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COVER NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Work Programme of the Social Protection Committee for 2019

Delegations will find attached the 2019 Work programme of the Social Protection Committee and its permanent and temporary subgroups, as adopted in accordance with the Committee's rules of procedure, with a view to the meeting of the EPSCO Council on 15 March 2019 (Any Other Business item).



2019 SPC Work Programme

The Social Protection Committee (SPC) is an advisory policy Committee, established in accordance with art. 160 of the TFEU, providing a representative forum for multilateral social policy coordination, dialogue and cooperation at EU level. It brings together senior policy makers from all EU Member States and the Commission in an effort to discuss and identify the most appropriate policy measures necessary to respond to the social policy challenges across the EU. The Committee actively participates, on behalf of the Council of the European Union for employment, social affairs and health, in the European Semester process of policy coordination as per Article 2 (2b) of Council Decision (EU) 2015/773 establishing the SPC.

The Treaty-based mandate of the SPC stipulates that the Committee monitors the social situation in the EU and the development of social protection policies.¹ SPC delivers on this mandate through the use of the social open method of coordination as the main policy framework, including all major social policy strands: social inclusion, pensions, health and long-term care.

The SPC may, if necessary, prepare additional reports, formulate opinions or undertake other work within its fields of competence, at the request of the Council, the Commission or its own initiative as per Article 2(1c) of the Council Decision 2015/773, establishing the Committee.

1. The European Semester and Europe 2020 Strategy

Contribution to the EPSCO input for the Spring European Council

SPC will contribute to the preparation of the EPSCO input to the Spring European Council with its assessment of the social protection issues raised in the Commission 2019 Annual Growth Survey and its accompanying documents, notably the 2019 Joint Employment Report.

	Activities	Deliverables to the Council
1st half 2019	Reaction to the 2019 Annual Growth Survey (AGS) and Joint Employment Report, offering an analysis of the relevant social protection and social inclusion issues	Contribution to the drafting of the Council Conclusions on the 2019 AGS and JER: political guidance on employment and social policies – March EPSCO
1st half 2019	Examination and input into the Joint Employment Report and its key messages on issues related to social protection and social inclusion, including the analysis of key employment and social indicators.	Input through EMCO

¹ Art. 160 TFEU

Multilateral implementation reviews

The SPC will continue its multilateral surveillance on the implementation of policy reforms to address the Council country-specific recommendations. It will inform the Council of its views on the social protection and social inclusion aspects of the Commission Country Reports, including the in-depth reviews provided for under art. 5 of Regulation (EU) No 1176/2011. In this context, Member States will have the opportunity to report on past measures but also on intentions for future measures as a form of ex-ante discussion of social policy reforms. It will also follow-up on the implementation of the social protection aspects of the Eurozone recommendation in cooperation with the Employment Committee (EMCO) and the advisory Committees of the ECOFIN Council.

It will explore ways of further strengthening its working methods and the multilateral nature of the reviews undertaken by the Committee. It will engage in joint reviews with other Council advisory committees and the Working Party on Public Health at Senior Level (WPPHSL), where relevant. The Committee will make use, where appropriate, of the results of the peer review programmes and successful social policy innovation projects.

	Activities	Deliverables to the Council
1st half 2019	Multilateral examination of the implementation of the 2018 Council country-specific recommendations in the area of social protection and social inclusion and the relevant issues in the 2019 Commission Country Reports	Horizontal opinion and country-specific conclusions – June EPSCO

Review of the proposals for Council country-specific recommendations and Eurozone recommendation

The Committee will prepare the Council's adoption of the 2019 country-specific recommendations by reviewing all Commission proposals for country-specific recommendations falling under its Treaty-based competence on issues related to social protection and social inclusion. In its assessment, it will use the conclusions of the multilateral implementation reviews carried out in the first half of the year. The SPC will adopt joint opinions with other Committees on all recommendations falling under joint competence. It will examine in the second half of the year any social protection issues which may be included in the Commission proposal for a Eurozone recommendation, in cooperation with the Employment Committee (EMCO) and the advisory Committees of the ECOFIN Council, and contribute to the preparation of the EPSCO views.

	Activities	Deliverables to the Council
1st half 2019	Country-specific opinions to the Council on the 2019 Commission proposals for Council recommendations on the National Reform Programmes	Country-specific opinions – June EPSCO
2nd half 2019	Examine social protection issues included in the Commission proposal for a Eurozone recommendation	Contribution on social protection parts of Eurozone recommendation 2020 – December 2019 EPSCO

Monitoring of the social situation and developments in social protection policies

The SPC will continue its monitoring of the social situation in the EU, including the progress towards the Europe 2020 poverty and social exclusion target and the development of social protection policies as per its Treaty mandate. It will produce its annual report based on the analysis of the Social Protection Performance Monitor (SPPM) results, including the identification of key social challenges and good social outcomes, and of the main trends in the evolution of social protection policies. On this basis, it will propose for endorsement by the October EPSCO key messages on the main policy priorities in the area of social protection and social inclusion in view of the Commission's preparatory work for the 2019 Annual Growth Survey. An intermediate update of the SPPM dashboard will be produced by spring 2019, to take account of the availability of the full set of results from EU-SILC 2017.

	Activities	Deliverables to the Council
2nd half 2019	Preparation of an annual report on the social situation in the EU and overview of social protection reforms on the basis of the Social Protection Performance Monitor (SPPM) and reporting by Member States	Report + Main messages on the social situation and key social policy priorities as input to the preparation of the 2020 Annual Growth Survey – October EPSCO

Use of benchmarking

The SPC will continue to work, in cooperation with the Commission, on the development of benchmarking frameworks in the area of social protection, in line with the common approach agreed as concerns the use of benchmarking in the context of EPSCO work.

Activities will include following the ISG work on the framework on pension adequacy and continuous use of the minimum income framework.

Use of EU funds

SPC will also follow developments related to the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), 2021-2027, the proposed new regulations for the ESF+ and EGF, as well as the Regulation on the establishment of the Reform Support Programme. The SPC will seek cooperation with the Employment Committee (EMCO) and the Economic Policy Committee (EPC) on these matters.

Assessment of the Europe 2020 Strategy

The SPC, in conjunction with EMCO, will start work to assess the achievements of the Europe 2020 strategy and bring the Committee's involvement in the strategy to a conclusion. This will be on the basis of initial reflections and roadmap, to be proposed jointly by SPC ISG and EMCO IG in early 2019. The SPC will also start reflecting on a possible successor strategy in the first half of 2019, with a view to providing its contribution to the debate on the future of social Europe post-2020 in the course of 2019.

2. Social OMC

2.1 Thematic social reporting

By the end of June, SPC members will submit their inputs for the annual social reporting under the *thematic*² module whose topic will be decided by the beginning of March. The underlying questionnaire will be approved by the SPC in April. In order to ensure comparability and the possibility of comprehensive analysis, all Member States will be invited to contribute.

2.2. Thematic work

The SPC will continue its thematic work on relevant issues related to social inclusion, pensions, health and long-term care. This will include carrying out thematic reviews and undertaking peer reviews on specific topics. In the selection of thematic areas for discussion, it will take into account the policy priorities of the Romanian and Finnish Presidencies in the field of social protection as well as the Commission 2019 work programme.

Topics for thematic work may include, among others, i) active inclusion and inequality (carry-over from 2018 Work Programme), (ii) homelessness and housing exclusion, and (iii) in-work poverty. A policy exchange on inequality may be envisaged, following up to previous work concerning drivers of inequality and on-going work on a monitoring framework.

	Activities	Deliverables to the Council
1 st half 2019	Thematic review on active inclusion and inequality	Input for the June EPSCO meeting
2 nd half 2019	Thematic review on homelessness and housing exclusion	Input for the December EPSCO meeting
2 nd half 2019	Thematic review on in-work poverty	

In the area of pensions, the SPC will seek to strengthen its cooperation with the EPC on the adequacy and sustainability of EU pension systems. To that end, a joint EPC-SPC policy paper on adequate and sustainable pensions, taking into account the findings of the two Committees' 2018 reports³, will be developed in the first half of 2019 and finalised in the 2nd half of 2019.

The SPC, together with the Commission, will also start preparations for the development of the 2021 edition of the triennial Pension Adequacy Report (PAR). The modalities of the cooperation and coordination will be defined in the second half of 2019. In particular, the SPC will approve the report's outline and set up an ad hoc working group. The working group will prepare the draft PAR, on the basis of inputs from the Commission, for SPC approval and Council endorsement (or possible Council conclusions) in the first half of 2021.

² On the SPC meeting from 1 December 2017, the SPC took a decision to discontinue the permanent module of the Social Reporting, as of 2018. Member States are invited to report on the social policy aspects in their respective National Reform Programmes

³ 2018 Pensions Adequacy Report and 2018 Ageing Report

The Committee will renew its focus on long-term care with a view to a joint SPC-European Commission report in 2020. The report will contribute to the development of better measures of long-term care, including through a mapping of relevant services and policies in the Member States. To that end, in 2019 the SPC will set up a dedicated working group, including its terms of reference and roadmap of activities.

	Activities	Deliverables to the Council
1st and 2nd half 2019	SPC-EPC cooperation on the development of joint policy paper on adequate and sustainable pension	Endorsement of the report by EPSCO and ECOFIN Councils (or joint conclusions) in 2 nd half 2019.
2nd half 2019	Set up working group on pension adequacy, with a view to preparing the 2021 Pension Adequacy Report	
2nd half 2019	Set up a working group on long term care, with a view to preparing a joint SPC-European Commission report in 2020	

The SPC will monitor the developments on the Commission initiatives related to the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), including the work-life balance initiative (in cooperation with the Employment Committee (EMCO)) and the social protection for all initiative, for which the Committee will contribute with its expertise to discussions on the development of a monitoring framework.

3. Input from working groups

The SPC will continue to be supported in its work by the Indicators Sub-Group, which will focus its work during 2019 on the following issues: a review and analysis on the Europe 2020-related work carried out by the SPC (including the monitoring and reporting framework), monitoring and analysis of the 2020 poverty and social exclusion headline target (including the scope for improvement of the (quasi-)jobless household indicator), following work on improving the timeliness of social indicators and producing the SPPM results and related analysis of the social situation in the EU. The ISG will also continue working on the identification and development of indicators to assess inequality in its key dimensions, the reconciliation of private and professional lives, long-term care and housing exclusion. It will develop a common methodology and policy indicators for measuring the quality of social services, and, pending the outcome of the proposal for a Council Recommendation on access to social protection, explore data/indicators needed to assess the access to social protection for workers and the self-employed, including in new forms of employment contracts. It also stands ready to provide support regarding any potential activities related to the European Pillar of Social Rights and related benchmarking exercises. It will continue its work on thematic monitoring in the context of the OMC, including on health and support for the preparation of the 2021 PAR. A full overview of ISG activities is presented in the 2019 ISG work programme.

4. Working methods and relations with other Committees

In its cooperation with other policy Committees (EMCO, EPC, EFC) and with the Working Party on Public Health at Senior Level (WPPHSL), the SPC will be guided by Council Decision (EU) 2015/773 establishing the SPC, the European Council Conclusions of 24-15 October 2013 calling for more work to strengthen cooperation between the various Council configurations in order to ensure consistency of the economic, employment and social policies in line with the common EU objectives. This includes joint meetings and coordination of the views on different cross-cutting policy issues.

5. Cooperation with the EU social partners' organizations and social NGOs

SPC will continue its practice, consolidated in previous years, on consultation with social partners and social NGOs at key moments in the European Semester and in relation to the Committee's thematic work.

Annex: Tentative calendar of SPC meetings for 2019

31 January – 1 February	SPC
4-5 March	Informal SPC (RO)
15 March	EPSCO
25-27 March	SPC (Multilateral Implementation Reviews)
10-11 April	EPSCO (RO)
29-30 April	SPC
16-17 May	SPC
28-29 May	SPC/EMCO/EPC (TBC)
3-5 June	SPC/EMCO/EPC (TBC)
June	EPSCO
18-19 June	SPC
18-20 September	Informal SPC/EMCO (FI) TBC
October	EPSCO
24-25 October	SPC (TBC)
26-28 November	SPC/EMCO/EPC (TBC)
December	EPSCO