

## Presidency Summary

### **Informal Video Conference of the of the Employment and Social Policy Ministers on the Recovery Package: contributions at national and EU level to make national employment and social policies more robust and labour markets more resilient, so as to overcome the consequences of the current crisis**

On 9 June 2020, the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU organised a third ministerial videoconference of Employment and Social Policy Ministers. As Europe begins exiting the crisis, it has become ever more apparent that the pandemic will have profound, structural and long-lasting consequences for our society and economy, including negative impacts in the employment and social area. The Presidency therefore deemed it opportune that Ministers together with the Commission should exchange views on the ongoing efforts to make national employment and social policies more robust and labour markets more resilient, so as to overcome the consequences of the current crisis as effectively as possible.

Many Ministers shared the view that the world of work is profoundly transformed by the COVID-19 crisis, with long-lasting changes in working patterns that will continue to be used more often, such as more widespread use of IT tools for teleworking and videoconferencing and new approaches to working time and employee management. The crisis-driven focus on digital competences, as well as the shift to teleworking and towards more flexible working hours, will lead to a greater "flexibilisation" of work in many sectors. While still analysing the changes on the labour market, a number of Ministers pointed out that such changes offered new opportunities for enterprises and employees alike. They also cautioned about challenges and risks related to the safety and health of workers and work-life balance. Some Ministers underlined the important role that the social partners should play in shaping and managing the ongoing changes in the world of work. The Ministers suggested a number of policy responses ranging from strengthening the right to disconnect and agreeing on rules to regulate platform work and related atypical forms of work, with special focus on the protection of people working in precarious jobs and the self-employed. The issues of digital literacy and equal access to the internet and IT equipment was also raised, including the importance of ensuring access for people living in remote and rural areas.

Many Ministers shared the view that knowledge, skills and competences were vital for the productivity and competitiveness of European economies, for their resilience and recovery from the current crisis, and in order to accelerate digital and green transitions. A number of Ministers felt that the current crisis has further increased the need for upskilling and reskilling as ways to support economic recovery and social cohesion, including especially in economic sectors and geographical areas where

imbalances persist. In their view, reskilling and upskilling will be vital for the recovery, including the prevention of structural unemployment post-COVID-19, and in order to make labour markets more resilient to future challenges. Several Ministers recalled that the education and training sector had to quickly adapt and reorganise almost all its activities and switched to e-learning and online tools. Publication of the Commission's proposal for a Reinforced Youth Guarantee and its Updated Skills Agenda are expected soon, offering much needed support for young people.

Many Ministers also acknowledged that the Covid-19 crisis had a gender dimension: workers in the health and care sectors have found themselves in the front line, and the closure of schools and childcare facilities has placed a particular burden on all parents, but especially women. Many Ministers emphasized that new forms of family support and *ad hoc* work-life balance measures had been introduced during the crisis. There has been a spike in domestic violence during the lockdown, and combating violence against women and providing readily accessible support for its victims is more important than ever. According to a number of Ministers, recovery policies should be designed with gender equality in mind. Ministers and the Commission expressed their determination to ensure that the Covid-19 crisis does not slow down progress towards gender equality.

A number of Ministers have reflected on the decision to handover the RINA maintenance by the mid-2021. They called for further discussion between Member States and the Commission in order to find the solution that is acceptable to all.

Information on this year's process of Country Specific Recommendations was given by the Presidency, Commission and respective chairs of Employment and Social Protection Committees, emphasizing impact of COVID-19 crisis on the whole process and content.

Finally, incoming German Presidency presented priorities of their Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second part of the 2020.