

EESC asks for 2020 Employment Guidelines to be adapted in the face of Covid-19 pandemic



The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has welcomed the Commission's proposal on revised employment guidelines for Member States, but asked for the guidelines to be adapted to take account of the looming employment and social crisis caused by the Covid-19 outbreak and to help cushion its adverse effects on Europe's labour markets.

The EESC suggests that, although the employment guidelines should be stable over a longer period and valid for all EU countries in their national contexts, for this year the possibility should be exceptionally considered of introducing an additional extraordinary or emergency guideline that would help Member States adjust their employment policies to the current unprecedented circumstances.

Such an emergency Covid-19 employment guideline could include references to efficient temporary measures needed to mitigate the impact of the crisis, such as short-term work arrangements, income support, extension of sick pay, postponement of employers' social security contributions, preliminary tax on salaries and value added tax and the promotion of remote working while

respecting employers' responsibility for the health and safety of the employees, the EESC said.

The EESC has put forward its proposals in an opinion on the Commission's proposal for a Council decision on guidelines for employment policies of the Member States, adopted at its first plenary session since the outbreak of the pandemic. The plenary was held remotely on 7 May, with votes cast by EESC members in writing.

The Commission's proposal was adopted on 26 February 2020, before the start of the coordination of emergency measures to deal with the Covid-19 outbreak.

The rapporteur-general for the EESC opinion, **Ellen Nygren**, said: *The economic shock caused by the Covid-19 outbreak may have a severe and long-lasting impact on European labour markets. The employment guidelines could be an important tool for Member States, helping them to develop and implement policies and measures that could mitigate the economic and social impact of the Covid-19 crisis in the short term and to emerge from the crisis without undermining labour rights or losing competitiveness.*

A strong social dialogue is essential for any employment policy, Ms Nygren stressed. More needs to be done to facilitate and promote social dialogue, both at national and European level.

Although the role of the employment guidelines to serve as a compass is important in the current context, when short-term measures are getting most of the attention, the long-term perspective must not be forgotten even in times of urgency, with a view to striving for sustainable economic and social development in all Member States and to eliminating disparities.

The crisis has earned Europe's healthcare workers enormous respect and appreciation, and has clearly pointed to the need to invest into public services and in the welfare system. Many workers who are typically considered low skilled and are commensurately low paid have emerged as indispensable in keeping the world moving during the lockdown, which has highlighted the need to protect these most vulnerable groups in the labour market both now and once the crisis ends.

The Covid-19 crisis is also sharply illustrating the existing structural problems in European labour markets, with workers in more precarious forms of work being harder hit in terms of losing income and job security.

Commenting on Guideline 5, which encourages the Member States to foster "innovative forms of work", the Committee acknowledged that new forms of work and innovation provided opportunities for growth. At the same time, it reiterated its warning about the many challenges associated with this type of work. It said the guidelines should seek to translate these trends into fair employment opportunities based on a balance between smooth transitions in labour markets and appropriate provisions for the security of workers.

It welcomed the call to set adequate and fair wages and recommended that the guideline should include proposals to strengthen the effectiveness of

collective agreements by enhancing their coverage, while at the same time respecting the subsidiarity principle and the autonomy of the social partners.

For Guideline 6, which deals with enhancing labour supply and improving access to employment, skills and competences, the EESC welcomed the fact that the guideline referred to an overarching vision of competences aligned with a sustainable productive system, but called for more sustainable financing for reskilling and up-skilling of all adults through lifelong learning.

In a comment on Guideline 7, which relates to the social dialogue and the functioning of labour markets, the EESC welcomed advances made by the Commission in involving civil society in the European Semester process and said this should be built upon.

However, the EESC said Guideline 7 failed to address the need to improve occupational health and safety, which is vital in the context of the Covid-19 outbreak.

The Committee warned that the EU's coordination of employment policies must be adapted to respond to this new situation and, in this context, welcomed the establishment of the European instrument for temporary support to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency (SURE) as a positive initiative to give immediate support to workers and businesses.

The employment guidelines have an important role in bringing together the Commission, national governments, employers and trade unions to modernise employment policies and social protection systems to match the changing economic and social context in Europe.

Under the EU Treaties, economic policies and promoting employment in the EU is a matter of common concern and, in this regard, Member States must coordinate their action with the Council of the EU. The latter has to adopt employment guidelines.

First adapted in 2010 in connection with the Europe 2020 strategy, the guidelines were aligned with the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights in 2018. With the European Semester updated to incorporate the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Commission is now also proposing a revision of the employment guidelines.

[Article – Standing together to mark Europe day](#)



Europe Day is held every 9 May to mark the anniversary of the [speech by French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman](#) that led to the foundation of the European Union.

As we mark Europe Day, we remember how Europeans made history in 1950 and pay tribute to those who are making history today. In the context of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, 9 May 2020 represents an important opportunity to celebrate unity and solidarity in Europe.

Normally, the Parliament organises events for visitors at its premises. As this is not possible due to the pandemic this year, Parliament and the other institutions have created a digital open day, bringing people together in this time of crisis by highlighting the sense of solidarity and emphasising what the EU is doing to help.

Among the highlights, Parliament President David Sassoli is scheduled to take part in a live debate on Saturday morning, with interpretation into various languages.

Other events include a Facebook live with Parliament Vice-Presidents Othmar Karas and Katarina Barley, video messages from the leaders of the political groups, a virtual visit to the plenary chamber in Brussels and a panel discussion on Schuman and his vision for Europe.

You can also enjoy an [online exhibition](#), featuring items from the Parliament's archives.

Follow Parliament's all-day [Facebook event](#) and check the European Parliament's website.

[2020](#)

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[Press release – Statement by EP Conference of Presidents on the Schuman Declaration anniversary](#)



The celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration comes at a moment when Europe is facing its most difficult challenge since the end of the Second World War: a health, economic and social crisis triggered by the outbreak of COVID-19.

The Schuman Declaration, which laid the foundations of our European Union, started a unique and genuine political project to guarantee peace and prosperity and to improve the lives of all European citizens. Already 70 years ago the Schuman Declaration contained the idea that “Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity.” This step-by-step approach led to the European Union we know today.

Since the very beginning, the European project has been about building a political and economic community, based on the values arising from our common European history, like solidarity, openness, freedom, tolerance, equality in diversity and respect for the rule of law.

Jean Monnet, the author of the Schuman Declaration, declared that “people do not change if it is not out of necessity, and they only see the need in times of crisis”. Each crisis is an opportunity to take a step forward. Likewise,

the current crisis heightens the urgency for the European Union to start to work on how to become more effective, democratic and closer to citizens.

Over the last 70 years the world has changed dramatically and the role of the European Union is more crucial than ever. In a new emerging geopolitical order and in the context of an ecological emergency, our responsibility is to accept to become a global force of stability and peace, rule of law, sustainability and multilateralism.

This crisis has shown at a very high cost that the EU remains an unfinished project and that the failure to organize solidarity, or to counter the on-going attacks on fundamental rights and rule of Law are not theoretical debates.

Because we stand on the shoulders of giants, the capacity of the European institutions and all Member States to respond to current health, social, economic, environmental, security and institutional challenges should be at least commensurate with the political ambition contained in the Schuman Declaration. We need to strengthen and deepen the democratic legitimacy of the European Union, and ensure its policies and leadership are the expression of the citizens of Europe in a fully-fledged European parliamentary democracy.

We believe that it is time for an ambitious debate on the future of Europe with EU citizens and all stakeholders, in order to shape the Union in which we want to live together and to find an agreement among European citizens on the political foundations we want to build for the recovery of the European continent. Solidarity has become the main condition of our future common achievements.

In this context, we continue to believe that the planned European-wide project, the "Conference on the Future of Europe" is the appropriate forum to fulfil this ambition. The Conference needs to be convened as soon as possible and has to result in clear proposals by engaging directly and meaningfully with citizens, in order to bring about a profound reform of the Union, enabling it, above all, to take decisions in the common European interest so as to make the EU more effective, united, democratic, sovereign and resilient.

We reaffirm Parliament's position and take note of the Commission's position that the Conference process, its concept, structure, timing and scope should be agreed upon jointly by the three institutions. Therefore, we call on the Council to come forward with an ambitious position concerning the Conference.

Beyond the joy and gratitude at having been united and at peace for 75 years, we need to remember that solidarity does not end at our borders. The current pandemic reminds us of the importance of multilateralism in tackling common challenges and crises together. Instead of reverting to national egotism, a strengthened and more integrated European Union that collaborates closely with international partners in a spirit of mutual fairness and understanding should be the way forward.