settings has increased in some cases over the past decade. Legal barriers also persist for certain persons with disabilities, who risk being deprived of some or all of their legal capacity.

Ministers will be invited to respond to the following questions:

1. In your view, what are the most important measures and policy tools to further promote the rights of persons with disabilities? In which areas do challenges remain most pressing?
2. What should be the key priorities for the second half (2025–2030) of the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities? How can the strategy more effectively support national reforms and the implementation of disability-related legislation and policies?

[Advancing disability rights in the EU: challenges, progress, and future directions](#) (steering note)

[Union of Equality: Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030](#)

[Accessibility to products and services for people with a disability](#) (background information)

Informal lunch debate

Over lunch, ministers will discuss measures that can be taken at EU level to combat sexual violence and promote consent in sexual relationships.

Other points (in public session)

- The Danish presidency has invited Carlien Scheele, Director of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), to give a presentation on the Gender Equality Index, with a focus on gender stereotypes.
[Gender Equality Index](#)
- The presidency will also provide an overview of recent events, including the informal meeting of employment and social affairs ministers that took place in July 2025.
- Hungary will share information about an initiative for a European day of sign languages.
[Initiative for a European Day of Sign Languages](#)
- The Commission will present relevant elements of Commissioner Lahbib’s annual report on simplification, enforcement and implementation.
[Annual report on simplification, implementation and enforcement](#)