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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: Work Programme of the Social Protection Committee for 2021

Delegations will find attached the 2021 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 Informal videoconference of the Ministers of Employment and Social Policy on 15 March 2021 (Any Other Business item).



2021 SPC Work Programme

The Social Protection Committee (SPC) is an advisory policy Committee, established in accordance with art. 160 of the TFEU, providing a 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 as per Article 2 (2b) of Council Decision (EU) 2015/773 establishing the SPC.

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.¹ 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.

The SPC may, if necessary, prepare additional reports, formulate opinions or undertake other work within its fields of competence, at the request of the Council, the Commission or its own initiative as per Article 2(1c) of the Council Decision 2015/773, establishing the Committee. In addition, the Committee is tasked² to contribute to all aspects of the European Semester within its field of competence and report on them to the Council.

1. Priorities for SPC work in 2021

The 2021 SPC work programme takes into account the policy priorities of the Council of the European Union, the European Commission and forthcoming Portuguese and Slovenian presidencies. It focuses on two main interlinked areas of policy work, which also support the implementation European Pillar of Social Rights – one is related to the European Semester, as outlined by the 2021 Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy, while the second is focused on thematic in-depth work. In delivering on these areas, the Committee will continue to make full use of the opportunities provided by the social open method of coordination, including mutual learning.

In light of the current travel and meeting restrictions, a certain level of flexibility is to be foreseen in the SPC activities in 2021. To that end, the Committee will monitor the progress of its work and, **if necessary adapt its work programme in the course of 2021.**

The Committee will seek to align its activities with the work programme of the European Commission and the priorities of the forthcoming Portuguese and Slovenian presidencies.

¹ Art. 160 TFEU

² Council decision (EU) 2015/773, article 2b

The European Semester

2.1 Contribution to the EPSCO input for the Spring European Council

SPC will contribute to the preparation of the EPSCO input to the Spring European Council with its assessment of the social protection issues raised in the **2021 Joint Employment Report**. It will, also take part in any negotiations on possible changes of the **Employment Guidelines**, and the monitoring framework(s), in particular **the Social Scoreboard** and/or to the **Joint Assessment Framework (JAF)**.

	Activities	Deliverables to the Council
1 st half 2020	Reaction to the Joint Employment Report, offering an analysis of the relevant social protection and social inclusion issues	Following its preparation of the EPSCO position (December 2020) on the 2021 Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy, the SPC will contribute to the Council Conclusions on the 2021 JER: political guidance on employment and social /policies – March EPSCO
1 st half 2020	Examination and input into the Joint Employment Report and its key messages on issues related to social protection and social inclusion, including the analysis of key employment and social indicators.	

2.2 Multilateral implementation reviews

In view of the transitory changes introduced with the 2021 ASGS in the European Semester process, the SPC will seek to adapt, but will continue its **multilateral surveillance on the implementation of structural reforms in the Member States, including those addressing the Council country-specific recommendations (CSRs)** of 2020 and 2019, where relevant. In this context, Member States will have the opportunity to report on past measures but also on intentions for future measures, including those announced in the national Reform and Resilience Plans (RRPs) as a form of ex-ante discussion of social policy reforms. The Committee will inform the Council of views in each of the thematic areas of Committee Competence .

It will also follow-up on the implementation of the **social protection aspects of the Eurozone recommendation** in cooperation with the **Employment Committee (EMCO)** and the advisory Committees of the ECOFIN Council.

It will explore ways of further strengthening its working methods and the multilateral nature of the reviews undertaken by the Committee. It will **engage in joint reviews** with other Council advisory committees and the Working Party on Public Health at Senior Level (WPPHSL), where relevant. The Committee will make use, where appropriate, of the results of the peer review programme and successful social policy innovation projects.

	Activities	Deliverables to the Council
1 st half 2021	Multilateral examination, complemented by further thematic discussion, of the implementation of the 2020 and, where relevant, the Council country-specific recommendations in the areas under SPC Competences	Horizontal opinion and country-specific conclusions for the June EPSCO

2.3 Review of the proposals for Council country-specific recommendations and Eurozone recommendation

In the absence of non-fiscal CSRs in the 2020 Semester cycle, the SPC will seek to adopt joint opinions with other Committees in case of recommendations falling under joint competence. It will examine in the second half of the year any social protection issues which may be included in the **Commission proposal for a Eurozone recommendation**, in cooperation with the Employment Committee (EMCO) and the advisory Committees of the ECOFIN Council, and contribute to the preparation of the EPSCO views.

	Activities	Deliverables to the Council
1 st half 2020	Cooperation with other Committees on 2021 CSRs of common interest	Horizontal opinion and country-specific conclusions for the June EPSCO
2 nd half 2020	Examine social protection issues included in the Commission proposal for a Eurozone recommendation	Contribution on social protection parts of Eurozone recommendation 2021 – December 2020 EPSCO

2.4 Monitoring of the social situation and developments in social protection policies

Through its annual report, SPC will continue its **monitoring of the social situation in the EU**, including through carrying out a final assessment of the progress achieved against the Europe 2020 poverty and social exclusion headline target, , and the development of social protection policies as per its Treaty mandate.

Based on the report, the Committee will propose for endorsement by the **October EPSCO key messages** on the main policy priorities in the area of social protection and social inclusion in view of the Commission's preparatory work for the **2022 Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy**. An intermediate update of the SPPM dashboard will be produced by spring 2021, to take account of the availability of the full set of results from EU-SILC 2019.

	Activities	Deliverables to the Council
2 nd half 2021	Preparation of an annual report on the social situation in the EU and overview of social protection reforms on the basis of the Social Protection Performance Monitor (SPPM) and reporting by Member States	Report + Main messages on the social situation and key social policy priorities as input to the preparation of the 2022 Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy – October EPSCO

2.5 Follow-up from the joint SPC-EMCO assessment of the Europe 2020 Strategy

As a follow-up from its joint work with EMCO on the assessment of the Europe 2020 Strategy and in the light of the Action Plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the SPC will **reflect, jointly with EMCO, on how to adjust its working methods, reporting tools, and monitoring frameworks**, and how to achieve a wider dissemination and better impact of the Committee's deliverables.

3. Social OMC

3.1 Thematic work

The SPC will continue its thematic work on priority issues related to social inclusion and social protection, pensions, health and long-term care. This will include carrying out thematic reviews, policy debates and mutual learning activities.

In the selection of thematic areas for discussion, it will take into account the policy priorities of the Council, the Commission and the Portuguese and Slovenian Presidencies, and the corresponding thematic work.

Thematic priorities for the Committee include:

- Contribution to the implementation of the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, including the forthcoming EPSR Action Plan and related governance, target setting and monitoring arrangements.
- Contribution to the implementation of the Council Recommendation on **Access to Social Protection**, with focus on the national plans defining implementation measures.
- Work related to the forthcoming Council Recommendation for a **European Child Guarantee**, including its monitoring and implementation
- In line with the Council Conclusions on Strengthening Minimum Income Protection to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion in the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond, initiate work on the joint reporting of **minimum income schemes**. In this context, seek to strengthen the activities of the Minimum Income Network (MINET).
- Monitoring of the social **impact of the COVID-19 crisis** – through regular reports by the ISG and the SPC Annual Report
- The finalisation of the **Pension Adequacy Report** and the **Long-term Care Report**.

Building on successful Committees' previous joint efforts, the SPC will continue its work in the field of **inequality**, including on the analysis of the distributional impact of reforms. In this context, it is envisaged to organise a mutual learning seminar. The SPC may also engage in work related to defining further the concept of **social resilience**.

Timing	Activity	Deliverables to the Council
H1 2021	Finalisation of the Pension Adequacy Report	Key messages
H1 2021	Finalisation of the Long-term Care report	Key messages
tbc 2021	Follow-up thematic exchange on a European Child Guarantee	Thematic conclusions
2 nd half 2021	Preparatory work for the reporting on minimum income	TBD
2 nd half 2021	Mutual learning seminar on inequality	Thematic conclusions

The Committee will follow relevant developments and may provide views on policy initiatives such as the Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Green Paper on Aging, the Action Plan for Social Economy, the initiative related aimed at Improving the working conditions of platform workers, the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation, as well as policy initiatives related to homelessness and housing exclusion, energy poverty, integration and inclusion of migrants.

The SPC would also follow the developments related to the next **Multiannual Financial Framework** (MFF), 2021-2027, in particular the new regulations for the **ESF+**, as well as the regulation for the **Recovery and Resilience Facility**. The SPC will seek cooperation with the **Employment Committee** (EMCO) and the **Economic Policy Committee** (EPC) on these matters whenever relevant.

3.2 Thematic social reporting

Every year, the SPC Members engage in thematic social reporting on a topic chosen according to the current social policy priorities. For 2021, it is proposed that the reporting is focused on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on **Access to social protection for workers and the self-employed**, a key initiative part of the roll-out of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

To ensure comparability and the possibility of comprehensive analysis, the Member States' National Plans under the recommendation would form the basis for the thematic reporting. The consolidated feedback will feed into the Commission's review of the progress made in the implementation of this Recommendation.

3.3 Use of benchmarking frameworks

The SPC will continue to work, through its indicator Subgroup (SPC ISG) and in cooperation with the European Commission, on the development of benchmarking frameworks in the area of social protection and social inclusion, in line with the common approach agreed as concerns the use of benchmarking in the context of EPSCO work. In 2021, the Committee will finalise its work on developing benchmarking frameworks on ***pension adequacy*** and on ***childcare and support to children***. It will also consider a possible update and review of the one on ***minimum income***.

4. Input from the SPC working groups

The SPC ad hoc **Pensions Adequacy working group (WG PA)** and **Long-term Care working group (WG LTC)** will finalize their work on the 2021 Pension Adequacy and Long-term Care Reports. The groups will utilize the expertise of the SPC Indicators' Sub-Group (ISG) and coordinate, where appropriate, with the EPC Working Group on Ageing Populations and Sustainability (WG AGE).

The permanent **SPC Indicators' Sub-Group** will continue to provide its support to the SPC and will during 2021 focus on issues such as:

- Follow up to the Europe 2020 Strategy and its headline poverty and social exclusion target, including reviewing the related AROPE indicator, and review the current social monitoring framework in particular in the light of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.
- Review issues of timeliness of social indicators, and, jointly with the EMCO Indicators Group, monitor regularly the social situation following the COVID-19 outbreak
- Produce the SPPM results and related analysis of the social situation in the EU for the SPC annual report

The ISG will also continue working on the identification and development of **indicators to assess inequality** in its key dimensions, as well as **benchmarking frameworks** as highlighted above. It will further develop its **monitoring frameworks for health**, the portfolio of **indicators for long-term care**, and will further develop **the monitoring framework for the Council Recommendation on Access to Social Protection**.

A full overview of ISG activities is presented in the 2021 ISG work programme.

5. Working methods and relations with other Committees

In response to the travel and meeting restrictions introduced in 2020 in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and with the aim to protect the health and safety of its Members, the SPC has adapted its working methods. Heavier reliance on virtual meetings and enhanced written procedures allowed the Committee to successfully deliver the key items of its 2020 work programme. Nevertheless, physical meetings continue to be seen as enabling much richer and more interactive discussions.

In light of the continued uncertainties with regard to these restrictions, the **Committee meetings will continue to be held virtually in 2021, with physical meetings resuming as soon as it is deemed safe.** The SPC will monitor the progress of its work under the current restrictions and, **if necessary, adapt its work-programme in the course of 2021.**

In its cooperation with other policy Committees (EMCO, EPC, EFC, Education Committee) and with the Working Party on Public Health at Senior Level (WPPHSL), the SPC will be guided by Council Decision (EU) 2015/773 establishing the SPC, 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 line with the common EU objectives, as well as by the EPSCO Council Conclusions on Economy of Well-being, which call on the SPC to continue fostering a close cooperation with other Council Committees and preparatory bodies. This may include joint meetings, preparation of joint papers, as well as coordination of the views on cross-cutting policy issues.

6. Cooperation with the EU social partners' organizations and social NGOs

In delivering on its work programme, SPC will seek to continue its co-operation with social partners and EU-level social NGOs.