102616/EU XXVIII. GP
Eingelangt am 10/11/26

Council of the European Union

Brussels, 10 November 2026
(OR. en)

15019/26

Interinstitutional File:
2026/0137(NLE)

SOC 690
EMPL 404
ECOFIN 1379
EDUC 425

LEGISLATIVE ACTS AND OTHER INSTRUMENTS

Subject:	COUNCIL DECISION on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States

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COUNCIL DECISION (EU) 2026/…

of …

on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Article 148(2) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Parliament[1],

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee[2],

After consulting the Committee of the Regions,

Having regard to the opinion of the Employment Committee[3],

[1] Opinion of … (not yet published in the Official Journal).
[2] Opinion of … (not yet published in the Official Journal).
[3] Opinion of … (not yet published in the Official Journal).

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Whereas:

(1) In line with Article 145 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), Member States and the Union are to work towards developing a coordinated strategy for employment and in particular for the promotion of a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce, as well as inclusive and resilient labour markets, with a view to achieving the objectives of full employment and social progress, and balanced economic growth laid down in Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). In line with Article 146(2) TFEU, Member States are to regard promoting employment as a matter of common concern and to coordinate their action in that respect within the Council.

(2) Pursuant to Article 3 TEU, the Union is to combat social exclusion and discrimination, and to promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and the protection of the rights of the child. In defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union is to take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health as laid down in Article 9 TFEU.

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(3) The Union has developed and implemented an integrated policy coordination framework for economic and employment policies in the context of the European Semester, as set out in Regulation (EU) 2024/1263 of the European Parliament and of the Council[4]. The European Semester is aligned with the Competitiveness Compass, which provides a framework to boost competitiveness by closing the innovation gap, decarbonising our economy, reducing excessive dependencies and increasing security. The Competitiveness Compass identifies skills, quality jobs and social fairness among the horizontal enablers. The European Semester also integrates the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, proclaimed by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission in November 2017[5]. The implementation of the European Semester is monitored, inter alia, through the Social Scoreboard, which also constitutes guidance for monitoring the employment, skills and social performance of Member States. The Social Scoreboard also provides the basis for an analysis of risks and challenges to upward social convergence in the Union, in the framework of the Social Convergence Framework, as referred to in Article 3 of Regulation (EU) 2024/1263. The European Semester provides for strong engagement with social partners, civil society and other stakeholders. The European Semester is also complemented by the Digital Decade Policy Programme governance and recommendations.

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4 Regulation (EU) 2024/1263 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2024 on the effective coordination of economic policies and on multilateral budgetary surveillance and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1466/97 (OJ L, 2024/1263, 30.4.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1263/oj).

5 Interinstitutional Proclamation on the European Pillar of Social Rights (OJ C 428, 13.12.2017, p. 10).

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(4) As part of that framework, the guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States (the 'Employment Guidelines'), set out in the Annex to this Decision, together with the broad guidelines for the economic policies of the Member States and of the Union, set out in Council Recommendation (EU) 2015/1184[6], form the Integrated Guidelines. The Employment Guidelines are to guide policy implementation in the Member States and in the Union, reflecting the interdependence between the Member States. The resulting set of coordinated Union and national policies constitutes an appropriate economic, employment and social policy mix, while allowing Member States to adapt in line with their national circumstances. It should achieve positive spill-over effects for labour markets and society at large, strengthen economic and social resilience, promote equal opportunities, intergenerational fairness and social cohesion. It should also facilitate the access of underrepresented groups to the labour market and effectively respond to medium- and longer-term challenges, including the need to strengthen competitiveness, innovation and productivity and the Union's strategic autonomy. The economic, employment and social policies of the Union and the Member States should go hand in hand with the Union's fair transition to a climate-neutral, environmentally sustainable, socially inclusive and digitally sovereign economy, while taking demographic change into account.

[6] Council Recommendation (EU) 2015/1184 of 14 July 2015 on broad guidelines for the economic policies of the Member States and of the European Union (OJ L 192, 18.7.2015, p. 27, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reco/2015/1184/oj).

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(5) The Employment Guidelines are consistent with the revised economic governance framework of the Union as laid down in Regulation (EU) 2024/1263 and with other existing Union legislation and Union initiatives. These include, inter alia, the Commission flagship Communications on the Union of Skills of 5 March 2025, and on the European Union's Anti-Poverty Strategy of 6 May 2026, and the Council Recommendation on Human Capital in the European Union of 9 March 2026[7].

(6) The European Pillar of Social Rights acts as the Union compass for fairness in an age of rapid transformation and as a commitment to protect and empower citizens. The Pillar recognises twenty principles and rights to support well-functioning and fair labour markets and welfare systems. Those principles and rights are structured around equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions and social protection and inclusion. They give strategic direction to the Union. The Pillar drives reforms and investments at national, regional and local levels, supporting a competitive social market economy.

[7] Council Recommendation of 9 March 2026 on human capital in the European Union (OJ C, C/2026/1687, 13.3.2026, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2026/1687/oj).

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(7) On 4 March 2021, the Commission put forward an Action Plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. This included ambitious yet realistic Union headline targets for 2030 on employment (at least 78 % of the population aged 20-64 should be in employment), skills (at least 60 % of all adults should participate in training every year) and poverty reduction (at least 15 million fewer people should be at risk of poverty or social exclusion) as well as a revised Social Scoreboard. The headline targets are accompanied by complementary sub-targets, including one on reducing child poverty (out of 15 million people to lift out of poverty or social exclusion, at least 5 million should be children). The Union headline targets for 2030 were welcomed by the Heads of State or Government at the Porto Social Summit of May 2021 and by the June 2021 European Council. The Union headline targets, together with the Social Scoreboard, support the monitoring of progress towards the implementation of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights in the European Semester. Against that background, Member States also set ambitious national targets which, taking due account of the starting position of each Member State, constitute an adequate contribution to the achievement of the three Union headline targets for 2030. On 22 July 2026, the Commission called on all partners to intensify joint efforts and fully deliver on the European Pillar of Social Rights, as well as the 2030 headline targets for the Member States and the Union.

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(8) The implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and progress on the Union and national headline targets for 2030 are monitored in the Joint Employment Report, the latest edition of which was adopted by the Council in March 2026 and is integrated into the monitoring tools for the European Semester. The Joint Employment Report contains a 'first-stage country analysis' of potential risks to upward social convergence in line with the Social Convergence Framework. The latter identifies Member States which experience potential risks to be examined in a deeper 'second-stage analysis'.

(9) The Integrated Guidelines should serve as a basis for the country-specific recommendations that the Council addresses to Member States under the European Semester. While the Integrated Guidelines are addressed to Member States and the Union, they should be implemented in partnership with relevant national, regional and local authorities, closely involving parliaments, as well as social partners and representatives of civil society. Labour market and social reforms should respect national practices of social dialogue and collective bargaining, as well as the autonomy and role of social partners. The importance of social dialogue in tackling challenges in the world of work was reaffirmed at the 2024 Val Duchesse Summit and in the Pact for European Social Dialogue signed in March 2025.

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(10) Member States should make full use of available Union funding where relevant, in particular the European Social Fund Plus and the Social Climate Fund, to foster quality employment, including by improving working conditions and adapting workplaces to climate-related risks, to foster skills, to prevent and to fight against poverty, as well as to support employment, social reforms and investments. This includes, among other things, preventing and fighting social exclusion and homelessness, combatting discrimination, ensuring accessibility and inclusion, ensuring access to social services, and promoting upskilling and reskilling opportunities for the workforce, lifelong learning and high-quality education and training for all. The Employment Guidelines should, where relevant, inform the programming of Union funding. In the context of the overarching decarbonisation objectives of the Union, the Social Climate Fund will be key in addressing the needs of households in vulnerable situations, vulnerable transport users and vulnerable micro-enterprises.

(11) The Employment Committee and the Social Protection Committee should monitor how the relevant policies are implemented in light of the Employment Guidelines, in line with their respective mandates under the TFEU. These Committees and the Council preparatory bodies involved in the coordination of economic and social policies should work closely together. Policy dialogue between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission should be maintained, in particular as regards the Employment Guidelines.

(12) The Social Protection Committee was consulted,

HAS ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

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Article 1

The Guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States (the ‘Employment Guidelines’), as set out in the Annex, are hereby adopted. The Employment Guidelines shall form part of the Integrated Guidelines.

Article 2

The Member States shall take the Employment Guidelines into account in their employment policies, which shall be reported in accordance with Article 148(3) TFEU.

Article 3

This Decision is addressed to the Member States.

Done at …, …

For the Council
The President

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