



# EPR Public Affairs e-bulletin

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## Social Affairs & Social Services

### Towards a European Pillar of Social Rights

On 8 March 2016, the European Commission put forward a first, preliminary outline of what should become the European Pillar of Social Rights. As mentioned by President Juncker in his State of the Union address on 9 September 2015, "I believe we do well to start with this initiative within the euro area, while allowing other Member States to join in if they wish to do so". The Pillar will identify a number of essential principles common to euro area Member States, focusing on their needs and challenges in the field of employment and social policies. Throughout 2016, the Commission will engage in a debate with EU authorities, social partners, civil society and citizens on the content and role of the Pillar to move towards a [deeper and fairer Economic and Monetary Union](#). The outcome of this debate should feed into a final text of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The Pillar should build on, and complement, our EU social "acquis" in order to guide policies in a number of fields essential for well-functioning and fair labour markets and welfare systems. The principles proposed do not replace existing rights, but offer a way to assess and, in the future, approximate for the better the performance of national employment and social policies. Once established, the Pillar should become the reference framework to screen the employment and social performance of participating Member States, to drive reforms at national level and, more specifically, to serve as a compass for the renewed process of convergence within the euro area.

The European Commission launched a [public consultation on the European Pillar of Social Rights](#). Deadline is 31 December 2016.

Read more: [http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/towards-european-pillar-social-rights\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/towards-european-pillar-social-rights_en)

### Peer Review in the Netherlands: Social community teams against poverty

The Dutch government's declared aim is to move from a welfare state to a "participation society" built on citizens' self-reliance and networking. Large parts of the social security system have been devolved to the municipalities, which are expected to follow an integrated approach to social services, while offering solutions tailored to each individual case. In response, most municipalities have set up Social Community Teams. This Peer Review, held in The Hague, discussed the use of SCTs to combat poverty. Social Community Teams (SCTs) generally include a broad range of professionals from both the public and private sector. The way they are organised varies considerably and may evolve over time, but the common aim is to provide a single entry point for people in need to help them efficiently.

Read more about key learning elements:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=2334&furtherNews=yes>

## Peer Review in Ireland: Prevention and early intervention services to address children at risk of poverty

Ireland is in the process of developing a more coordinated and integrated approach to children's services, aimed at tackling the complex problems of disadvantaged families in a more joined-up and holistic way. This Peer Review looked at Irish good practice and harnessed learning from other EU Member States. The following key learning points emerged from this Peer Review:

- The pre-birth and 0-3 years are vital to a child's future development. Prevention and early intervention are a real long-term investment.
- Political will is important to ensure adequate resources and a long term approach. This needs to be built and constantly reinforced.
- A broad holistic policy mix is essential, as well as support for parental employment and adequate child and family benefits.
- Develop a system-wide approach that is multi-dimensional, strategic and integrated.
- Combine universal and targeted services as this will increase public support and help to improve the quality of services.
- Focus on local level and coordination is important.
- Reach out to children and families most at risk.
- To ensure quality, invest in building capacity across agencies, including training and mentoring for professionals.

Read more (short reports are also available):

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=2328&furtherNews=yes>

## Employment & Disability

### Labour market shows positive signs: highest overall EU employment rate since 2008

The 2015 winter edition of the Employment and Social Situation Quarterly Review shows improvements on the EU labour market. Employment and activity rates have continued to increase in the EU, across all population groups and most notably for older workers (55 - 59 years). In the third quarter of 2015, the overall EU employment rate has even reached its pre-crisis level, although the progress is unevenly distributed among Member States. In addition, unemployment has continued to recede and the share of long-term unemployed persons in total unemployment has slightly gone down. The EU employment rate for people 20 to 64 years has increased by 0.9 percentage points in the year to the third quarter of 2015, reaching 70.6%. The improvement was shared by most Member States, with Estonia, Latvia, Hungary and Spain recording the largest increases. The Quarterly Review also confirms that in the year to the third quarter, employment was up in all broad sectors except for agriculture and construction. However, the EU quarterly employment growth in the third quarter of 2015 was mainly driven by the service sectors.

Read more:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=2460&furtherNews=yes>

## Women and unpaid work: recognise, reduce, redistribute!

8 March is the International Women's Day. This year's theme is gender equality that is indispensable for achieving many of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It is also crucial for achieving the EU's Europe2020 targets of raising employment and reducing poverty. So this is a good moment to look at how EU Member States are performing with regard to one key aspect of gender equality, namely equal participation in the labour market and how this is affected by unpaid work.

**Gender equality is one of the fundamental values of the EU** and there is a strong emphasis on gender equality in the labour market. The [Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019](#) recalls this by underlining the importance of

- increasing female labour market participation and equal economic independence, and
- reducing gender pay, earnings and pension gaps and fighting poverty among women.

In the last ten years, female employment rate (women aged 20-64 years old) in the EU28 has risen from 60% to 64%, but **the gender gap in employment is still 11.5 percentage points**. The largest gap, more than 28 percentage points, can be found in Malta that has however made remarkable progress in women's participation in the labour market, from an employment rate of 34.8% in 2005 to 52.0% in 2014. The gap is compounded by **the higher prevalence of part-time work among women** in all countries.

Only Sweden has achieved the EU2020 employment target of 75% for both men and women, while Germany and the other two Nordic countries are close to the target. In contrast, in Greece and Italy, female employment rates are the lowest in the EU, 44.3% and 50.3% respectively.

Read more:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=2492&furtherNews=yes>

## Self-employed and entrepreneurship: breaking the barriers to job creation

Promoting self-employment and entrepreneurship is an important way of creating new jobs and enhancing the labour market opportunities for the unemployed and other disadvantaged groups. Are Member States using the full potential of self-employment and entrepreneurship for tackling their employment challenges? About 16% of the EU's working population were self-employed in 2014 (see also our blog post on different groups in self-employment); and micro-enterprises, i.e. companies employing 10 persons or fewer, provided almost one third of the jobs in the EU's for-profit private sector.

Yet, only a minority of self-employed – on average less than one third – actually employ other people, and only about one quarter of these employers are women (see chart below). In 2014, the highest share of employers among the self-employed is found in Hungary (49%), followed by Germany (45%), Austria (42%) and Denmark (42%) – with most of them being active in whole- and retail-sale. In Romania (6%), the share of self-employed hiring employees is exceptionally low, but this reflects the fact that more than three quarters of the self-employed are small farmers in individual farms, practicing (semi-)subsistence farming, not hiring employees. At the same time, Spain (31%) and Poland (30%) recorded the highest share of female self-employed with employees, while Cyprus (13%) and Malta (15%) recorded the lowest share.

Read more:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=2472&furtherNews=yes>

## **The Commission presents reform of posting of workers – towards a fair and truly European Labour Market**

On 8<sup>th</sup> March, the European Commission presented a targeted revision of the rules on posting of workers, as set out in the 2016 Commission work programme. The aim of this proposal is to facilitate the provision of services across borders within a climate of fair competition and respect for the rights of posted workers, who are employed in one Member State and sent to work temporarily in another by their employer. More specifically, the initiative aims at ensuring fair wage conditions and a level playing field between posting and local companies in the host country. The targeted revision will introduce changes in three areas: remuneration of posted workers, rules on temporary work agencies and long-term posting. The proposal foresees that posted workers are subject to equal pay and working conditions as local workers. This will be done in full respect of the way these rules are set by the Member State in question. Currently, posted workers are already subject to the same rules as host Member State employees in certain fields, such as health and safety.

Read more:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=2488&furtherNews=yes>

## **Education & Vocational Training**

### **Zero Project Conference 2016: Innovative Policies and Practices On Inclusive Education and ICT**

The Zero Project Conference 2016, convened by the Essl Foundation, the World Future Council and the European Foundation Centre at the United Nations Office in Vienna, Austria was held from 10-12th February 2016 and highlighted 98 Innovative Policies and Innovative Practices concerning Inclusive Education and/or ICTs from around the world in 35 plenary sessions and workshops, plus an exhibition. The conference gathered more than 500 innovators from more than 70 countries.

Read more: <http://zeroproject.org/retrospective/>

### **Youth Guarantee in practice: from unemployed to marble stonemason**

With support from the Youth Guarantee scheme, many young people in Europe have managed to find a job or follow a course which gives their career a boost. This is Eduard's story, from Romania. While visiting the local employment office, a careers adviser explained Eduard what the Youth Guarantee was all about and the opportunities it could provide. He also had a paid apprenticeship offer on the books with a local marble assembly company. Eduard applied immediately – and got the post! He attended stonemason classes and then started to work for the company. Before this job, Eduard had been sending his cv to various employers and asked friends for references – but with

no success. He could not find work due to his lack of work experience and education. He had left high school without passing his Baccalaureate. Eduard has now left his job – but only temporarily – so that he can concentrate on the Baccalaureate. After that, he will go back to work for the company thanks to his supportive boss. The whole experience has filled Eduard with new-found confidence – as well as learning new things he even managed to save money for a new apartment.

Read more:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=2473&furtherNews=yes>

## Research & Development

### How digital is your country? New figures show action needed to unlock Europe's potential

From connectivity and digital skills to public services, EU countries have made progress since last year which marked the launch of the Digital Single Market Strategy by the European Commission. On 25 February, the European Commission published the results of the 2016 edition of the [Digital Economy and Society Index](#) (DESI). The findings show that Member States have made progress in areas such as connectivity and digital skills, as well as in public services, since the publication of the Commission's [Digital Single Market Strategy](#) last year. While highlighting improvements, the results released today also show that the pace of progress is slowing down. Action is needed, both at the EU and national levels, to remove the obstacles which prevent EU Member States from fully benefitting from digital opportunities.

Main findings of the [Digital Economy and Society Index](#) (DESI)

- The EU is progressing, but slowly: The EU as a whole attains a score of 0.52 out of 1, an improvement from 0.5 last year. All EU countries but Sweden have improved their score.
- **Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden and Finland** continue to lead the DESI rankings.
- **The Netherlands, Estonia, Germany, Malta, Austria and Portugal** are the fastest growing countries and they are running ahead. More information on country performance can be found in [country profiles](#) and in [this factsheet](#).

Read more: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-16-384\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-384_en.htm)

### Equal access to web

Web accessibility means that everyone – including people with disabilities – can use the internet independently to browse, navigate and interact. In 2012, the European Commission released a proposal for a Web Directive on the accessibility of the public sector bodies' websites. The proposal has been discussed at the European Parliament and at the EU Council. The Council, which is composed of representatives of all EU member states, has proposed to significantly reduce the scope of the Web Directive, excluding websites of public broadcasters, schools, kindergartens, universities, nurseries



or NGOs. The Council also proposed to exclude some web content such as the live audiovisual, as well as intranets and extranets. Excluding intranets and extranets will prevent persons with disabilities from being able to work in organisations that rely on the use of these types of “private websites” in their everyday work. 20 civil society networks, representing consumers, older people and people from a range of representative organisations of persons with disabilities strongly oppose Council’s proposals to water down the Web Accessibility Directive.

Read the open letter:

[http://cms.horus.be/files/99909/MediaArchive/OpenLetterWebDirective\\_Final.pdf](http://cms.horus.be/files/99909/MediaArchive/OpenLetterWebDirective_Final.pdf)

## Other relevant EU Affairs

### European Semester 2016: Commission publishes Country Reports

On 26 February, the European Commission published its annual analysis of the economic and social challenges in the EU Member States, the so-called [Country Reports](#). The reports are a tool under the streamlined [European Semester](#) of economic policy coordination to monitor policy reforms and to point early on to challenges that Member States should address. Following the publication in November of the [Annual Growth Survey](#) 2016 and the [euro area recommendation](#), which set out the priorities at European level, today's reports shift the attention of the European Semester to the national dimension. The reports will serve as the basis for discussion with Member States of their national policy choices ahead of their National Programmes in April, and will lead to the formulation in late spring of the Commission's Country-Specific Recommendations.

As part of the European Semester, the Commission will pursue a close dialogue with the Member States in the months ahead. In March, the Commission will hold bilateral meetings with the Member States to discuss the Country Reports. Commissioners will also visit Member States to meet national governments, parliaments, social partners and others. The Member States are required to present in April their National Reform Programmes and their Stability Programmes (for euro area countries) or Convergence Programmes (for non-euro area countries), covering public finances. The Commission has called on Member States to consult closely national parliaments and the social partners when preparing these documents. The Commission will then present its proposals for a new set of Country-Specific Recommendations in spring, targeting the key economic and social priorities for each country.

Also in March, the Commission will decide on the Macroeconomic Imbalances Procedure (MIP) category for each Member State covered by an In-Depth Review. As of this year, the Commission has streamlined the MIP from six to four categories of macroeconomic imbalances: no imbalances, imbalances, excessive imbalances, and excessive imbalances with corrective action.

Read more: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-16-332\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-332_en.htm)

## **Investment Plan for Europe: new guidelines on combining European Structural and Investment Funds with the EFSI**

The Juncker Commission's top priority is to get Europe growing again and to increase the number of jobs without creating new debt. The [European Fund for Strategic Investments \(EFSI\)](#) – the heart of the Investment Plan for Europe - and [European Structural and Investment Funds \(ESI Funds\)](#) both play a crucial role in creating jobs and growth. A [brochure](#) is designed to help local authorities and project promoters make full use of the opportunities of combining the EFSI and ESI Funds. These two instruments have been designed in a different but complementary way in terms of rationale, design, and legislative framework. They reinforce each other.

Read more: <http://www.eib.org/efsi/index.htm>

## **The EU in 2015: General Report on the Activities of the EU published**

The European Commission publishes the General Report on the Activities of the European Union for 2015 which gives, in a citizen-friendly way, an account of the EU's major initiatives and achievements of the past year. Do you want to know what the European Union did in 2015? Which decisions the EU took to address the refugee crisis and strengthen the financial and economic situation in the EU? You can find the answers to all these questions and more in the 2015 General Report which summarises the activities of the European Union in the previous year. 'The EU in 2015' comes with an introduction by President Juncker and covers the major events and initiatives of the year.

Read more: <http://publications.europa.eu/en/web/general-report>

## **EU leaders pursue European approach to refugee crisis**

EU Heads of State and Government met on Monday with Turkish Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, to agree ambitious steps that will significantly limit the flow of irregular migrants to the EU. EU leaders also agreed the Commission's new Roadmap back to a fully functioning Schengen area free of internal border controls. An agreement in principle was reached with Turkey that it will accept the rapid return of all irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greece and take back all irregular migrants apprehended on Turkish waters. It was also agreed that Turkey will readmit Syrian nationals returned from the Greek islands under the logic that they can apply for asylum in Turkey and under the understanding that for every Syrian readmitted, one will be resettled to the EU directly from Turkey.

Read more: [http://ec.europa.eu/news/2016/03/20160308\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/news/2016/03/20160308_en.htm)



## EU funded programmes

- Erasmus+ [new calls 2016](#) and [Programme Guide](#)
- DG EMPL – PROGRESS / EaSI [calls](#)
- Horizon 2020 – various [new calls](#)

## Calendar of upcoming events

Date	Title	Venue	Contact
21/03/2016	Annual Convention for Inclusive Growth	Brussels	<a href="http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&amp;catId=88&amp;eventId=1087&amp;furtherEvents=yes">http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&amp;catId=88&amp;eventId=1087&amp;furtherEvents=yes</a>
20-21/05/2016	European Youth Event - 2016	Strasbourg (France)	<a href="http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&amp;catId=88&amp;eventId=1075&amp;furtherEvents=yes">http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&amp;catId=88&amp;eventId=1075&amp;furtherEvents=yes</a>