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NOTE

From:	Employment and Social Protection Committees
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject:	Implementation of the Council Recommendation on long-term unemployment: key messages - Endorsement of joint EMCO and SPC key messages

Delegations will find attached the key messages from the Employment and the Social Protection Committees on the implementation of the Council Recommendation of 15 February 2016 on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market, with a view to their endorsement.

The Annex to EMCO and SPC key messages on the implementation of the Council Recommendation of 15 February 2016 on the integration of the long-term unemployed can be found in ADD 1 to document 5623/21.

The Permanent Representative Committee is invited to recommend the Council the endorsement of the key messages from the Employment and the Social Protection Committees on the implementation of the Council Recommendation of 15 February 2016 on the integration of the long-term unemployed.

Joint EMCO and SPC review of the Council Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market

Key messages from the Employment and the Social Protection Committees

The third review of the Council Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed (LTU) into the labour market took place on 30 November 2020. As the Recommendation calls on EMCO to monitor its implementation in close cooperation with SPC with regard to the social services and income support provision, this third review was carried jointly by the two Committees.

The 2020 review explored the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on long-term unemployed people, and the responses delivered by employment and social services for the provision of integrated services. The main objectives were to showcase how Member States have been tackling the challenges that long-term unemployed faced during the initial stages of the economic crisis and measures put in place to prevent increases in long-term unemployment as well as possible pathways to recovery. While policy responses in the context of COVID-19 with regard to employment and social services vary across Member States, the review identified a few common features.

As regards employment services, individualised counselling or profiling, as well as access to and availability of services have been the most negatively affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Registration and integrated service provision have been least affected (with 14 and 16 Member States reporting no impact for each function, respectively). Due to health and safety considerations, many Member States reported efforts to move online at least some of the employment support to the long-term unemployed. However, these changes have had mixed outcomes, including due to unequal access to online services among the long-term unemployed and inactive, in particular those with lower ICT skills. Moreover, in a context of increasing numbers of people registering for employment services and limited staff capabilities, some Member States also report that when providing job placement and corresponding services employment service's staff tends to prioritise people who moved into unemployment more recently, as they have a higher probability to find a job.

With regard to social services, the review showed that the pandemic has negatively impacted on the delivery of services, in particular those requiring personal contacts. While the support to people in most vulnerable situations has been maintained to some extent, this focused mainly on access and continuity of social assistance benefit provision. Minimum income recipients have been mentioned as one of the priority target groups by some Member States. The registration and integration of services appear to be the least impacted (with 18 Member States reporting no impact for both functions). Some Member States undertook additional efforts to enhance access to benefits (through, for example, relaxing access conditions, waving fees, carrying out outreach campaigns, or using digital tools).

Outreach, individual counselling or profiling, as well as continuity of services were most often negatively impacted. Nevertheless, some good practices were reported as part of social activation programme (such as weekly contacts with the beneficiaries were maintained through various social media channels or by encouraging voluntary activities to help the most vulnerable citizens).

More than half of the Member States plan changes in the administrative processes of Public Employment Services (PES), notably towards online solutions and further integration of services. Almost all Member States have appointed a single point of contact within or outside their PES, which could facilitate coordinating the support and offers provided to the long-term unemployed. At the same time, it could contribute to fostering advanced partnerships between PES and social services to provide social activation programmes and other initiatives blending employment and social support elements. Such advanced partnerships entailing joint goals and comprehensive measures and services are however still rather rare. Strengthening the single Point of Contact approach can help to face the increasing pressure on service providers. Strengthening individual pathways addressing multiple barriers to labour market integration can contribute to preventing further increases of long-term unemployment. This requires enhanced cooperation between employment and social services. To support this process, Member States are encouraged to further build on mutual learning programmes, involving in particular both PES and social services.

Most Member States have increased resources to address long-term unemployment and inactivity in the context of the current crisis. This entailed immediate responses focusing on enhancing the use of online services, broadening target groups and targeting the vulnerable groups. Many Member States are still in the process of planning or implementing such measures, including as part of their Recovery and Resilience Plans, for instance measures to improve digital skills.

The uncertainty as to the longer-term implications of the ongoing crisis on the support to long-term unemployed people was also widely shared given the current focus on responding mainly to the immediate effects of the crisis on loss of jobs and preserving employment. Against this juncture, policy implementation efforts in the mid- to long-term will have to focus on the completion of programmes and measures that were interrupted or postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as on the targeted mix of services for the long-term unemployed and their integrated delivery.

The monitoring of the LTU Recommendation is also underpinned by quantitative data being gathered with the support of Member States. The latest (third) full data collection exercise based on the Indicator Framework developed by EMCO was undertaken in 2019 (a summary of the results is annexed to these key messages). The exercise is focused on the delivery of job integration agreements (JIAs), the employment outcomes achieved and the extent to which these are sustainable. Whilst 14 Member States achieved at least 95% coverage in 2019, in 8 Member States at least one in three individuals registered for 18 months or more did not have a JIA. Follow-up indicators showing the situation of JIA users twelve months after they started work can only be calculated for 16 countries. The 2019 results show that 46.5% of JIA users who exited unemployment as a result of taking up work in 2018, were still employed 12 months later (not necessarily in the same job) compared to 50.1% of those that left in 2017, showing a decline. Overall, Member States are encouraged to take additional steps to improve the quality and completeness of the data collection and improve their capacity to follow up people after they move out of unemployment.