



The Presidency Programme for the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO)

Employment and social policy

An inclusive and sustainable Europe that supports the creation of equal opportunities for work, as well as the development of skills and access to services is a priority of our Presidency. To this end, we focus our attention on the modernisation of legislation in order to support the free movement of workers and persons, and to ensure equal opportunities in the labour market and in societal life.

We welcome the European Commission's proposal on the **European pillar of social rights**. Considering the present trends and new challenges of society, it is high time we continue with the discussions on the common trends in Europe on ensuring people's social rights. Our wish is to move forward with the discussions on approving the pillar at the political level in the Council of the EU. We also consider the debate on the future of Europe, and the diverse and considered treatment of the social dimension of Europe, to be of great importance.

The free movement of persons is one of the fundamental pillars of the European Union (EU). Therefore, we will pay special attention to the draft legislation supporting it during our Presidency. We will continue the work on updating and simplifying **social security coordination regulations**, which was started during the Maltese Presidency. These rules make it possible for the people who go to work and live in other countries to retain the social security rights they are entitled to.

In order to make it possible for people to receive their benefits more rapidly when moving between Member States, we consider it important to support the project initiated by the European Commission on the **electronic exchange of social security data** between Member States. The Presidency will organise a regional (Baltic States and Nordic Countries) workshop, where we plan to make the first data exchange with real data.

We have also aim to hold successful **negotiations on the posting of workers directive** in the context of the internal market of the EU. We wish to find a good and fair balance between, on the one hand, ensuring the rights of posted workers, and on the other hand, the freedom of companies to provide services to the Single Market. We will continue our work in making the text of the directive clear, of legal certainty and applicable in practice.

In order to achieve the application of a similar level of legal protection across the EU, and also to ensure uniform protection against discrimination beyond the workplace and vocational training for all minority groups (incl. disabled people, people of different ages, religious minorities, sexual minorities, etc.), we will continue working on the draft **equal treatment directive** during our Presidency.

To increase awareness of the importance of diversity and equal treatment in companies and other organisations, we will organise an EU Diversity Charters' Forum in cooperation with the European Commission. Practical opportunities for supporting diversity at the institutional level will be discussed at the forum.





We need to increase the opportunities available for people with disabilities to participate in society. Bearing in mind the wider goal to promote equal opportunities and social inclusion for all, we need to ensure that people with special needs are able to participate independently in the societal life. Making the cross-border provision of accessible products and services easier for companies will contribute to innovation and economic growth. With this in mind, we will continue working on the draft **accessibility act**. The legal framework that will be created with the directive will help the EU and the Member States to meet their obligations arising from the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

We wish to assist the transition from institution-based services to community-based services to support dignified independent living in the EU (**deinstitutionalisation**). We will organise an expert conference in Tallinn in October to shape the relevant policies at the EU level and exchange good practices. We plan to discuss the experience of the transition from institutional services to community services in the long-term care sector at the informal meeting of the Social Protection Committee (SPC) in Tallinn in September. On the basis of the above-mentioned discussions, we will prepare the conclusions of the Council of the EU on deinstitutionalisation.

It is also necessary to take into account that the economy and the labour market of the EU are constantly changing. Issues relating to new forms of work created by changes in society and growing technological opportunities are topical subjects for workers, employers and policy shapers. These issues will be discussed at the **high-level conference on the future of work**, held in Tallinn. The discussion will focus on the changes in how we work and the challenges this presents to working conditions, social security, and the skills necessary for the labour market, as well as the potential e-solutions that the state could provide. We will prepare the conclusions of the Council of the EU on this topic. The future of work will also be the subject of the informal meeting of the Employment Committee (EMCO) in Tallinn.

Occupational health and safety issues should be considered more widely than in the traditional workplace context. The impact of new forms of work on the mental and physical health of workers deserves special attention. To open the discussion, we will organise a **thematic European Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee (SLIC) day and a conference on occupational health and safety** that will focus on practical solutions to minimise the risks presented by new forms of work, while at the same time help to make maximum use of these new opportunities.

Promoting healthy working environments will bring both economic and social benefits; it also has a positive impact on productivity, increases worker satisfaction and enables workers to be active on the labour market for longer. In order to reduce the exposure to carcinogenic substances in working environments, it is important to establish limit values on additional dangerous substances in the EU. As such we intend to amend the **Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive** as one of the priorities of our Presidency.

We consider it important to maximise the potential of young people in the labour market. To promote the employment of young people, we will concentrate on initiatives to give them the opportunity to find a place of work or traineeship in different sectors and countries within the framework of the European **Solidarity Corps**. The Estonian Presidency considers it important that the work of the European Solidarity Corps has added value.





The continued disparity between women and men when it comes to caring responsibilities for children, the aged and other family members who need help has a negative impact on the working opportunities and income of women, and does not support the participation of men in family life. At the societal level, the benefits of the high level of education of women are not fully realised. Therefore, we consider it important that the EU discusses and supports the **balancing of work and family life**. Here, the regulations on parental leave, including leave for fathers, which among other things, would support a more equal distribution of the caring burden of men and women, are relevant for us. During the Estonian Presidency, we will focus on the first discussions of the draft directive in the Council of the EU. Measures for balancing work and family life will be a topic of discussion at the informal meeting of the EU employment and social policy ministers in Tallinn in July.

We will also focus on the **gender segregation in educational choices and on the labour market**. We will prepare the relevant conclusions of the Council of the EU. In order to ensure the quality of the guidelines agreed upon in discussions and conclusions, and review the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) will prepare a report on gender segregation, in which the links between gender segregation and the **gender pay gap** will be also discussed. A special focus is on sectors where women or men are significantly underrepresented, but which are of critical importance for sustainable development and the balance of modern society.

Together with Bulgaria and Austria, we will sign the **declaration of the Trio Presidency on gender equality**, in which the gender equality priorities of the Presidency trio in the coming 18 months are reflected.

We also consider it important to modernise the tasks and improve the management of various EU agencies (Cedefop, EU-OSHA and Eurofound)¹, and to reach an agreement on the **amendments to the regulations on the EU agencies** in this context.

We will also contribute to the input of the EPSCO Council in the **European Semester** process.

Health

Estonia values the health and welfare of people living in the EU. Europe is the world's heaviest drinking region, and thus bears the brunt of alcohol-related harm to society, the economy and public health. We aim to further develop the discussion between Member States on **reducing the harm caused by alcohol**. The existence of the Single Market means that achieving the aims of the alcohol policy of one Member State is significantly influenced by the activities in the border areas of the country and in neighbouring states. During our Presidency, we will focus on cross-border challenges in reducing alcohol-related harm, which can only be solved by common initiatives of Member States (bilaterally, regionally, across the EU). At the informal meeting of health ministers in July, the progress of the initiatives implemented in the EU so far is evaluated and the main cross-border challenges of the coming

¹ Eurofound – European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions; EU-OSHA – European Agency for Safety and Health at Work; Cedefop – European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training





years (like cross-border advertising, including in social media, cross-border trade, labelling of alcoholic drinks) are discussed. These topics will also be discussed at the expert level during the conference 'Cross-Border Aspects in Alcohol Policy – Tackling Harmful Use of Alcohol' held in October. We will also propose Council conclusions on these issues.

The use of e-health solutions supports the general health policy objectives of Member States to improve public health and make the health systems more manageable and sustainable. In order to promote the cooperation and coordination between Member States in e-health, we will initiate discussion on potential areas for EU cooperation in the coming years. It is necessary to focus on initiatives that can help create favourable conditions for developing and adopting new digital solutions in Member States. We must also consider how to overcome obstacles such as the lack of interoperability and the fragmentation of services and markets. In order to create the necessary **preconditions for the wider use and cross-border movement of health data**, for treatment purposes, and for research and innovation, we consider it important to implement the principles of the Digital Single Market in the health sector. Regarding EU-level cooperation, we wish to pay more attention to practical solutions that enable people to get access to their health data online, control the use of such data, and allow it to be securely shared for the use of e-services.

Digital solutions help patients assume a greater role in making decisions concerning their health, as well as making treatments more precise and better adjusted to individual needs. In order to bring mobile applications into wider use in health care, attention should be paid to the quality, security and interoperability of these solutions. Due to the increased role of **smart devices and mobile applications in our everyday lives**, large volumes of health and lifestyle data is created, the potential of which should be better utilised, while enhancing integrated use of data from various sources. Secure sharing of health data between health care service providers, and for the purposes of research and innovation, is necessary for providing safe and effective health care services. At the same time, it is important to pay attention to the issues of data protection and cyber security, so that health data can be used in a safe and secure way and not be secured from use. Health ministers will discuss e-health issues in July at an informal meeting and in October at a high-level conference. We will also propose Council conclusions on digital health for adoption at the December EPSCO Council.

We also consider it important to jointly manage the emergence and spread of **antimicrobial resistance (AMR)**, which can reduce quality of life and add an extra burden to our health care systems. AMR is found in people, animals, food and the environment, and it can spread from person to person, and between people and animals. The cross-border spread of environmental pollution, and the free movement of goods, services and people clearly makes AMR a cross-border problem, and it is not sufficient to only deal with it at the national level. During our Presidency, we would like to foster an expert-level discussion to ascertain the intersectoral indicators for assessing AMR action plans.

During our Presidency, we will move forward with the **drafts of the veterinary medicines regulations**, one purpose of which is to reduce the threat to public health caused by AMR. We will also deal with the possible solutions to the tasks faced by the EU in relation to **the implementation of the safety features appearing on the packaging of the medicinal products and the availability of medicines**. During the Presidency, we also wish to share expert knowledge and experience on how to integrate the management of HIV epidemics sustainably into health care systems.

