



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 22 November 2019
(OR. en)

14303/19

SAN 473
SOC 757
ECOFIN 1053
COMPET 754

NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

Subject: Preparation of the **Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council session** on 9 December 2019
Economy of Wellbeing - next steps in investing in health as its key component
- Policy debate

Delegations will find a note from the Presidency in Annex. This note is intended as a basis for the policy debate on 'Economy of wellbeing - next steps in investing in health as its key component' taking place at the Council (EPSCO) session scheduled for 9 December 2019.

Economy of Wellbeing – next steps in investing in health as its key component

On 24 October 2019, the Council of the European Union adopted conclusions¹ on the Economy of Wellbeing as **the new horizontal approach to political decision-making, defining priorities and governance**.

The conclusions underline how **the Economy of Wellbeing puts people and their wellbeing at the centre of policy and decision-making and sees people's wellbeing and sustainable economic growth** as mutually reinforcing factors instead of contradictory goals. In particular, it presupposes cross-cutting collaboration between different policy areas such as health, social protection, employment, gender equality, competitiveness, environment and education.

Health is an essential determinant and component of wellbeing. The positive impact of an improved health status on other aspects contributing to human wellbeing – such as educational attainment and labour market participation – and on potential savings for society goes well beyond its effects on gross domestic product growth. Conversely, ill-health imposes a significant burden on society and public finances, in addition to its human toll. From an economic perspective, **prevention of ill-health and promotion of health** are more effective ways to increase wellbeing than curing diseases once they occur.

Implementation of the Economy of Wellbeing builds on sustainable growth being a prerequisite for improving the wellbeing of people, that in turn is a prerequisite for sustainable growth. Such policies must be underpinned by data-driven research and innovation. The European Union has instruments, such as the Horizon Europe programme, to strengthen the knowledge base for the promotion of wellbeing.

¹ Council conclusions on the Economy of Wellbeing adopted on 24 October 2019 (document 13432/19)

The Economy of Wellbeing is based on core European values such as solidarity, respect for human rights, social protection, universal access to care, gender equality, access to education, and safe working conditions. Ensuring respect for human dignity and promoting people's wellbeing are among the fundamental aims of the EU, as enshrined in the Treaty on European Union (Articles 2 and 3).

The Council conclusions address several important topics closely related to health policy. In this context, the Presidency would like to highlight particularly mental health, healthy ageing, and the digital transformation of health and social services.

There is no health without mental health. Mental health is one of the fundamental preconditions for wellbeing. Systematic and result-oriented action to tackle the burden of mental ill-health at national and EU level includes prevention, early detection and treatment of learning difficulties and mental health disorders, implementation of best practices to tackle psychosocial risks at work, as well as better cooperation between different policy sectors. Such action has the potential to bring about an enormous positive impact on the labour market and economy.

In order to achieve good mental health and wellbeing for the whole population, it is not sufficient to only concentrate on treating mental disorders, but it is also important to actively promote mental wellbeing at work, in school and early childhood education, and across communities.

Good mental health improves people's quality of life at all ages. Each stage of life has its mental health enablers and problems. But throughout life, good mental health and the development of mental health skills enhance resilience and adaptation to the growing pace of change facing work and daily life, and to the complexity of work patterns.

Much progress has been made since 1999, when mental health was put on the EU's health agenda² for the first time. Despite progress resulting, *inter alia*, from the implementation of the European Pact for Mental Health and Well-Being³, mental health is becoming one of the defining health challenges of the 21st century, both at European and global level. Changes in working life regarding contents of work, the ways people work, and the relationship between employers and employees will intensify this trend, setting specific demands for social, emotional, and cognitive skills. As a consequence of these changes, organisational human capital is becoming ever more important in the labour market, and good mental health is at its foundation.

The Council conclusions on the Economy of Wellbeing draw attention to the necessity of promoting good mental health and advancing prevention, early diagnosis, treatment and de-stigmatisation of mental disorders. Policy priorities could include measures contributing to the promotion of mental health, such as developing diagnostics and more systematic support programmes, promoting non-discrimination at work and in education, and reducing stress in the workplace. These would improve the lives of millions of Europeans and contribute to better working conditions, and thus to a stronger economy.

A comprehensive, cross-sectoral EU strategy on mental health will help to steer long-term policy and action based on research evidence and impact assessments.

Defining the Decade of Healthy Ageing. Longevity springs largely from the success of the European social model: many diseases have been overcome and social protection has reduced poverty and inequalities. The ageing of the population is a consequence of this success and linked to other demographic changes.

² Council resolution on the promotion of mental health, adopted 18 November 1999, OJ C 86, 24.3.2000, p. 1–2

³ European Pact for Mental Health and Well-Being, 2008, https://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/mental/docs/pact_en.pdf

Health promotion and disease prevention, public health measures, combating major diseases, and advances in healthcare have all contributed to the increase in life expectancy. Promotion of active and healthy ageing has been a priority at national and European⁴ level, but it now needs further impetus. Lifelong health promotion contributes to increasing longevity but also to reducing costs for care.

There is an urgent need to look at ageing as more than a question of the sustainability of the national economy. Longevity provides possibilities for the labour market and the economy but requires supportive measures enabling all people to make an active contribution to society and working life. Safe and healthy workplaces translate into a longer working life and prevent work-related illness, accidents and related costs.

Ageing affects all sectors of society, such as healthcare, pension systems, housing, and markets for goods and services⁵. Responses to demographic change need to be renewed in a broad range of policies. The common goal is to deliver ageing policies that enable active, healthy, inclusive and independent lives. The Presidency considers that the policy challenges and opportunities of ageing must be addressed in a cross-sectoral manner that takes generation and gender issues duly into account.

Ageing does not impact all socioeconomic groups in the same way. In the view of the Presidency, inequalities among the ageing population need to be addressed through the health system and social services but also by ensuring adequate income and pensions and reducing poverty.

There is a wide variety of determinants of health that have an impact on people's capacity to accomplish daily activities throughout their lives. Measures need to contribute to the promotion of active and healthy ageing and prevention of ill-health, supporting lifelong learning of work-life skills and competences, empowering older people and fostering supportive communities.

⁴ The Silver Economy. An Overview of the European Commission's Activities 2019, <https://silvereconomyforum.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Silver-Economy-Brochure.pdf>

⁵ The High-Level Forum on the Silver Economy, Helsinki, 9-10 July 2019, <https://silvereconomyforum.eu/>

Social and digital innovation must be used to the full when searching for solutions to demographic change and guaranteeing resources for dignified living⁶. Furthermore, anticipation of future impacts of demographic changes is a key prerequisite for successful policies across all sectors.

Digital society to benefit people's wellbeing. Innovative technological developments, especially digitalisation and artificial intelligence, are changing the way people's wellbeing can be promoted and how health and social services are delivered⁷. This has the potential to increase the cost-effectiveness, efficiency and quality of services as well as to counter inequalities in access and outcomes. In particular, health professionals need to be adequately trained to enable the health sector to take full advantage of new technologies.

There is a great potential for further progress in health promotion and tackling healthcare challenges through digitalisation. Digital information systems are crucial in creating integrated care. Member States can learn from each other and also work together to create an interoperable eco-system for digital health and investment programmes for digital infrastructure in Europe⁸.

Because technology is developing rapidly, it is important that the whole population has access to life-long acquisition of skills and competences both to meet the challenges and to seize the opportunities of digitalisation and new forms of work. According to many studies, the use of digital tools depends on digital skills and knowledge and not on age as such, but the lack of digital literacy among older people and disadvantaged groups must be addressed.

People's access to their own health and social data is an important element of patient-centred care. Well-designed digital systems are secure by design and follow data protection rules and relevant ethical standards. Systems designed based on these principles help make use of the potential of health and social data in public health, research and innovation.

⁶ Council conclusions on healthy and dignified ageing, adopted 30 November 2009 (document 15955/09)

⁷ Council conclusions on health in the digital society – making progress in data-driven innovation in the field of health, adopted on 8 December 2017 (document 14079/17)

⁸ EHealth Network Guidelines 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/ehealth/docs/ev_20190611_co922_en.pdf

In order to speed up the current work on the cross-border exchange of health data, the Commission has launched the idea of a European Health Data Space⁹. It could draw inspiration from the eHealth Digital Service Infrastructure for e-prescriptions and patient summaries, the clinical consultations on rare disease patients under the European Reference Networks, and the emerging collaboration on putting together more than 1 million sequenced genomes¹⁰, as well as other research infrastructures which showcase benefits of health-data sharing. The European Health Data Space could be backed up by European and national legislation or other instruments that implement the data protection rules, data security and related ethical principles in practice, in particular on the secondary use of health and social data.

⁹ Mission letter to Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner-designate for Health,
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/mission-letter-stella-kyriakides_en.pdf

¹⁰ The Commission Communication on the Transformation of Digital Health and Care
(document 6451/18)
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2018:233:FIN>

Conclusion

The Economy of Wellbeing builds on the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights as well as on the Health in All Policies and One Health approaches, supports the implementation of the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and promotes inter-sectoral cooperation and coordination at national and EU levels. The recent Council conclusions seek to strengthen the role of employment, social, health and education policies within the European Semester process. Against the background set out above, the Presidency invites the Council to hold a policy debate based on the following questions:

1. When developing concrete measures to advance the Economy of Wellbeing approach, what actions are needed to ensure a strong health-policy input while fostering cross-sectoral dialogue at EU level?
 - a) More specifically, what critical elements should an EU mental health strategy include to best support the Member States' efforts?
 - b) In the context of demographic change, what kind of actions should be put in place to promote active and healthy ageing, and to encourage prevention and anticipation-based ageing policies?

2. Looking at the years to come, how could the Member States and the Commission work towards the creation of a European Health Data Space through current and new initiatives to enable better use of health data in care, public health and research to benefit the wellbeing of all?