European semester for economic policy coordination: employment and social aspects in the annual growth survey 2019

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The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Marian HARKIN (ADLE, IE) on the European Semester for economic policy coordination: Employment and Social Aspects in the Annual Growth Survey 2019.

European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)

Emphasising that the EU's social goals and commitments are just as important as its economic goals, Members called on the Commission and the Member States to reinforce social rights in such a way as to build a real social dimension for the EU. They called for a full commitment by the European Semester to the EPSR, emphasising equal treatment and opportunities between women and men, the right to equal pay for work of equal value, and the right to high-quality, affordable care services.

Investment

Members highlighted the need to bridge the investment gap for research and innovation in infrastructure, including social, health and care services as well as health promotion and disease prevention and decent, energy-efficient housing, as well as in human capital. They called on the Commission and the Member States to maximise their efforts in investing in affordable, accessible and targeted high-quality education and training, reinforcing upskilling and reskilling measures including digital and transferable skills, and to promote lifelong learning and skills development.

Decent wages

Members called on the Commission and Member States to carefully examine the issue of in-work poverty and implement measures to improve job quality and reduce wage dispersion, including by raising wage floors also in the form of, where applicable, minimum wages set at decent levels.

Fight against unemployment and measures to remedy skills mismatch

While unemployment rates in the EU are at their lowest level, the job vacancy rate in the Union was 2.2 % in 2018, up from 1.9 % in 2017.

The report stressed that convergence between qualifications and skills with job opportunities is a precondition for creating a competitive EU labour market and should be tackled by facilitating closer cooperation between education systems and businesses and trade unions, for example by promoting dual education, apprenticeships, work-based learning and reality-based learning in all forms and at all levels of education, including higher education. The integration of long-term unemployed individuals through individually tailored measures is also a key factor for fighting inequalities, poverty and social exclusion.

Member States were called upon to ensure that young people not in employment education or training (NEETs), including young people with disabilities and those with complex needs, can, in line with the recommendations of the European Commission and the European Court of Auditors, avail of and benefit from the Youth Guarantee in a real and meaningful way.

The teaching of basic digital skills in educational institutions should be strengthened.

The report invited the Commission and the Member States to:

- promote measures to reduce undeclared work, to allow the recognition of labour rights of domestic workers and care service providers and to improve working conditions;

- increase the scope and effectiveness of active labour market policies;

- step up efforts to further integrate people with disabilities into the labour market;

- take the interests of SMEs and microenterprises into account in the policy process;

- step up efforts to ensure fairer taxation, including in the digital economy;

- take all necessary measures to improve work-life balance and promote gender equality.

Pensions

Acknowledging the challenges faced by Member States to strengthen the sustainability of pension systems, Members nevertheless stressed the importance of safeguarding solidarity in those systems. They believed that the best way to ensure sustainable, safe and adequate pensions for women and men is to increase the overall employment rate and create more quality jobs across all ages, improving working and employment conditions, and to commit the necessary supplementary public spending. Reforms of pension systems should focus, among other things, on the effective retirement age, and should reflect labour market trends, birth rates, the health and wealth situation, working conditions and the economic dependency ratio. These reforms must also take account of the situation women, young people and the self-employed, who are suffering from insecure, atypical employment, periods of involuntary unemployment or reductions in working time.