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Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs

Employment and Social Policy issues

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President

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Minister for Labour, Social Affairs and Family

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

ITEMS DEBATED

Carcinogens or mutagens at work

The Council reached a general approach on a revised directive protecting workers from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens or mutagens at work ([12883/16](#) +COR 1).

The proposed directive aims to significantly increase the number of carcinogens for which occupational limit values are set, as compared to the 2004 directive.

It proposes the revision or introduction of exposure limit values for 13 chemical agents with carcinogenic or mutagenic effects. The Commission is expected to present a second list of limit values for other substances by the end of 2016.

The proposed revision concerns in particular annexes I and III of directive [2004/37/EC](#). In annex I, a provision is added on exposure to respirable crystalline silica dust generated by a work process.

With regard to annex III, while the current directive includes three carcinogenic agents (hardwood dust, benzene and vinyl chloride monomer) and their limit values for occupational exposure, the proposal revises the limit value for two of those substances and includes new limit values for eleven substances.

European Parliament

The EP's [Employment Committee \(EMCO\)](#) will examine a draft report in November and will adopt it in February 2017.

For more information read the [press release](#)

Work in fishing

The Council reached a political agreement on a directive dealing with the 2007 work in fishing convention of the International Labour Organisation ([12226/16](#)).

This directive implements the agreement between EU-level social partners, i.e. the General Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives in the EU (COGECA), the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) and the Association of National Organisations of Fishing Enterprises (EUROPÊCHE).

More particularly, this agreement clarifies the EU legislation on working conditions in the fisheries sector by merging existing provisions with new provisions from the ILO convention.

The main ambition is to create a level playing field for EU workers and employers once the convention enters into force, giving fishermen decent working and living conditions on board of fishing vessels.

For more information read the [press release](#)

Employment-related issues

– Long-term unemployment

The Council held an exchange of views on the implementation of the recommendation on long-term unemployment (LTU).

During this exchange, member states noted that long-term unemployment is worrying and that the Council recommendation of December 2015 is a tool for integrating long-term unemployed people into the labour market.

Since last December, member states have been committed to implementing the recommendation. Today they underlined that efforts have to be maintained since the long-term unemployed are affected by isolation, loss of skills and lower income. A quick return to the labour market is an investment for society. Long-term unemployment cannot be dealt with labour ministers alone but needs an integrated approach that also involves education, health and social affairs ministers.

Employers should be encouraged to hire long-term unemployed people by putting aside prejudices or fears that the long-term unemployed cost more money to the company.

The Council endorsed the main messages of the new EMCO indicator framework for monitoring the LTU recommendation ([12493/16](#)). According to those messages, prevention is more effective than treatment. When prevention fails, job integration agreements should contain clear provisions on mutual responsibilities, pointing out who is in charge of follow-up measures.

– Youth Guarantee / Youth Employment Initiative

The Commission presented to the Council its report on the implementation of the Youth Employment Initiative/Youth Guarantee ([12749/16](#)).

The Council adopted the recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee in April 2013.

In order to support the youth guarantee schemes, and to tackle youth unemployment more generally (which stood at over 23.5% in the EU at the beginning of 2013), the European Council of February 2013 agreed on a financial envelope of €6 billion for the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) for the 2014-2020 period.

The Council took note of the bench-learning programme of the European public employment services network.

New skills agenda for Europe

The Council held a policy debate on the new skills agenda package and endorsed an EMCO opinion ([12485/16](#)).

The main messages of the discussion, to be forwarded to the Education Council in charge of this dossier, can be summarised as follows:

Ministers reiterated their support for the objectives of the package, pointing out the need to link vocational training with labour market needs.

The Commission package's focus on reskilling, upskilling and providing people with basic skills was welcomed, as was the importance it placed on soft skills, education in entrepreneurship and digital skills.

Increasing the competitiveness of the workforce should, however, go hand in hand with social inclusion, and vulnerable groups, such as the unemployed, should be the focus of active labour market policies.

While stressing the importance of forming partnerships between central and local authorities and the public and private sectors, a number of ministers referred to the key role social partners play in this process and to the importance of involving stakeholders, such as educational institutions, schools and employers, at local level.

Several ministers also reiterated the need to adequately address the issue of migrants and of their needs in terms of labour market integration.

Greater mobility for students was also identified as a key issue to be addressed in order to enhance skills, employability and intercultural awareness.

The Commission also presented its new proposal on Europass, which was adopted on 4 October ([12947/16](#)).

European Semester 2017

In view of the Commission's autumn economic package, the Council endorsed the main messages, reports and monitors of EMCO and the Social Protection Committee (SPC) ([12486/16](#), [12488/16](#), [12490/16](#), [12606/16](#) and [12607/16](#)).

Pillar of social rights

The Council endorsed the joint EMCO/SPC opinion on the European pillar of social rights ([12605/16](#)).

Over the past months EMCO and SPC have held discussions on the future direction of the pillar. The result of this examination is outlined in the above joint opinion.

Social dialogue

The presidency and the Commission updated the Council on the preparation of the Tripartite Social Summit for Growth and Employment (TSS) on 19 October 2016, and about recent developments concerning the new start for social dialogue.

The main theme of this summit is 'Addressing Europe's common challenges: generating growth, creating jobs and ensuring fairness'. The three sub-themes cover the European Semester and its current main challenges; the integration of refugees into the labour market and society; and the new skills agenda.

Under points without discussion, the Council adopted a decision on the TSS. The new decision, which will enter into force only after the summit on 19 October, will replace the current Council decision on the TSS. The changes are primarily organisational and will not change the nature of the summit.

Roma integration

The Council adopted conclusions on a European Court of Auditors' report ([12225/16](#)) concerning EU policy initiatives and financial support for Roma integration.

The report focuses on political initiatives and the use of financial incentives through the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund.

Any other business

The presidency informed the Council about the following dossiers:

- Blue card for highly skilled employment;
- Action plan on the integration of third-country nationals;
- Collaborative economy.

The Greek delegation informed the Council about collective bargaining and the future of work, as an update on the negotiation process on labour market reforms in Greece.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

Employment

Employment policies

The Council adopted a decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the member states ([12163/16](#)).

Social policy

Tripartite Social Summit

The Council adopted a decision on a Tripartite Social Summit for Growth and Employment (TSS) which revises the 2003 decision ([12136/16](#)).

This decision was necessary so as to take into account the institutional changes brought in by the Lisbon Treaty and the positive results of recent practical experience with the TSS.
