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NOTE

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

Delegations will find attached the 2021 Work Programme of the Employment Committee and its subgroups, as adopted in accordance with the Committee's rules of procedure, with a view to the meeting of the Informal videoconference of the Ministers of Employment and Social Policy on 15 March 2021 (Any Other Business item).

EMCO Work Programme 2021

The Employment Committee (EMCO) is a Treaty-based advisory Committee, established in accordance to Article 150 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the EU (TFEU). It acts as advisory body for the EPSCO Council and is tasked to monitor, report on the employment situation and labour market developments in the EU, and in doing so, promote multilateral discussion on policy developments and new initiatives in respective Committees' domains.

Every year, EMCO adopts its annual Work Programme, which defines its activities for the coming year. The discussions in EMCO on the draft 2021 Work Programme will take place in February 2021, and is expected to be finalised shortly afterwards and be presented at the March 2021 EPSCO.

Currently, EMCO's work programme covers four main areas – the European Semester (notably multilateral surveillance), thematic work, benchmarking and monitoring/reporting. EMCO's work, in particular concerning benchmarking and monitoring/reporting, is supported by the EMCO Indicators Group, which has its own Work Programme linked to the main priorities of EMCO and EMCO PAG and providing input to their activities.

The efforts already undertaken to focus and streamline certain Semester formats and working methods with regard to the work of EMCO and its working groups, as well as the close cooperation with SPC, EPC and EDUC will continue in 2021.

In terms of policy priorities, sufficient time should be foreseen for EMCO's and the EMCO IG's work on the Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) including with regard to discussions on potential new headline targets and an update of the Social Scoreboard, in the post Europe 2020 strategy context.

1. Strategic priorities

EMCO will consider necessary adjustments to its Work Programme stemming from the policy priorities highlighted in the **Strategic Agenda of the European Council and the Commission's political priorities and work programme**¹, which are relevant to its remit, and which will require the preparation of input to EPSCO. Depending on respective timeframes, EMCO will stand ready to engage in the consultation and/or presentation of relevant policy initiatives identified in **particular in the upcoming EPSR Action Plan (expected publication in March 2021)**.

The **Action Plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights**², its underlying EU policy initiatives and expected contribution at Member State level, will therefore play a significant role in shaping the EMCO and EPSCO agenda in 2021.

In this context, the following announced policy and funding initiatives could be of relevance for EMCO's work in 2021, taking into account:

- 1) The strategic priorities to be defined in view of the Commission work programme, for example:
 - European Child Guarantee (Q1 2021)
 - EU Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030 (Q1 2021)
 - New occupational Safety and Health Strategy Framework (Q2 2021)
 - Individual Learning Accounts (Q4 /2021)
 - European approach for micro-credentials (Q4 2021)
 - Action Plan for Social Economy (Q4 /2021)
 - Improving the working conditions of platform workers (Q4 2021)

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2021-commission-work-programme-key-documents_en

² As launched by the Commission in its Communication on building a strong social Europe for just transitions:
<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1487&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9524>

- 2) Developments related to NextGenerationEU and the 2021-27 Multiannual Financial Framework, and in particular the Recovery and Resilience Facility and respective national recovery and resilience plans; the Members States' programming of cohesion policy funding (notably REACT-EU and the ESF+) as well as other relevant EU funding instruments.

As a follow-up from its joint work with SPC on the assessment of the Europe 2020 Strategy, EMCO will continue to adjust its working methods, reporting tools, and monitoring framework(s) and how to achieve a wider dissemination of the Committee's outputs.

2. Existing commitments

2.1. European Semester / Multilateral surveillance

EMCO has a number of commitments under the European Semester. These commitments determine much of the Committee's calendar for the year. In 2021, which will be an exceptional year given the adaptation of the 2021 Semester cycle set out in the **Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2021** and the related EPSCO Council conclusions, EMCO will continue to work on recurrent activities, notably:

- Preparation of **Council Conclusions and Key messages on the Joint Employment Report 2021** (jointly with SPC for March EPSCO);
- Finalisation and adoption of the **Joint Employment Report** (for March EPSCO);
- **Employment Guidelines;**
- **Multilateral Surveillance (MLS)** of the implementation of the previous European Semester cycle's CSRs, whereby EMCO reviews all CSRs in its remit of competence and draws conclusions on their level of implementation³. EMCO will do this work in conjunction with its Policy Analysis Group (PAG) in the period February-April 2021. Given the experience of last year's reviews, EMCO will seek to strengthen further the horizontal discussion on each thematic area preceding its Multilateral Surveillance Reviews;

³ EMCO's conclusions are subsequently used in the negotiations on new CSRs (usually October through April). However, as proposed by the Commission, the 2021 European Semester process exceptionally does not provide for new CSR in 2021, so as to take into account the programming of the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

- **Examine the National Reform Programmes and Recovery and Resilience Plans** as regards the implementation of the relevant policies and investments, in cooperation with the **Social Protection Committee**, where relevant;
- As in 2020, in 2021 EMCO will have **joint MLS sessions with the Social Protection Committee (SPC) and the Education Committee (EDUC)**, where crosscutting issues would be reviewed jointly.
- Monitoring of the employment situation based on the **Employment Performance Monitor (EPM)**;
- **Opinion** on the implementation of the previous year's CSRs (for June EPSCO);
- Input in preparation of the 2022 **ASGS**;
- Discussion on Commission's proposal for the **Euro Area Recommendation** (November-December).

EMCO and its Indicators Group will continue to produce the Employment Performance Monitor. EMCO will submit this to the October EPSCO Council alongside the EMCO Annual Performance Report, along with some key messages about the employment situation in the EU. This will represent EMCO's contribution to the preparation of the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy for 2022, which will start the 2022 Semester cycle.

All EMCO activities, including data collection, analysis, presentation, monitoring and follow-up should, as far as possible, be gender-mainstreamed.

2.2. Collaboration with other committees and stakeholders

In fulfilling its Semester-related obligations, as highlighted also in the EPSCO Council conclusions on the 2021 ASGS, EMCO will work closely with other Council advisory bodies and preparatory committees, notably with the **Social Protection Committee (SPC)**, the **Economic Policy Committee (EPC)** and the **Education Committee (EDUC)**.

As in previous years, cooperation with EPC could be organised through joint thematic discussions and in line with the Commission work programme.

More regular and extensive exchange of views between EMCO and EDUC could be organised alongside the EMCO-EDUC reviews of CSRs in March, notably on thematic aspects of common interest such as digital and green skills, skills matching, VET and adult learning. Within the institutional setting of the Treaty, EDUC input to EMCO on relevant deliverables could be considered.

Collaboration with the European Network of Public Employment Services (PES Network) will continue – e.g. through participation in meetings and with the Indicator Group on the effectiveness of labour market policies and benchlearning.

In 2021, EMCO will continue its practice to involve, when relevant, the **European Social Partners** and the **Civil Society Organizations**.

2.3. Thematic work

EMCO will also carry out as part of its regular work **thematic reviews**⁴, some of which in the past have usefully fed into the preparation of Council Conclusions⁵ and Commission initiatives.⁶ EMCO will continue to be involved in the review of the employment aspects of the Economic Reform Programme with the Western Balkans and Turkey.⁷

⁴ In-depth thematic reviews form a key Committee instrument, helping Member States learn from one another, engaging in multilateral discussions on successful measures addressing policy challenges in the areas of employment, social protection and social inclusion.

⁵ For example: on Early Childhood Development with the Bulgarian presidency or on the Future of Work with the Austrian Presidency.

⁶ For example: thematic work on reconciliation of private and professional life as an input to the work-life balance package; and review on social protection gaps as an input to the Access to social protection initiative.

⁷ In the context of the Economic and Financial Dialogue, the Western Balkan countries and Turkey submit annual Economic Reform Programmes (ERPs) to the European Commission, which are assessed in EPC and EMCO meetings in April. This assessment leads to 'joint conclusions' with targeted policy guidance, agreed by EFC and adopted by the Economic and Financial Dialogue between EU Member States and the Western Balkans and Turkey, adjacent to the ECOFIN Council meeting.

EMCO will continue to deliver on its **review commitments on two Recommendations**, namely on **Long-Term Unemployment (LTU)**, foreseen for 2022⁸, and the **Youth Guarantee (YG)** in end-2021 as well as on the involvement of the social partners in the European Semester (**Social Dialogue**⁹). While the review on social dialogue is organised every year, the reviews on the two Council Recommendations take place in alternate years. In case of presence of relevant CSRs, EMCO will also review the implementation of these CSRs in the context of these thematic reviews, as already done in the past. In doing so, and in particular in the context of virtual meetings, EMCO could build upon the experience of the 2020 reviews on LTU and Social Dialogue, ensuring a more thematic and discussion-oriented review, based on previously submitted discussion questions and including the discussion of case studies of “good practices” presented by Member States.

In its thematic work, EMCO will also take into account the **priorities of the Portuguese (January – June) and Slovene Presidencies (July – December)**. The key messages resulting from thematic events (on Presidency policy priorities) are transmitted to the Council¹⁰ or they input into the preparation of Council Conclusions. The priorities of the Portuguese Presidency will focus on the Social Pillar Action Plan (with a dedicated Social Summit planned in May) and more specifically on the future of work promoting access to quality jobs and decent work for all and forms of employment, old and new, with an emphasis on employability, and minimum wages and the strengthening of social dialogue.

⁸ The 2019 Commission evaluation of the implementation of the LTU Recommendation (COM(2019) 169 final), called for a holistic approach towards activation and integration of social and employment services. To that end, a joint EMCO-SPC review session was conducted in 2020 and shall be continued in 2022.

⁹ In the absence of non-fiscal CSRs in 2021, a review involving national social partners may also be conducted in a thematic way and/or on a different topic of joint interest.

¹⁰ For instance, in 2020 under the German Presidency two thematic events on short-time work schemes and equivalent employment measures in the context of the COVID-19 crisis took place and resulted in key messages which were transmitted to the DE PRES.

EMCO will follow developments related to the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), 2021-2027, in particular as regards the programming of the **Recovery and Resilience Facility** (RRF), while taking into account the ESF+ and other EU funds supporting the policies in EMCO's remit. Given the paramount role that the RRF will play in the 2021 Semester, EMCO will provide, in close cooperation with the SPC, input to the Council regarding the coverage of employment policy-related reforms and investments in the national Recovery and Resilience Plans as well as the Plans' implementation, as called for by the 2021 ASGS Council Conclusions. The precise scope, the timing of NRP/RRP reviews and the time frame for the preparation of this input will be discussed and agreed in EMCO during the first quarter of 2021.

2.4. Benchmarking and monitoring frameworks

In line with its general aim to support structural reforms and convergence towards best performer, benchmarking is used as a vehicle to support the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, as a tool for building evidence base for CSRs under the European Semester and as an instrument for mutual learning under the Social Open Method of Coordination. Since 2016, EMCO together with SPC, with the active support of the Commission (DG EMPL), carry out work in developing benchmarking frameworks, being a comparative assessment of country performance and policies using agreed policy indicators.

EMCO will continue its ongoing work on a benchmarking framework on **minimum wage**¹¹ and on mapping **collective bargaining**.

¹¹ While the Indicators Group has already been working in previous years on a benchmarking framework on minimum wages, as regards any further work related to the Commission proposal for a directive on adequate minimum wages in the EU (COM(2020) 682 final) which is currently under negotiation, EMCO will mandate the Indicators Group to carry out related work, as required.

Outside of development of benchmarking frameworks, EMCO is involved in the regular development of indicators and analytical frameworks. The EMCO and SPC indicator groups will contribute to the refinement of the indicators and methodology used under the Joint Assessment Framework (JAF). Furthermore, stepping on the work in its Indicator Group, EMCO will reflect on how to transform and adapt the EPM notably in the post-Europe2020 Strategy context, notably in line with the future Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights.

2.5. Possible topics for EMCO PAG thematic events

In addition to thematic discussions as part of the MLS reviews, EMCO/EMCO PAG could replicate the successful experience of thematic events of 2020, and carry out further events on policy topics of interest to Members, for instance on digital and green transitions, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment and social recovery, policies addressing the needs of persons with disabilities, etc.

PROVISIONAL MEETINGS CALENDAR FOR THE FIRST HALF OF 2021

The calendar below is provisional and can only be considered as indicative at this stage. The Work Programme will be updated whenever needed throughout 2021.

DATES	COMMITTEE(S)	MAIN AGENDA POINTS
20 January	IG (partly joint with ISG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YG – LTU monitoring • Draft Roadmap for the 2021 EPM <p><i>Joint with the SPC ISG:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular monitoring report on employment and social situation following the pandemic • JER main body discussion (with ISG)
1 February	EMCO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JER Council conclusions and Key messages – input to March EPSCO • JER main body - approval • EMCO Work Programme 2021 - discussion
4-5 February	EMCO	MLS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALMP and PES
<i>22 February</i>	<i>Informal EPSCO Council</i>	
24 February	PAG	MLS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labour Market Segmentation, Wages, Labour Taxation and Undeclared Work
10-11 March	EMCO (PT PRES)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future of work/ remote work • Presentation of EPSR Action Plan and discussion
<i>15 March</i>	<i>EPSCO Council</i>	
15 March	IG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPSR Action Plan – discussion on monitoring –aspects (following EMCO

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> discussion) - tbc¹² Finalisation and adoption of non-JAF key employment challenges
16-17 March	EMCO-EDUC	MLS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education and Skills - Joint reviews (one day) and thematic discussion
21 April (tbc)	IG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EPSR Action Plan – discussion (tbc)
26 April	EMCO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dialogue with Western Balkans and Turkey
29-30 April (tent.)	EMCO-SPC	MLS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> LM female participation linked to ECEC; integrated employment and social services
<i>30 April</i>	<i>NRP/RRP submission (tbc)</i>	
<i>7-8 May</i>	<i>Social Summit (Porto)</i>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">
18 May	IG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EPSR Action Plan JAF KECs/ EPM
21 May	EMCO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EPSR Action Plan – validation of input to Council
<i>14 June</i>	<i>EPSCO Council</i>	
23 June	IG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EPM adoption

Second half of 2021¹³:

Annual review on Social Dialogue (with social partners) / thematic event with involvement of social partners – tbd

EMCO meeting hosted by the Slovene Presidency - second half of September (tbc)

Review of the Youth Guarantee Recommendation – October 2021

Finalisation of EMCO Annual Employment Performance Report (after IG)

¹² In light of the Action Plan's content with regard to monitoring aspects.

¹³ A more detailed planning for the second half of 2021 will be provided before the summer.