



Council of the  
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**NOTE**

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From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Council Conclusions on Enhancing well-being at work

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With a view to the meeting of the Social Questions Working Party on 10 January 2020, delegations will find attached a set of draft Council conclusions on the above subject, as prepared by the Presidency.

## Draft 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. With the proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (hereinafter 'the Pillar'), the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission affirmed their commitment to the fundamental rights of workers and improved living and working conditions. Principle 5 underlines the need for quality working conditions, including access to training. Principle 8 stresses the importance of social dialogue and workers' involvement. Principle 9 emphasises the importance of work-life balance. 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. A highly competitive economy such as that of the European Union constantly needs 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 have an impact on the well-being of all workers, in particular those in new types of work. Addressing emerging challenges must be an important policy objective of the Union and of the Member States.

5. The mutual reinforcing effect of well-being and economic prosperity has already been acknowledged by the Council.<sup>1</sup>
6. Enhancing well-being at work can have positive effects on productivity and engagement at work and on health, and can result in a better work-life balance for men and women. Well-being at work contributes to higher participation in the labour market, extended 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.
7. Eurofound research found that nearly 20 % of all jobs across the EU are of ‘poor quality’ characterised by poor prospects, low earnings and little opportunity to apply skills and learning<sup>2</sup>. 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.
8. While 80 % of workers 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 tasks<sup>3</sup>.
9. Adequate 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 work<sup>4</sup>. Yet for only 40 % of workers it was the employer who provided the training. In addition, those on temporary contracts and those working part-time are less likely to receive employer-funded training<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Council of the European Union (2019), Council conclusions on the Economy of Wellbeing, Brussels.

<sup>2</sup> Eurofound (2017), Sixth European Working Conditions Survey – Overview report (2017 update), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

<sup>3</sup> Eurofound (2017), Sixth European Working Conditions Survey – Overview report (2017 update), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg (p. 118).

<sup>4</sup> Eurofound (2017), Sixth European Working Conditions Survey – Overview report (2017 update), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg (p. 90).

<sup>5</sup> Eurofound (2017), European Working Conditions Survey overview report (p.83) and Policy brief: Does employment status matter for job quality (p.13).

10. While stress at work is costly for employers and workers, and for society in general, Member States still face challenges in addressing it effectively.
11. Workers are less likely to state that work affects their health when their job quality is high. The physical and social environment are the most important factors for job quality. Autonomy, professional development and opportunities to progress in a career are also shown to have a positive association with high job quality and therefore with increased well-being at work<sup>6</sup>.
12. Workers' involvement in decision-making processes, particularly as regards 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.<sup>7</sup>
13. 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. Reduced hours, predictability, flexible working arrangements and flexibility as regards the place of work, when properly applied, all contribute to better work-life balance. At the same time, digitalisation and the widespread use of ICT and mobile technology is blurring the line between the work sphere and the private sphere, thus reducing rest time and the ability to disconnect.
14. While work-life balance is strongly related to practices at the workplace, the provision of public services, such as childcare and other care services, is crucial in order to provide an enabling framework. Adequate social insurance schemes are also very important in this respect, not least those related to parental and other associated leave provisions.

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<sup>6</sup> Eurofound (31 March 2020) *Job quality article*, Eurofound's website: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/topic/job-quality>.

<sup>7</sup> Eurofound (2013), *Work organisation and employee involvement in Europe*, Publications office of the European Union, Luxembourg (p. 9).

15. Access to social security for all workers is crucial for a sense of well-being, as it minimises the threat in the event of economic inactivity.
16. Alongside policy efforts at EU and national level and efforts by the social partners, companies 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.
17. The social partners are key to ensuring well-being at work and improving working conditions.<sup>8</sup> 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 growth for businesses on the other.

**The Council of the European Union INVITES the Members States to:**

18. DEVELOP a cross-sectoral assessment of the impact of well-being at work in order to strengthen knowledge-based policy- and decision-making.
19. ENGAGE with the social partners in developing frameworks for well-being at work and improving working conditions in Member States.
20. ENFORCE the existing legal framework, IMPLEMENT the Work-Life Balance Directive as soon as possible and EXPLORE possibilities of going beyond the minimum requirements laid down therein.
21. STRIVE to provide good quality affordable early childhood care and long-term care services.

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<sup>8</sup> Eurofound (2016), *Sustainable work throughout the life course: National policies and strategies*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg (p. 2.).

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

22. PROMOTE the implementation of the relevant principles of the Pillar as an important step towards enhancing well-being at work.
23. RAISE awareness of the fact that investment in well-being at work has positive effects on efficiency and productivity at company level, and on individuals and society as a whole.
24. 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:**

25. SUPPORT the collection of data and the sharing among Member States of examples of good practices or projects in the field of improving well-being at work.

**INVITES the Employment Committee and the Social Protection Committee to:**

26. INTEGRATE a ‘well-being at work’ perspective into their reflections in the policy fields within their remit.
27. 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 and the work carried out by relevant actors.