

Presidency Report: Main take-aways of the High-Level Conference "On the Need for a New Postal Services Directive"

The European postal sector plays a central role in connecting citizens, businesses, and communities across Member States. Postal and e-commerce services in the European Union are currently at a tipping point, undergoing significant transitions. On the one hand, postal services as a means of communication are decreasing rapidly due to e-substitution, resulting in a continuous decline of letter mail volumes. On the other hand, there is a growing volume of parcel deliveries, boosted during the COVID-19 pandemic. These evolutions in consumer demand and the growing number of new e-commerce suppliers and parcel delivery operators are happening at a time when extra efforts are needed to achieve climate-neutrality by 2050.

In this light, the Belgian presidency of the Council of the European Union hosted a High-Level Conference on 11 April in Brussels regarding the need to review legislative framework for Postal Services. The conference brought together representatives of the European Commission, national authorities, regulators, postal operators, workers unions, consumer organizations and the academic world.

This conference built upon Council Decision (EU) 2022/1327 of 26 July 2022 requesting the Commission to submit a study on the situation of the internal market of Union postal services, in particular regarding the application of Directive 97/67/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 1997 on common rules for the development of the internal market of Community postal services and the improvement of quality of service, as amended by Directives 2002/39/EC and 2008/6/EC, and a proposal if appropriate, in view of the outcomes of the study.

The Belgian Presidency strongly underlines the need to revise the Postal Services Directive to ensure that it is future-proof and that it addresses the aforementioned challenges in a sustainable way, while taking into account the different realities that exist in Member States. During the conference, four priority fields were identified where the postal regulation should be reviewed.



First, broadening the scope of the directive to better include the last mile e-commerce parcels' delivery providers will contribute to develop the internal market for delivery services and a level playing field between parcels' delivery providers and postal operators.

Second, the postal sector represents approximately 1.8 million jobs in the European Union. Consumers enjoy the fast delivery of parcels thanks to the flexibility of postal workers and subcontractors. While recognizing that the competence for employment policy remains primarily with the Member States and underscoring the importance of horizontal legislation, good labour conditions, in particular in the last mile delivery, should be ensured.

Third, the postal sector has a role to play in addressing climate change and reducing its carbon footprint. Many postal operators are already greening their operations through decarbonization, energy efficiency, or waste reduction. While recognizing the importance of horizontal legislation, a new Postal Services Directive could further help promoting and enforcing environmental sustainability, by providing member states with the possibility to advance sustainable practices in the postal sector and fully exploit the opportunities offered by technologies and delivery methods such as parcel lockers, parcel boxes, and cycle logistics to name but a few. This approach not only enhances environmental stewardship but also optimizes the utilization of resources while meeting evolving consumer demands effectively.

Fourth and finally, the Universal Service Obligation, particularly the mandatory minimum distribution frequency of 5 deliveries a week for priority letters, should be evaluated to take into account changing users' needs, a changing cost-benefit analysis for society, and the need to promote sustainable postal operations. At the same time, the specific needs of more vulnerable groups in our societies and of remote and underserved areas should not be forgotten. Compensation for Universal Service Operators should happen in a transparent and verifiable way.

The Belgian presidency suggests that the Commission takes these priorities into account while assessing how the postal framework can be made fit for the future. The Presidency is looking forward to the outcomes of the Commission's prospective study on the future of the postal sector. It is our hope that the insights gathered from that study and this event will be used as an initial step towards the development of a future-oriented, recast of the Postal Services Directive, to be proposed by the Commission in the upcoming legislative mandate.

