

***European Economic and Social Committee***

***Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship***

**Priorities for section work during the half-term 2015-2018**

**EN**

**Introduction**

The challenges Europe is facing are cross-cutting and intertwined and so are the solutions. The EU's aims of growth, more and better jobs, stability, cohesion and solidarity require combined and comprehensive strategies. This must be reflected, on the one hand, in extended cooperation between the EESC's sections, observatories and the CCMI on overarching themes. For some of these, the SOC section will be in the lead, for others the SOC section and its permanent structures look forward to close cooperation under the leadership of other EESC bodies. On the other hand, a comprehensive approach requires more strategic and systematic cooperation with the section's external partners at other European and international institutions and agencies and beyond with European social partners and other civil society organisations.

The section strives for a proactive role in the legislative cycle taking account of the cooperation agreement with Parliament, which stipulates that the EP draws on the EESC's expertise for impact assessment, and the Commission's better regulation package, which foresees more systematic policy evaluation. The EESC is currently developing its own policy evaluation capacity, which should be qualitative and ex-post in nature in order to complement the work of the EP and the Commission, while retaining the full autonomy and capacity of the EESC’s bodies and the advisory role of its members laid down in the Treaty. During the first half-term of the current term of office, the SOC section will focus on three main themes. These priorities take account of the Commission's ten priorities for 2014-2019 and will also guide the section when carrying out work beyond the delivery of opinions on legislative and non-legislative proposals, such as own-initiative and explanatory opinions and, as appropriate, policy evaluations.

The Section will also explore the possibility of holding at least one meeting a year outside of Brussels in order to be closer to citizens and learn about the most topical issues on the spot.

# **Investment, including social investment~~,~~ in inclusive growth, quality jobs, better working conditions and human capital**

Building on the Social Investment Package, the section, through opinions, the work of its Labour Market Observatory and in collaboration with other sections concerned, will endeavour to identify ways of creating quality jobs and combating unemployment, in particular youth and long-term unemployment through the establishment of a business-friendly environment, social investment and active and inclusive labour-market policies. In the same collaborative spirit, it will look at how to invest in improving working conditions, human capital, initial education and training as well as life-long learning to develop relevant knowledge, better matching of skills with labour market needs, removing barriers to the integration of new entrants to the labour markets, such as rigid employment regulations, discussing different forms of employment contracts and providing a framework to facilitate transitions between them as well as attitudes for employability and innovation and to meet the challenges and reap the opportunities of the transition to a low-carbon and digital economy.

## **Social investment**

The section will intensify its efforts to promote the multiple positive effects of the social investment approach and carry out work on how these play out for the labour market and public finance. This will include work on a more ambitious and complete policy roadmap to implement the Social Investment Package by 2020.

## **Employment and investment into human capital**

The Labour Market Observatory (LMO) will work on the integration of refugees and migrants into the labour market, the impact on employment of the digital transition and the transition to a low-carbon, resource-efficient and green economy in synergy, continue previous work on youth employment and tackle long term unemployment including modernisation of employment services in Member States. The section will explore the changing nature of employment, decent working conditions, ~~and~~ encourage improvements in safety and health and democracy at work and promote active and healthy ageing. The section will monitor the implementation of Commission measures to improve outcomes for socially vulnerable groups, for example, The European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing and the EU joint Action on Dementia. It will continue to work on initial education and training (including language learning and vocational training schemes) as well as life-long learning (work-based and abroad) to promote mobility (across Member States), employability, entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial spirit, better matching skills with labour market needs and innovation as well as increased social mobility and equality, which lay the foundations for democratic values and active citizenship. The section will furthermore continue to address the challenges of demographic change for society and employment.

## **Monitoring closely the implementation of the Structural Funds 2014-2020 with particular emphasis on the European Social Fund**

In this respect, the implementation of the provisions of the General Regulation and also of the Regulation of the European Social Fund that refer to the partnership principle, to the multi-governance approach, to non-discrimination etc. should be closely examined as to how they have been respected by the Commission and the Member States and of course how civil society has been involved in this process.

# **Respect for human,** **fundamental and social rights**

The section will continue to examine measures to develop the social dimension of the European Monetary Union and of the European Semester based on the renewed flexicurity approach. The section will contribute to the development of a European pillar of social rights and also look at initiatives for implementing equal treatment and anti-discrimination policies and how these can be accompanied by positive action regarding education, training and integration in the labour market. The section will also evaluate the proposals of the five presidencies to deepen the EMU, in particular the possible interference and the effects of competitiveness bodies on wage setting at national level. This will include actions towards ensuring that EU policy making is gender sensitive. Its new permanent study group for disability rights will continue the work on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The new permanent study group on the inclusion of the Roma will provide a focal point for sharing experiences between civil society organisations and dialogue with representatives of the EU institutions and contribute to the recognition and communication of the best initiatives. In the fight against poverty and social exclusion it will be important for the EESC to examine the stigma and discrimination experienced by people who have mental health problems, life limiting illnesses and who are family carers including the barriers that those groups face in accessing employment opportunities and playing a full and inclusive role in our communities.

## **European pillar of social rights and the fight against** **poverty and social exclusion**

The section will contribute to the development of the European pillar of social rights called for by Commission President Juncker and continue its work on the social dimension of the EMU and the European Semester as well as the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

## **Fundamental rights**

The section will explore how to improve the European governance with the establishment of a "policy coordination cycle" regarding the rule of law and fundamental rights. In this respect the section will carefully observe the ongoing interferences in the autonomy of social partners in more and more Member states and explore measures to stop this policy tendency. It will also continue to work on the discrimination faced by women in employment and in decision-making (including on company boards and at political level), on fighting violence against women and the discrimination suffered by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual and intersexed people (LGBTI). The section will work on non-discrimination in general, the blocked Equal Treatment Directive and cooperate more closely with the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA).

## **Labour mobility and workers' rights**

The section will focus on the forthcoming Labour Mobility Package and follow-up measures, promoting and safeguarding the free movement of citizens, while avoiding abuse. In this context, it will focus on social dumping practices and contribute to exploring European measures to fight them (including the fight against the black and/or shadow economy). It will examine remaining barriers for mobility within Europe, family and employment benefits and the rules for posting employed and the situation of self-employed persons within the social policy coordination rules.

## **Disability rights**

The new permanent study group on disability rights will contribute to the development of a clear and comprehensive human rights agenda for persons with disabilities, with an allocated budget, timeframe and monitoring mechanism. It will work on the implementation of the UNCRPD concluding observations by the EU building on the results of hearings, study visits and other work involving relevant stakeholders.

## **Inclusion of the Roma**

The new permanent study group on the inclusion of the Roma will continue to work on the EU framework strategy and the implementation of national Roma integration strategies (NRIS) up to 2020. It will provide a platform as broad as possible for sharing experiences among stakeholders and improve the dialogue with representatives of the EU institutions.

# **Migration, asylum and integration**

The section will continue its work on the new European Agenda on Migration and the initiatives to be derived from it. The Labour Market Observatory and the permanent study group on immigration and integration will cooperate to look at initiatives to improve EU legal migration policy. Where EU efforts to implement a Common European Asylum System are concerned, it should underline the importance of increased solidarity and the need for a review of the Dublin regulation, the importance of a permanent relocation and resettlement mechanism as well as financing and shared burden solutions and the need for monitoring proper implementation of existing legislation. It will work with the REX section whenever international organisations (e.g. UNHCR) or third countries are concerned. It will intensify the cooperation with the Commission building on the joint support for the European Migration Forum and in other areas.

## **Immigration and integration**

The section and notably its permanent study group on immigration and integration (IMI) will continue to promote the development of a common European immigration and integration policy, including the question of qualifications, based on the principles of fundamental rights and solidarity, with strong involvement of civil society.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_