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From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	AOB for the meeting of the EPSCO Council of 2 December 2024: Presidency events <i>- Information from the Presidency</i>

Delegations will find attached information on the events organised by the Presidency, with a view to the EPSCO Council of 2 December 2024 (Any Other Business item).

INFORMATION ON THE EVENTS ORGANISED BY
THE HUNGARIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. Informal meeting of Ministers of Employment and Social affairs, 9-10 October 2024, Budapest

Ministers of Employment and Social affairs met informally in Budapest on 9-10 October 2024, together with Ministers from European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries. Besides the Ministers, representatives of EU institutions, the chairs of the **Employment Committee (EMCO)** and the **Social Protection Committee (SPC)**, representatives of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the Eurofound, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), as well as of the European social partners, attended the informal meeting.

In their first discussion, the participants focused on the challenges of labour and skills shortages in the EU. In a global context, the representative of the ILO gave a keynote presentation on the global challenges of labour shortages, including underutilized and changing labour supply, skills mismatches and geographical mobility, working conditions and discrimination, and a shrinking and untapped labour force. Possible solutions included activating the untapped labour force, investing in education and training with a focus on lifelong learning, developing targeted activation strategies for young persons not in employment, education or training (NEETs), creating conditions for women to enter the labour market and social dialogue.

The ministerial debate focused on policy measures to increase and maintain labour market participation and on the impacts of technological and structural changes on work-life balance. The challenges posed by technology, digital gaps, skills shortages and ageing populations were the main issues mentioned by the Ministers, which should be addressed urgently. Proposals for shaping national policies focused on increasing lifelong learning for adult workers, launching training programmes, promoting the right to disconnect and attracting women into the labour market. Concerning cooperation at EU level, it was suggested to facilitate the labour market participation of young people, to develop skills and competences of the workforce, to channel European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) funding more, to participate in the EU Talent Pool and to ensure equal working conditions for all workers.

During the afternoon session, the SPC 2024 Annual Report was presented. It provided an overview of policy developments and the analysis of the social situation, especially regarding poverty and child poverty, using latest data from 2023, and acknowledging further necessary efforts to achieve the 2030 poverty reduction EU headline target, especially for children. It also emphasized the need for cooperation between the EPSCO and ECOFIN Council *filières* within the European Semester.

The second ministerial exchange focused on promoting the inclusion and employment of persons with disabilities and persons with changed working capacity. National approaches, measures and regulations related to reasonable accommodation were discussed and best practices were shared. The debate was held around the challenges and experiences (regarding the interpretation, legislation and implementation of the concept) in implementing reasonable accommodation and moving the issue forward at national and EU level.

The opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee “Promoting the social integration of persons with disabilities and persons with changed working capacity”, prepared at the request of the Hungarian Presidency, was also presented. Challenges identified include difficulties in the transition between sheltered workplaces and the open labour market, as well as the lack of information and misconceptions about the costs of implementing reasonable accommodation. Proposals relating to designing national policies concerned particularly the use of a person-centred approach contributing to independent life, the training of employers, awareness raising campaigns, the importance of employment rehabilitation, ensuring accessibility and flexible working hours, qualification being the sole requirement for hiring and the need for cooperation between governments, employers and civil society. Suggestions for enhancing EU level cooperation included sharing of good practices and disseminating the Disability Employment Package prepared by the European Commission, networking and the use of EU funds in order to increase the employment of persons with disabilities.

2. Informal meeting of Ministers responsible for Demography, 18-19 November 2024, Budapest

The informal meeting of Ministers responsible for Demography took place in Budapest on 18-19 November 2024. Besides representatives of the Member States and of EU institutions, partners from the Western Balkans and the European Economic Area (EEA) also attended the informal meeting.

In their first plenary session, the participants discussed the issue of active ageing and intergenerational solidarity. They exchanged on the means of fostering intergenerational solidarity and the possible positive effects that it can have when addressing demographic challenges, the measures of promoting active ageing and preserving older people’s mental health, and also the better harnessing of the untapped potential of older people in light of the changing demographic realities.

The second plenary focused on the support of young people on the threshold of their independent life. The Ministers exchanged views on the measures of increasing housing opportunities for young people, the possible actions to help young people find stable employment and quality jobs, as well as addressing youth unemployment. Lastly, the possible actions for supporting and enhancing the well-being and mental health of young people were also discussed.

3. High-level conferences

“You are Value!” high-level Presidency conference, 9 October 2024, Budapest

As part of its Presidency programme, the Hungarian Presidency organised a high-level conference on the employment of persons with disabilities and changed working capacity. The event allowed for the presentation of national experiences and good practices. The main message was that employees with disabilities are more motivated and more committed, therefore more companies are choosing to pay less taxes and employ more persons with disabilities.

The high-level panel discussion focused on the possibilities of putting reasonable accommodation into practice and any possible EU actions, or other form of synergies.

In a roundtable, representatives of EU civil organisations presented how they contribute to increasing open labour market employment of persons with disabilities and about the cooperation between relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, including international organisations. Participants emphasized the need for accessibility at the workplace and providing information to companies about technical solutions, while acknowledging the importance of assistive technology and the use of artificial intelligence in fulfilling basic economic, human and social rights. They stressed the need for further EU support and legislation to help the employment of persons with disabilities and the need for cooperation between employers and decision-makers. The value of corporate social responsibility was also brought up.

In another session, representatives of Hungarian employers emphasized that work also meant independence and saved costs for the State, while change in attitude costed almost nothing. "You Are Value!" awards were also presented during the conference to recognise the work of companies, organisations and individuals in strengthening the employment of persons with disabilities.
