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#### COVER NOTE

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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Work programme of the Social Protection Committee for 2015

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Delegations will find attached the 2015 Work programme of the Social Protection Committee and its permanent and temporary subgroups, as adopted in accordance with the Committee's rules of procedure, with a view to the meeting of the EPSCO Council on 9 March 2015 (Any Other Business item)..



# The Social Protection Committee

## 2015 Work Programme

The Social Protection Committee (SPC) is an advisory policy Committee, established in accordance with art. 160 of the TFEU, providing representative forum for multilateral social policy coordination, dialogue and cooperation at EU level. It brings together senior policy makers from all EU Member States and the Commission in an effort to discuss and identify the most appropriate policy measures necessary to respond to the social policy challenges across the EU. The Committee actively participates, on behalf of the Council of the European Union for employment, social affairs and health, in the European Semester process of policy coordination.

The Treaty-based mandate of the SPC stipulates that the Committee monitors the social situation in the EU and the development of social protection policies<sup>1</sup>. SPC delivers on this mandate through the use of the social open method of coordination as the main policy framework, including all major social policy strands: social inclusion, pensions, health and long-term care.

In 2015 the SPC will continue to fulfil its Treaty mandate. This work programme already accounts for the proposals on streamlining and reinforcing the European Semester put forward by the Commission in the 2015 Annual Growth Survey. 2015 will see an important set of Commission proposals, related to the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the review of the Employment Guidelines and the possible review of the six-pack legislation, which will have further implications for the organization and work programme of the Committee for next year.

In adapting its work and defining its priorities, SPC has used the conclusions from the Joint SPC-EMCO opinion on the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 Strategy, endorsed by the Council on 16 October 2014<sup>2</sup>. Some of the main elements of these conclusions were related to the improvement and genuine enhancement in the social governance model in the framework of the social OMC and a due account of social investment as a growth-enhancing factor. The Committee will continue to work on this, making use of well-established tools related to social monitoring, multilateral surveillance, thematic policy discussion, ex-ante discussion.

The proposed work programme focuses on two main interlinked areas of policy work – one is related to the activities of the SPC undertaken in the context of the European Semester and the Europe 2020 Strategy, including the social dimension of the EU, while the second is focused on thematic in-depth work. In delivering on these areas of work, the Committee will continue to make full use of the opportunities provided by the open method of coordination for social policy coordination and mutual learning.

## **1. Europe 2020 Strategy, the European Semester and the social dimension of the EMU and the EU**

### **Identification and definition of main policy challenges and priorities**

SPC will contribute to the analysis and identification of the main social protection challenges and policy priorities in view of the EPSCO input to the Spring European Council. It will do so on the basis of its annual review of social protection reforms, and the Committee's assessment of the social protection issues raised in the 2015 Annual Growth Survey and its accompanying documents, notably the Joint Employment Report and the scoreboard of key social and employment indicators. It will base its analysis and conclusions on the Member States' social reporting done in the context of the National Reform Programmes and the 2015 strategic social reporting.

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<sup>1</sup> Art. 160 TFEU

<sup>2</sup> Council document 13809/14

	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Deliverables to the Council</b>
<b>Jan-Feb 2015</b>	<b>Input to the Council on the 2015 Annual Growth Survey (AGS), offering an analysis of the relevant social protection and social inclusion issues on the basis of the annual review of social protection reforms in the 2014 SPC report “Recent social policy reforms for fair and competitive Europe”</b>	Contribution to the Council Conclusions on the “2015 AGS: political guidance on employment and social policies” in view of the EPSCO input for the Spring European Council - March EPSCO
<b>Jan-Feb 2015</b>	<b>Examination and input for the finalisation of the Joint Employment Report and its key messages on issues related to social protection and social inclusion, as well as the analysis of the social and employment scoreboard</b>	Finalised JER and its key messages, including the analysis of the social and employment scoreboard – March EPSCO
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> half 2015</b>	<b>Review of recent social protection reforms for the period 2014-2015 on the basis of the National Reform Programmes and the 2015 strategic social reporting</b>	Report + Main messages as input to the 2016 Annual Growth Survey - October EPSCO

### **Multilateral surveillance and social monitoring**

The SPC will continue its multilateral surveillance on the implementation of policy reforms to address the Council country-specific recommendations in the context of the Europe 2020 process. It will adjust its calendar and process on the basis of the Commission proposals for streamlining of the European Semester<sup>3</sup> already for the 2015 process, taking account of the results of the December 2014 EPSCO discussion in this regard. Following the conclusions of the Joint opinion on the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 Strategy, it will explore ways of further strengthening the multilateral surveillance working methods through both thematic and country reviews. It will do so on the basis of its two tools: i) the annual exercise of multilateral examination of the implementation of the Council recommendations on the basis of the Commission Country Reports<sup>4</sup> and Member States' reporting in the first half of the year and, ii) the thematic in-depth reviews on the basis of the SPPM social trends to watch and as a potential extension, on other horizontal thematic issues identified through the Semester process in the second half of the year.

It will continue on a voluntary basis the ex-ante discussion of major social policy reforms while following closely the procedures and processes resulting from the Commission Communication on “Making the best use of the flexibility within the existing rules of the Stability and Growth Pact” and in particular the assessment of structural reforms.

It will engage in joint reviews with other Council preparatory committees, where relevant, and the Working Party on Public Health at Senior level (WPPHSL) on reviews related to health care policy. The Committee will make more active use of the results of the peer review programmes in all its activities. It will continue improving its use of evidence-base, including by reviewing its social monitoring framework in cooperation with the Commission.

<sup>3</sup> 2015 Annual Growth Survey

<sup>4</sup> As per the Commission proposal for streamlining and reinforcing the European Semester

The Committee will work jointly with EMCO on improving and strengthening the role of the Scoreboard of key employment and social indicators, endorsed by the Council in June 2014, and its interpretations in light of the SPPM and the EPM.

Following the Commission 2015 AGS package, the SPC will also advise the Council on any proposals from the Commission to reinforce the use of social indicators in the Alert Mechanism Scoreboard and more generally on the improvement of the Scoreboard of key employment and social indicators in this context.

	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Deliverables to the Council</b>
<b>Jan-Feb 2015</b>	<b>Monitoring of the social situation in the EU</b>	SPC Annual report on the social situation in the EU on the basis of the Social Protection Performance Monitor (SPPM) and the 2014 SPPM in-depth reviews + Key messages - March EPSCO
<b>March-April 2015</b>	<b>Multilateral country examination of the implementation of the 2014 Council recommendations on the basis of the Commission Country Reports and Member States' reporting</b>	SPC Conclusions on the implementation of the 2014 CSRs and the examination of the NRPs – June EPSCO
<b>1st half of 2015</b>	<b>Discuss the social protection aspects of the in-depth reviews, part of the Commission Country Reports prepared by the European Commission as provided for under art.5 of the Regulation on the prevention and correction of Macroeconomic Imbalances</b>	Present its views to the Council
<b>2nd half 2015</b>	<b>Thematic in-depth reviews on the 2014 SPPM social trends to watch and thematic discussion on common policy challenges identified through the CSRs</b>	Input for the Annual Social Situation Report, the SPC/EMCO conference on Inclusive Labour markets, organized by the LV Presidency and relevant Council discussions/Conclusions
<b>2015</b>	<b>Examination and opinion on introducing social indicators into the MIP scoreboard</b>	tbd
<b>2015</b>	<b>Continuation of the voluntary ex-ante discussion of major social policy reforms</b>	tbd

### **Examination of the country-specific recommendations**

The Committee will prepare the Council's adoption of the 2015 country-specific recommendations by reviewing all country-specific recommendations falling under its Treaty-based competence on issues related to social protection (social inclusion, pensions, health and long-term care). In producing its opinions, it will use the conclusions of the multilateral implementation reviews to be carried out in the first half of the year. It will adopt joint opinions with other Committees on recommendations

falling under joint competence. In particular, it will consult the WPPHSL in the examination of all health-related CSRs.

It will provide input for the EPSCO debate on policy and procedural aspects of the 2015 European Semester and will prepare suggestions for improvement.

	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Deliverables to the Council</b>
May-June 2015	<b>Discussion of the 2015 Commission proposals for Council recommendations on the National Reform Programmes</b>	Country-specific opinions on the 2015 Commission proposals for Council recommendations on the National Reform Programmes - June EPSCO
2 <sup>nd</sup> half 2015	<b>Evaluation of the 2015 European Semester process</b>	SPC opinion and recommendations on the 2014 European Semester - October EPSCO

### **Reaction to Commission proposals and initiatives**

The SPC will provide its advice to the Council on the proposals by the Commission on the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the review of the six-pack legislation and the European Semester, and the review of the Employment Guidelines. The Committee will also stand ready to advise the Council on any new Commission proposals in the field of social protection, which will be part of the new Commission work programme for 2015.

	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Deliverables to the Council</b>
2015	<b>Assessment of the Commission proposal on the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 Strategy</b>	Opinion
2015	<b>Assessment of the Commission review of the 'six-pack' regulation</b>	Opinion
2015	<b>Assessment of the revision of the Employment Guidelines in relation to areas of SPC competence</b>	Opinion and drafting suggestions in view of comprehensive input by the Employment Committee

## **2. Thematic work in the framework of the social OMC**

The SPC will continue its thematic work on relevant issues related to social inclusion, pensions, health and long-term care. It will finalise its new edition of the Pension Adequacy Report in the first half of the year and will publish it in parallel to the Ageing Report. It will consider the possibility of continuing thematic in-depth work on certain aspects of pension policy identified in the Pension Adequacy Report and explore the possibility of doing so in cooperation with the EPC Ageing Working Group and the Employment Committee. Further to that, it will follow the Commission-led work on reference budgets in line with the request expressed by EPSCO Ministers in June 2014 on further work in the area of minimum income schemes. It will also explore together with the Commission in

line with the 2015 AGS priorities, particular aspects related to the modernization of social protection systems, including among others building on the commonly agreed objectives of the social OMC and strengthening the work on social benchmarks, looking at the role of social services and social entrepreneurship and more broadly the involvement of the private sector in social policies. It will look into the issue of social impact assessments and the best way to take this up at the Committee level, building on the 2014 peer review on quantitative impact assessment in the social field.

	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Deliverables to the Council</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> half 2015</b>	<b>Pension Adequacy Report 2015</b>	Report + Key messages – June EPSCO
<b>2015</b>	<b>Thematic work on specific areas of pension policy identified by the 2015 Pension Adequacy Report</b>	tbd
<b>2015</b>	<b>Modernization of social protection systems through social investment and innovation</b>	tbd
<b>2015</b>	<b>Social impact assessments</b>	tbd
<b>2015</b>	<b>Minimum income schemes: follow-up on the outcomes of the Commission project on reference budgets</b>	tbd

### **3. Work of permanent and temporary working groups**

In its work the SPC will make full use of its permanent working group on Indicators (ISG) and its ad-hoc group on Ageing issues. In particular, these two groups will focus their work on the following areas:

#### **3.1 Indicators' Subgroup (ISG)**

Following the discussions on the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the conclusions presented to the Council, the ISG will continue work to strengthen the social monitoring framework. It will work on the social monitoring tools – social and employment scoreboard, SPPM, JAF - with the aim of better reflecting the social investment dimension of welfare systems, exploring possible ways of bringing the SPPM and the EPM closer together by taking good practice from both, and more generally, reviewing the JAF social policy areas. The ISG will also examine how the monitoring framework can be complemented with the proposals of the EC-SPC report on "Social protection systems in the EU: financing arrangements and the effectiveness and efficiency of resource allocation". Where possible the ISG will contribute to the Commission's intention to enhance capacities for social monitoring and the assessment of social impact, including exploring ways to measure and analyse social spillovers. The ISG will continue work on the monitoring of health, as a follow-up of the work on JAF health, and of pensions, in particular by contributing to the production of the Pensions Adequacy Report 2015.

It will continue its monitoring and analysis of the 2020 poverty and social exclusion headline target, including by reviewing the proposed improvements of the severe material deprivation indicator in

light of latest survey results in line with the 2010 Council Conclusions, examining the need and scope for improvement of the (quasi-)jobless household indicator and better addressing the gender dimension, as requested in the June 2014 Council Conclusions. Furthermore, the ISG will contribute actively to the preparation of the 2015 Annual SPC Report on the social situation in the EU, notably by producing the annual edition of the SPPM. It will continue pursuing the work on exploring ways of obtaining timelier indications of social developments, including by monitoring progress on better timeliness of data and on “nowcasting” of indicators, with the objective of striving for an enhanced capacity to assess employment and social impacts. The ISG will also continue work on the identification and development of indicators on income support and in-kind services, investigate additional income inequality indicators, and explore developing indicators which give a better view of the dynamic aspects of the social situation, such as indicators on transitions, persistence and recurrence, making greater use of the longitudinal component of EU-SILC. It will pursue the proposals for data and indicators' development identified in the EC-SPC 2014 report on "Adequate social protection for long-term care needs in an ageing society." The ISG will also continue its on-going work on enhancing the statistical capacity related to the three strands of the OMC and its active collaboration with Commission services, especially Eurostat, other international organizations and research institutions.

### **3.2 SPC Working Group on Ageing Issues (SPC WG-AGE)**

The SPC-AGE ad-hoc group will deliver on its task to finalise the 2015 Pension Adequacy Report in the first half of 2015. It will consider the possibility of continuing thematic in-depth work on certain aspects of pension policy identified in the Pension Adequacy Report and explore the possibility of doing so in cooperation with the EPC Ageing Working Group and the Employment Committee.

## **4. Social Reporting**

The SPC will continue its social reporting in the context of the social OMC in the form of the National Social Report/light year social reporting. It will do so in a complementary manner to the reporting done by Member States in the context of the National Reform Programme and will consider, as in previous years, parallel deadline in order to strengthen coherence.

## **5. Working methods and relations with other Committees**

In its cooperation with other policy Committees (EMCO, EPC, EFC) and with the Working Party on Public Health at Senior Level (WPPHSL), the SPC will be guided by the European Council Conclusions of 24-15 October 2013 calling for more work to strengthen cooperation between the various Council configurations in order to ensure consistency of the economic, employment and social policies in the line with the common EU objectives as well as the conclusions of the Joint SPC-EMCO opinion on the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 Strategy. This includes joint meetings and coordination of the views on different cross-cutting policy issues. Where there are policy recommendations, approval of reports, or other activity with significant relation to health policy, the SPC will invite the contribution of the WPPHSL.

As provided for in the regulation on a European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation regulation<sup>5</sup>, the SPC will be regularly informed about the progress in implementing the Programme.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0238:0252:EN:PDF>