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Subject: Enhancing Well-being at Work
- Council Conclusions (8 June)

Delegations will find in the Annex the Council conclusions on Enhancing Well-being at Work, as approved by written procedure on 8 June 2020.

Council conclusions on Enhancing Well-being at Work

ACKNOWLEDGING that:

1. People's well-being is one of the principal aims of the European Union. Promoting the improvement of living and working conditions, adequate social protection and social dialogue are shared objectives of the Union and the Member States in their social and employment policies. The Union, within its competences and taking into account diverse national practices, supports and complements the activities of the Member States in this field.
2. The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission affirmed their shared political commitment to deliver on the European Pillar of Social Rights (hereinafter 'the Pillar'), including on the fundamental rights of workers and improved living and working conditions laid down thereto. Principle 2 calls for equality of treatment and opportunities for women and men while Principle 3 refers to the right to equal treatment and opportunities regarding employment, social protection, education, and access to goods and services available to the public. Principle 5 underlines the need for secure and adaptable employment, in particular fair and equal treatment regarding working conditions and access to social protection and training. Principle 8 stresses the importance of social dialogue and of workers' involvement on matters relevant to them. Principle 9 emphasises the importance of work-life balance for parents and people with caring responsibilities and Principle 10 also refers to the need for a healthy, safe and well-adapted work environment, whilst there is a special focus on people with disabilities in Principle 17. Principles 11 and 18 highlight the right to affordable and good quality early childhood education and long-term care services. Moreover, in its Strategic Agenda 2019-2024, the European Council lists the implementation of the Pillar at EU and Member State level among the priority actions.

3. In a highly competitive economy such as that of the European Union there is often pressure to increase productivity. This often leads to multiple competing demands that can be detrimental to workers' well-being, such as an increased workload or greater intensity of work.
4. Changes in the world of work can have an impact on the well-being of workers and self-employed persons, in particular those in non-standard work or in new types of work including certain types of platform work. Addressing current and emerging challenges related to those changes, such as new forms of precariousness, must be an important policy objective of the Union and of the Member States.
5. The mutually reinforcing effect of well-being and economic prosperity has already been acknowledged by the Council¹, which also underlined the importance of effective occupational health and safety policies at national and Union level and called for a new EU Strategic Framework on health and safety at work for the years 2021 to 2027².
6. Enhancing well-being at work can have positive effects on productivity and engagement at work and on health, and can also result in a better work-life balance for men and women. Well-being at work contributes to higher participation in the labour market, longer healthy working lives and the sustainability of social security systems, as well as reduced expenditure on public health services and sickness benefit costs. At company level, this brings the additional advantages of staff retention and reduced absenteeism.

¹ Council conclusions on the Economy of Wellbeing, OJ C 400, 26.11.2019, p.9

² Council conclusions on a New EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work: Enhancing the implementation of Occupational Safety and Health in the EU, doc.14942/19.

7. There is a difference in the way work affects the well-being of men and women in terms of job quality, especially as regards the work environment risks that they are exposed to, working conditions, career opportunities and levels of pay. This difference needs to be taken into account when designing policies on well-being at work.
8. The Union agencies Eurofound³ and EU-OSHA⁴ make important contributions to understanding the factors which make a job a high-quality job, which includes having a safe and healthy working environment. Eurofound research found that nearly 20 % of all jobs across the EU are of ‘poor quality’, since they are characterised by poor prospects, low earnings and little opportunity to apply skills and learning⁵. Furthermore, at least a quarter of workers in the EU feel that work puts their health at risk, which makes them more likely to want to leave the labour market early.
9. While 80 % of workers in the Union are generally satisfied with their working conditions, many still experience a work-life conflict. For example, one fifth of workers state they are – always or most of the time – too tired after work to carry out necessary household tasks⁶.

³ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

⁴ European Agency for Health and Safety at Work

⁵ Eurofound (2017), Sixth European Working Conditions Survey – Overview report (2017 update), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, Average for EU28.

⁶ Eurofound (2017), Sixth European Working Conditions Survey – Overview report (2017 update), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg (p.118), Average for EU28.

10. Adequate education, training, life-long learning and skills are a prerequisite for an innovative and competitive work force. Over 80 % of workers who have received training agree that training improves the way they work⁷. Yet for only 40 % of workers it was *their* employer who provided the training, and there are significantly different practices among Member States⁸. In addition, workers on temporary contracts and those working part-time are less likely to receive employer-funded training⁹.
11. All forms of violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, are forms of abuse and discrimination that seriously threaten well-being at work and continue, in many cases, to be underreported. The vast majority of victims of sexual harassment at work are women¹⁰.
12. While stress, burnout, depression and other psychosocial risks at work are costly for employers and workers, and for society in general, and are estimated to be exceeding 4% of GDP¹¹, Member States still face challenges in addressing them effectively.

⁷ Eurofound (2017), Sixth European Working Conditions Survey – Overview report (2017 update), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg (p. 90), Average for EU28.

⁸ Eurofound (2017), European Working Conditions Survey overview report (p.83), Average for EU28.

⁹ Eurofound (2018) Policy brief: Does employment status matter for job quality (p.13).

¹⁰ Microdata from the 2015 European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), coordinated by Eurofound, available at: https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/genvio_sex_harass_sur_ewcs_harassment/metadata

¹¹ OECD/European Union (2018), Health at a Glance: Europe 2018: State of Health in the EU Cycle, OECD Publishing, Paris/European Union, Brussels

13. Workers are less likely to state that work affects their health when their job quality is high. The physical and social environment is the most important factor determining job quality. A working environment adapted to the professional needs of the workers, in particular older workers and workers with disabilities, will enable a productive and long involvement in the labour market. Autonomy, professional development and opportunities to progress in a career are also shown to have a positive association with high job quality and increased well-being at work¹².
14. Workers' involvement in decision-making processes, particularly concerning their own individual workplace, enhances satisfaction and self-development, strengthens overall well-being at work and increases productivity. It also leads to greater commitment and motivates workers to make full use of their skills and to upgrade them. Involving workers strengthens their sense of initiative, in particular in situations where close managerial control of work performance is unfeasible.¹³ Non-standard and short-term contracts constitute a special challenge to workers' involvement.
15. Promoting work-life balance is also an important element when it comes to increasing workers' well-being, including mental well-being. Working time arrangements are the most important factor in achieving a good work-life balance. When properly applied and where feasible, the possibility of workers to obtain reduced hours, predictability, flexible working arrangements and flexibility as regards the place of work, all contribute to a better work-life balance. Digitalisation and the widespread use of ICT and mobile technology can change the way work is organised and can also have a positive impact on work-life balance. At the same time, however, they can blur the line between the work sphere and the private sphere, thus reducing rest time and the ability to disconnect.

¹² Eurofound (1 March 2020) *Job quality article*, Eurofound's website: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/topic/job-quality>.

¹³ Eurofound (2013), *Work organisation and employee involvement in Europe*, Publications office of the European Union, Luxembourg (p. 9).

16. While work-life balance is strongly related to practices at the workplace, the provision of accessible, affordable and high-quality public services, such as childcare and other care services, is crucial in order to provide an enabling overall framework for better work-life balance, and thus contributes to reducing the gender gaps in labour market participation, earnings and pensions. Adequate social protection schemes are also very important in this respect, not least those related to parental and other associated leave provisions.
17. Access to adequate social protection for all workers and, under comparable conditions, for self-employed persons, is crucial for a sense of well-being, as it minimises threats in the event of economic inactivity.
18. Alongside policy efforts at EU and national level and efforts by the social partners, employers can take action across a range of areas to ensure greater well-being and increased engagement of their workers, and thereby improve competitiveness and productivity.
19. Social partners and social dialogue in all forms are key to ensuring well-being at work and improving working conditions.¹⁴ Social dialogue and collective bargaining can also contribute to finding the right balance between the needs of employers and workers, taking into account the need to ensure the well-being of workers on the one hand and competitiveness and sustainable growth for businesses on the other.

¹⁴ Eurofound (2016), *Sustainable work throughout the life course: National policies and strategies*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg (p. 2.).

The Council of the European Union INVITES the Members States, while taking into account national circumstances and respecting the role and autonomy of the social partners, to:

20. DEVELOP a cross-sectoral assessment of impacts on well-being at work in order to strengthen knowledge-based policy- and decision-making.
21. ENGAGE with the social partners in developing frameworks for well-being at work and improving working conditions and working environments in Member States.
22. ENFORCE the existing legal Union framework, keeping in mind the Member States' possibility to go beyond the minimum requirements laid down therein, PROCEED with the implementation of the Work-Life Balance Directive¹⁵ and follow the Council Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed¹⁶.
23. STRIVE to provide good quality and affordable early childhood education and care, and long-term care services.

INVITES the Member States and the European Commission, in accordance with their respective competences and taking into account national circumstances, whilst respecting the role and autonomy of the social partners, to:

24. INCLUDE the perspective of well-being at work horizontally into relevant national and Union policies and PROMOTE the implementation of the Pillar as an important step towards enhancing well-being at work.

¹⁵ OJ L 188, 12.7.2019, p. 79–93

¹⁶ OJ C 387, 15.11.2019 p.1

25. RAISE awareness of the fact that investments in well-being at work, in particular social investments and investments in corporate social responsibility, have positive effects on efficiency and productivity at company level, and on individuals and society as a whole.
26. PROMOTE and IMPLEMENT evidence-based and effective policy interventions at Union and national level to address common challenges to well-being at work.

INVITES the European Commission to:

27. SUPPORT, in the context of improving well-being at work, the collection of sex-disaggregated data, by making use, where possible, of existing reporting mechanisms and tools, and the sharing among Member States of examples of good practices or projects.
28. ADOPT a new EU Strategic Framework on Occupational Safety and Health for the period 2021 - 2027.

INVITES the Employment Committee and the Social Protection Committee to:

29. INCLUDE a ‘well-being at work’ perspective in their reflections in the policy fields within their remit.
30. CONTINUE improving and developing, in cooperation with the EU institutions, reliable and internationally comparable indicators for measuring well-being at work, taking into account the country-specific context, existing reporting mechanisms and the work carried out by relevant actors.