



Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council **Luxembourg, 12-13 June 2023**

Ministers of employment and social affairs will gather in Luxembourg on **12 June** at **9.30**. The meeting will be chaired by **Paulina Brandberg**, Minister for Gender Equality and Working Life, and **Johan Pehrson**, Minister for Employment and Integration. The Commission will be represented by **Helena Dalli**, Commissioner for Equality and **Nicolas Schmit**, Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights.

Ministers will aim to agree on the Council's general approach on the following directives: improving working conditions in **platform work**; standards for **equality bodies**; and **limit values for lead** and other dangerous chemicals in the workplace. They will also discuss the **European Semester** and take stock of progress made on the proposed directive on **equal treatment** followed by a discussion on the same directive. Finally, they will seek to approve a recommendation on strengthening **social dialogue** in the EU and conclusions on mainstreaming a **gender equality perspective** in policies, programmes and budgets.

On **13 June**, ministers of health will convene at **10.00**. The chair will be **Jakob Forssmed**, Minister for Social Affairs and Public Health, and the Commission will be represented by the health commissioner, **Stella Kyriakides**.

Ministers will aim to adopt a recommendation on stepping up EU actions to combat **antimicrobial resistance**. They will also seek to establish the Council's general approach on the regulation on fees and charges payable to the **European Medicines Agency**. The Council will also take stock of progress made on two regulations: the **European Health Data Space**, and standards of quality and safety for **substances of human origin** intended for human application, and will exchange views on strengthening the **pharmaceutical ecosystem** in support of competitiveness and equitable access to medicines.

Press conferences:

- 12 June, +/- 17.15: Ministers Pehrson and Brandberg, and Commissioner Schmit
- 13 June, +/- 15.50: Minister Forssmed and Commissioner Kyriakides

* * *

[Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council - meeting page](#)

[Press conferences and public events by video streaming](#)

[Video coverage in broadcast quality \(MPEG4\) and photo gallery](#)

* * *

¹ This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the Press Office.

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY

Improving working conditions in platform work

Ministers will aim to agree the Council's position ('general approach') on the platform work directive, which seeks to improve the working conditions and social rights of people working in the 'gig' economy.

Over 28 million people in the EU work through digital labour platforms, 5.5 million of whom are estimated to be incorrectly classified as self-employed, meaning that they do not have access to adequate labour rights and social protection.

On 9 December 2021 the Commission published a proposal for a directive to improve the working conditions of people working through digital labour platforms. The proposed measures include criteria to determine whether people working through such platforms have been granted the legal employment status that corresponds to their actual work arrangements.

Employment and social affairs ministers attempted to reach a general approach at their Council in December 2022.

[Proposal for a directive on improving working conditions in platform work](#)

Standards for equality bodies

The Council will seek to reach a general approach on two proposed directives laying down standards for equality bodies in the EU.

The role of equality bodies is to promote equal treatment by, inter alia: providing independent assistance to victims of discrimination; conducting independent surveys; publishing reports; and making recommendations on matters relating to discrimination.

In 2018, the Commission issued a recommendation on measures to improve the independence and effectiveness of member states' equality bodies. This paved the way for the publication of two proposed directives in December 2022 aimed at strengthening equality bodies so as to ensure that people in all EU countries benefit from the same minimum level of protection against discrimination.

While the directives provide for identical sets of standards, they build on and complement existing directives that have different legal bases (Article 19 TFEU and Article 157 TFEU); as a result, different legislative procedures are required to update them.

[Proposal for a directive on standards for equality bodies \(Article 19 TFEU\) – General approach](#)

[Proposal for a directive on standards for equality bodies \(Article 157 TFEU\) – General approach](#)

Limit values for lead and diisocyanates

Ministers will approve the Council's general approach on the proposed directive setting limit values for lead and its inorganic compounds and diisocyanates. The proposal aims to introduce or update limit values for two sets of harmful substances in the workplace, in order to significantly improve the protection of workers' health and safety.

Lead can affect sexual function and fertility and can harm the development of a foetus. It can also damage the nervous system, the kidneys, the heart and blood of people exposed to it. It is estimated that 100 000 workers in the EU are currently exposed to lead at work, according to an impact assessment carried out by the Commission.

Diisocyanates are a group of chemicals that can cause asthma and other respiratory diseases. Even though approximately 4 million workers in the EU are exposed to diisocyanates, there are currently no limit values at EU level. The proposed directive will introduce limit values to protect workers from exposure to diisocyanates at work.

[Proposal for a directive on the limit values for lead and its inorganic compounds and diisocyanates – General approach](#)

Equal treatment

Ministers will hold a policy debate on the proposed directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The discussion will be based on a progress report provided by the Swedish presidency.

The Commission published its proposal for a directive on equal treatment in 2008, with the aim of prohibiting discrimination in non-employment settings on the basis of religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation, in cases where EU-level equal treatment legislation had not yet been adopted. The proposal includes provisions on:

- equal access to social protection, including social security and healthcare;
- equal access to education;
- equal access to goods and services, including housing.

The director of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), Michael O'Flaherty, will participate in the policy debate.

[Progress report](#)

[Steering note for the policy debate](#)

European Semester 2023

Ministers will discuss the European Semester Spring Package, which was presented by the Commission on 24 May 2023. The discussion will focus in particular on the country-specific recommendations and the possible introduction of a social convergence framework.

The European Semester is the EU's framework for coordinating and monitoring economic and social policies. The annual cycle starts in November when the Commission sets the priorities for the year to come, and ends in October of the following year, when national governments submit their draft budgetary plans.

As part of the exercise, the Commission publishes a Spring Package containing targeted, country-specific recommendations for all member states on ways to tackle key economic and social challenges.

[European Semester](#) (background information)

[Introduction of a Social Convergence Framework in the European Semester - Key Messages from the Employment Committee and the Social Protection Committee](#)

[Steering note: presentation by the respective chairs of the Employment Committee and the Social Protection Committee of the key messages on the Social Convergence Framework](#)

Strengthening social dialogue

Ministers will seek to adopt a recommendation on strengthening social dialogue in the European Union.

Social dialogue refers to discussions, consultations, negotiations and joint actions involving organisations representing the two sides of industry (employers and workers). According to research carried out by the ILO and the OECD, it is a key driver of economic and social resilience, competitiveness, fairness and sustainable growth.

There are variations between member states in terms of the framework, structures, processes and effectiveness of social dialogue that reflect the countries' different histories and economic and political situations.

The aim of the proposed recommendation is to strengthen social dialogue and collective bargaining at national level. It recommends that member states:

- involve social partners in the design and implementation of economic, employment and social policies

- support social partners in adapting to new forms of work and atypical employment, and in promoting the benefits of social dialogue
- strengthen the capacity of workers and employers' organisations, for instance by ensuring they have access to relevant information and support from national governments

[Draft Council recommendation on strengthening social dialogue in the EU](#)

Mainstreaming a gender equality perspective

The Council will approve conclusions on mainstreaming a gender equality perspective in policies, programmes, and budgets. The conclusions are based on a report from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), and call for more effective gender mainstreaming in the context of institutional mechanisms, particularly policies, programmes and budgets.

[Draft Council Conclusions on Mainstreaming a gender equality perspective in policies, programmes, and budgets](#)

[Evidence to Action: gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the COVID-19 recovery - Report by EIGE](#)

Other business

Under other business, the Swedish presidency will provide information on two current legislative files: the directive on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to asbestos at work, and the revision of the regulations on the coordination of social security systems. The chair will also share information about relevant conferences organised by Sweden over the course of its presidency. The upcoming Spanish presidency will present its work programme.

[Proposal for a directive on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to asbestos at work](#)

[Proposal for a regulation on the coordination of social security systems](#)

[Information on the conferences and high-level meetings organised by the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union](#)

HEALTH

Combatting antimicrobial resistance

EU health ministers will adopt a Council recommendation on stepping up EU actions to combat antimicrobial resistance (AMR) as part of a 'One Health' approach.

On 26 April 2023, the Commission published its proposal for a recommendation on AMR as part of a package of measures aimed at revising the EU's pharmaceutical legislation. The aim of the recommendation is to achieve a strong and effective response to AMR across the EU.

AMR is considered one of the top three health threats in the EU according to the Commission's Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA). Over the years, the overuse and misuse of antibiotics have led to increasing AMR, meaning that antimicrobials lose their effectiveness and it becomes more difficult (or even impossible) to treat infections.

The proposed Council recommendation sets out a number measures to combat AMR, including:

- specific and measurable targets for reducing antibiotic use
- strengthening infection prevention and control measures
- improved public awareness
- education and training of relevant professionals
- cooperation between stakeholders from relevant sectors

[Council recommendation on stepping up EU actions to combat antimicrobial resistance in a One Health approach](#)

Fees and charges payable to EMA

The Council will seek to establish its general approach on the regulation on fees and charges payable to the European Medicines Agency (EMA). The goal of the proposal is to ensure adequate funding to guarantee the future sustainability of EMA's operations while also providing sufficient support to the National Competent Authorities (NCAs) in the Member States.

EMA charges companies who want to bring a medicine to the market for processing its application. In 2021, around 90% of the Agency's funding came from fees. Part of the money also goes to national regulators for their work.

[Regulation on fees and charges payable to EMA – General approach](#)

European Health Data Space

Ministers will take stock of progress made so far on the regulation to set up a European Health Data Space (EHDS). The proposal, published by the Commission in May 2022, aims to put in place a health-specific data sharing framework that will facilitate the safe exchange of patients' data (including when they travel abroad) while also giving EU citizens control over their health data. It will also support the use of health data for better healthcare delivery, research and policy making.

[Progress report](#)

Substances of human origin

The Council will discuss the state of play of the proposal for a regulation on standards of quality and safety for substances of human origin (SoHO) intended for human application. The aim of the proposal is to update the EU legislation on blood, tissues and cells, ensure the quality and safety of other substances of human origin that are not yet regulated at EU level, and allow for a more flexible alignment with scientific and technological developments. The proposed regulation aims to establish high standards of quality and safety for all SoHOs intended for human application.

[Progress report](#)

Strengthening the pharmaceutical ecosystem

Based on a background note prepared by the presidency, health ministers will discuss ways to strengthen the pharmaceutical ecosystem in support of competitiveness and equitable access to medicines.

On 26 April 2023, as part of its package of measures to reform the EU's pharmaceutical legislation, the Commission published a communication on pharmaceutical reform and antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

[Strengthening the pharmaceutical ecosystem in support of competitiveness and equitable access to medicines – background note](#)

[Commission communication: Reform of the pharmaceutical legislation and measures addressing antimicrobial resistance](#)

Other business

The presidency and the Commission will inform delegations about the negotiations for an international agreement on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response as well as complementary amendments to the International Health Regulation (IHR).

Information will also be provided by the Commission on its recently published communication on mental health; by the presidency on relevant conferences that it has organised during the course of its presidency; by the French delegation on the creation of a European day in memory of the victims of the Covid-19 pandemic; and by the upcoming Spanish presidency on its work programme in the field of health.

[Negotiations for an international agreement on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, as well as complementary amendments to the International Health Regulations \(2005\) - Information from the Presidency and the Commission](#)

[Communication from the Commission on a comprehensive approach to mental health](#)

[Creation of a European day in remembrance of the victims of the Covid-19 pandemic – information from the French delegation](#)

[Presidency conferences – information from the presidency](#)
