



BACKGROUND BRIEF

16 October 2026

Employment and Social Affairs Council

19 October 2026, Luxembourg

PRESS

EN

Chairs:

- Dara Calleary, Irish Minister for Social Protection
- Norma Foley, Irish Minister for Children, Disability and Equality
- James Browne, Irish Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage

Commission representatives:

- Roxana Mînzatu, Executive Vice-President for Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness
- Hadja Lahbib, Commissioner for Equality

Starting time: 9.30

Media opportunities:

- Doorsteps: Minister Calleary, Minister Foley, Minister Browne: +/-8.50–9.00
- Press conference: Minister Calleary, Minister Foley, Minister Browne, EVP Mînzatu: +/-16.15

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Main agenda topics:

Highlights of the agenda include the first ever Council recommendation on fighting housing exclusion and homelessness, which sets out a suite of measures aimed at addressing these issues. Furthermore, ministers will be invited share their expectations for the upcoming Quality Jobs Act, the proposal for which is expected by the end of 2026. The meeting will also focus on equality, with an exchange of views on delivering equality in the EU and conclusions on equality as a driver for growth and competitiveness.

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[Meeting page on the Council website](#)

[Press conferences, doorsteps and other public events in video streaming](#)

[High quality photo and video material](#)

Housing exclusion (in public session)

The Council is expected to adopt a recommendation on fighting housing exclusion, including homelessness.

Despite efforts at national level to address it, homelessness has risen in a number of member states and is currently estimated to affect more than one million people throughout the EU (OECD). The Council's recommendation focuses on long-term solutions and prevention. It takes a people-centred, housing-led approach to fighting social exclusion, including by boosting the supply of social and affordable housing across Europe.

The recommendation is one of the key deliverables of the European Affordable Housing Plan, which the Commission put forward in December 2025 as part of ongoing efforts to comprehensively tackle the housing crisis. The proposal was published in May 2026 as part of the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy.

Draft Council Recommendation on fighting housing exclusion, including homelessness

[The European Affordable Housing Plan](#) (Commission communication)

[The EU's housing crisis](#) (background information)

[The EU's Anti-Poverty Strategy: addressing and preventing poverty from childhood to old age](#) (Commission communication)

Quality Jobs Act (public session)

Ministers will exchange views on the topic of 'The Quality Jobs Act: Social Europe at the Workplace'.

In 2025 the Commission published the Quality Jobs Roadmap, in which it announced its intention to put forward a proposal for a 'Quality Jobs Act' by the end of 2026. The aim of the discussion will be to explore how best to ensure that the upcoming Quality Jobs Act addresses the needs on the ground for both workers and employers in a rapidly changing world of work.

In particular, ministers will share their expectations for the upcoming act based on five dimensions that have featured in the Commission's initial consultations with the social partners:

- algorithmic management and use of AI at the workplace
- health and safety at work
- the right to disconnect and telework
- workers' rights in subcontracting chains
- fair digital and green transitions

['The Quality Jobs Act: Social Europe at the Workplace' \(presidency steering note\)](#)

[Quality Jobs Roadmap](#) (Commission communication)

Equality as a driver for growth and competitiveness (in public session)

The Council will seek to approve conclusions on equality as a driver for economic growth and competitiveness in the EU. The conclusions make the economic case for equality policy, arguing that discrimination is not merely unjust, but also wastes human potential. As a result, it is damaging to the economy as a whole. The Council sets out a range of relevant measures, organised into sections focusing on gender equality, LGBTI equality, disability, anti-racism, Roma inclusion, and age discrimination and ageism.

[Draft Council Conclusions on Equality as a driver for economic growth and competitiveness in the EU](#)

[Equality in the EU](#) (background information)

Delivering equality in the EU (public session)

Ministers will exchange views on the topic of ‘Delivering Equality in the European Union: Our Values in Practice’.

The principles of equality and non-discrimination are enshrined in the EU’s Treaties and in its Charter of Fundamental Rights. Over the years, they have been implemented through the development of a legislative framework to ensure equal treatment in areas such as employment, pay transparency and equal pay, and work-life balance for working parents and carers.

Despite considerable progress, however, discrimination remains a reality for many, with persistent inequalities evident across key areas of life such as employment, pay, education, healthcare, housing, the digital realm, access to goods and services, and participation in public life.

The ministers’ discussion will focus on:

- the most significant social and economic benefits of progress on equality and non-discrimination in the member states in recent years
- actions that should be collectively prioritised over the next five years in order to advance equality in the EU and deliver measurable results

[Delivering Equality in the European Union: Our Values in Practice \(presidency steering note\)](#)

[Equality in the EU](#) (background information)

European Semester (public session)

The Council is expected to endorse key messages from the Employment Committee (EMCO) and the Social Protection Committee (SPC). The messages set out the main findings of the committees’ annual reports on the economic and social situations in the EU and relevant policy developments in member states.

The European Semester is the EU’s framework for coordinating and monitoring economic and social policies. The annual cycle begins in November, when the Commission sets the priorities for the year to come, and ends in October of the following year, when national governments submit their draft budgetary plans.

[Key employment challenges: key messages from the Employment Committee based on the Annual Employment Performance Report and the Employment Performance Monitor](#)

[Key social challenges: key messages from the Social Protection Committee based on the Review of the Social Protection Performance Monitor](#)

[How the European Semester works](#) (background information)

Informal lunch debate

Over lunch, ministers will exchange views with regard to possible EU action on the activation of persons excluded from the labour market. The EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, published in May 2026, identifies access to quality employment as the most effective route out of poverty and social exclusion. The discussion comes in the wake of the publication of the Commission’s communication on the European Pillar of Social Rights in July 2026.

[The EU’s Anti-Poverty Strategy: addressing and preventing poverty from childhood to old age](#) (Commission communication)

[Commission communication on the European Pillar of Social Rights](#)

[Advancing a stronger Social Europe](#) (background information)

Other points

- [Equal treatment directive: state of play](#) (information from the presidency)
- [Tripartite Social Summit](#) (information from the presidency)
- [Presidency events](#) (information from the presidency)
- [2026 Annual Progress Report by Executive Vice-President Mînzatu on Simplification, Implementation and Enforcement](#) (information from the Commission)
- [2026 Annual Progress Report by Commissioner Lahbib on Simplification, Implementation and Enforcement](#) (information from the Commission)
- [European Disability Card and European Parking Card for persons with disabilities – Overcoming challenges in the implementation process and addressing QR code colour requirements and interoperability](#) (information from Italy, Finland, Lithuania, Netherlands and Slovakia)

Items for approval without discussion

Revision of directive 2004/37/EC on carcinogens, mutagens and reprotoxic substances at work (sixth batch) – adoption of the legislative act