

## II

(Non-legislative acts)

## DECISIONS

## COUNCIL DECISION (EU) 2021/1868

of 15 October 2021

**on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Article 148(2) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Parliament <sup>(1)</sup>,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee <sup>(2)</sup>,

After consulting the Committee of the Regions,

Having regard to the opinion of the Employment Committee <sup>(3)</sup>,

Whereas:

- (1) Member States and the Union are to work towards developing a coordinated strategy for employment and particularly for promoting a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce, as well as labour markets that are future-oriented and responsive to economic change, with a view to achieving the objectives of full employment and social progress, balanced growth, a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment laid down in Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). Member States are to regard promoting employment as a matter of common concern and are to coordinate their action in that respect within the Council, taking into account national practices related to the responsibilities of management and labour.
- (2) The Union is to combat social exclusion and discrimination, and promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and the protection of the rights of the child as laid down in Article 3 TEU. In defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union is to take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against poverty and social exclusion, a high level of education and training and protection of human health as laid down in Article 9 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).
- (3) In accordance with the TFEU, the Union has developed and implemented policy coordination instruments for economic and employment policies. As part of those instruments, the Guidelines for the Employment Policies of the Member States (the 'Guidelines') set out in the Annex to Council Decision (EU) 2020/1512 <sup>(4)</sup>, together with the Broad Guidelines for the Economic Policies of the Member States and of the Union set out in Council Recommendation (EU) 2015/1184 <sup>(5)</sup>, form the Integrated Guidelines. They are to guide policy implementation in

<sup>(1)</sup> Opinion of 16 September 2021 (not yet published in the Official Journal).

<sup>(2)</sup> Opinion of 23 September 2021 (not yet published in the Official Journal).

<sup>(3)</sup> Opinion of 24 June 2021 (not yet published in the Official Journal).

<sup>(4)</sup> Council Decision (EU) 2020/1512 of 13 October 2020 on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States (OJ L 344, 19.10.2020, p. 22).

<sup>(5)</sup> Council Recommendation (EU) 2015/1184 of 14 July 2015 on broad guidelines for the economic policies of the Member States and of the European Union (OJ L 192, 18.7.2015, p. 27).

the Member States and in the Union, reflecting the interdependence between the Member States. The resulting set of coordinated European and national policies and reforms are to constitute an appropriate overall sustainable economic and employment policy mix, which should achieve positive spillover effects.

- (4) The Guidelines are consistent with the Stability and Growth Pact, existing Union legislation and various Union initiatives, including Council Recommendations of 10 March 2014<sup>(6)</sup>, 15 February 2016<sup>(7)</sup>, 19 December 2016<sup>(8)</sup>, 15 March 2018<sup>(9)</sup>, 22 May 2018<sup>(10)</sup>, 22 May 2019<sup>(11)</sup>, 8 November 2019<sup>(12)</sup>, 30 October 2020<sup>(13)</sup> and 24 November 2020<sup>(14)</sup>, Commission Recommendation (EU) 2021/402<sup>(15)</sup> and Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004<sup>(16)</sup>.
- (5) The European Semester combines the different instruments in an overarching framework for integrated multilateral coordination and surveillance of economic and employment policies. While pursuing environmental sustainability, productivity, fairness and stability, the European Semester integrates the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights and of its monitoring tool, the Social Scoreboard, and provides for strong engagement with social partners, civil society and other stakeholders. It supports the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Union's and Member States' employment and economic policies should go hand in hand with Europe's transition to a climate neutral, environmentally sustainable and digital economy, improve competitiveness, ensure adequate working conditions, foster innovation, promote social justice and equal opportunities, as well as tackle inequalities and regional disparities.
- (6) Climate change and environment-related challenges, globalisation, digitalisation, artificial intelligence, teleworking, the platform economy and demographic change are transforming European economies and societies. The Union and its Member States are to work together to effectively address those structural factors and adapt existing systems as needed, recognising the close interdependence of the Member States' economies and labour markets, and related policies. That requires coordinated, ambitious and effective policy action at both Union and national levels, in accordance with the TFEU and the Union's provisions on economic governance, and taking into account the European Pillar of Social Rights. Such policy action should encompass a boost in sustainable investment, a renewed commitment to appropriately sequenced reforms that enhance economic growth, the creation of quality jobs, productivity, adequate working conditions, social and territorial cohesion, upward convergence, resilience and the exercise of fiscal responsibility. It should combine supply- and demand-side measures, while taking into account their environmental, employment and social impacts.
- (7) The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission proclaimed the European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>(17)</sup>. It sets out twenty principles and rights to support well-functioning and fair labour markets and welfare systems, structured around three categories: equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion. The principles and rights give direction to the Union's strategy, making sure that the transitions to climate-neutrality and environmental sustainability, digitalisation and demographic change are socially fair and just. The European Pillar of Social Rights, with its accompanying Social Scoreboard, constitutes a reference framework to monitor the employment and social performance of Member States, to drive reforms at national, regional and local level and to reconcile the 'social' and the 'market' in today's modern economy, including

<sup>(6)</sup> Council Recommendation of 10 March 2014 on a Quality Framework for Traineeships (OJ C 88, 27.3.2014, p. 1).

<sup>(7)</sup> Council Recommendation of 15 February 2016 on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market (OJ C 67, 20.2.2016, p. 1).

<sup>(8)</sup> Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults (OJ C 484, 24.12.2016, p. 1).

<sup>(9)</sup> Council Recommendation of 15 March 2018 on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (OJ C 153, 2.5.2018, p. 1).

<sup>(10)</sup> Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning (OJ C 189, 4.6.2018, p. 1).

<sup>(11)</sup> Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems (OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 4).

<sup>(12)</sup> Council Recommendation of 8 November 2019 on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed (OJ C 387, 15.11.2019, p. 1).

<sup>(13)</sup> Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee (OJ C 372, 4.11.2020, p. 1).

<sup>(14)</sup> Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (OJ C 417, 2.12.2020, p. 1).

<sup>(15)</sup> Commission Recommendation (EU) 2021/402 of 4 March 2021 on an effective active support to employment following the COVID-19 crisis (EASE) (OJ L 80, 8.3.2021, p. 1).

<sup>(16)</sup> Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee (OJ L 223, 22.6.2021, p. 14).

<sup>(17)</sup> Interinstitutional Proclamation on the European Pillar of Social Rights (OJ C 428, 13.12.2017, p. 10).

by promoting the social economy. On 4 March 2021, the Commission put forward an Action Plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (the 'Action Plan'), including ambitious but realistic headline targets and complementary sub-targets for 2030, in the areas of employment, skills, education and social protection.

- (8) On 8 May 2021, at the Porto Social Summit, Heads of State or Government recognised the European Pillar of Social Rights as a fundamental element of the recovery, noting that its implementation will strengthen the Union's drive towards a digital, green and fair transition and contribute to achieving upward social and economic convergence and addressing demographic challenges. They stressed that the social dimension, social dialogue and the active involvement of social partners are at the core of a highly competitive social market economy. They found that the Action Plan provides useful guidance for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, including in the areas of employment, skills, health and social protection. They welcomed the new Union headline targets for 2030 on employment (78 % of the population aged 20-64 should be in employment), skills (60 % of all adults should participate in training every year) and poverty reduction (by at least 15 million people, including five million children), as well as the revised Social Scoreboard with a view to monitoring progress towards the implementation of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights as part of the policy coordination framework in the context of the European Semester. Moreover, they noted that, as Europe gradually recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, the priority will be to move from protecting to creating jobs and improving job quality, and stressed that implementation of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights will be essential to ensure the creation of more and better jobs for all within the framework of an inclusive recovery. They emphasised their commitment to unity and solidarity, which also means ensuring equal opportunities for all and that no one is left behind.

They affirmed their determination, as established by the European Council's Strategic Agenda 2019-2024, to continue deepening the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights at Union and national levels, with due regard for respective competences and the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. Lastly, they stressed the importance of closely following, including at the highest level, the progress achieved towards the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Union headline targets for 2030.

- (9) Reforms to the labour market, including the national wage-setting mechanisms, should follow national practices of social dialogue, with a view to providing fair wages that enable a decent standard of living and sustainable growth. They should allow for the necessary opportunity for a broad consideration of socioeconomic issues, including improvements in sustainability, competitiveness, innovation, the creation of quality jobs, working conditions, in-work poverty, education and skills, public health and inclusion, and real incomes. Member States and the Union should ensure that the social, employment and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is mitigated and that transitions are socially fair and just. Strengthening the recovery and the drive towards an inclusive and resilient society in which people are protected and empowered to anticipate and manage change, and in which they can actively participate in society and the economy, should be pursued. A coherent set of active labour market policies, consisting of temporary hiring and transition incentives, skills policies and improved employment services, is needed to support labour market transitions, as highlighted in Recommendation (EU) 2021/402.
- (10) Discrimination in all its forms should be tackled, gender equality ensured and youth employment supported. Access and opportunities for all should be ensured and poverty and social exclusion, including that of children, should be reduced, in particular by ensuring an effective functioning of labour markets and adequate and inclusive social protection systems, and by removing barriers to education, training and labour-market participation, including through investments in early childhood education and care, and in digital skills. Timely and equal access to affordable long-term care and healthcare services, including prevention and healthcare promotion, are particularly relevant in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and in a context of ageing societies. The potential of persons with disabilities to contribute to economic growth and social development should be further realised. As new economic and business models take hold in Union workplaces, employment relationships are also changing. Member States should ensure that employment relationships stemming from new forms of work maintain and strengthen Europe's social model.

- (11) The Integrated Guidelines should serve as a basis for country-specific recommendations that the Council may address to Member States. Following the launch of the Recovery and Resilience Facility by Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council<sup>(18)</sup>, the Commission adjusted the 2021 European Semester cycle and only proposed recommendations on the budgetary situation of the Member States in 2021 as envisaged under the Stability and Growth Pact.
- (12) Member States are to make full use of REACT-EU established by Regulation (EU) 2020/2221 of the European Parliament and of the Council<sup>(19)</sup>, which reinforces cohesion policy funds until 2023, the European Social Fund Plus established by Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council<sup>(20)</sup>, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and other Union funds, including the Just Transition Fund established by Regulation (EU) 2021/1056 of the European Parliament and of the Council<sup>(21)</sup> and InvestEU established by Regulation (EU) 2021/523 of the European Parliament and of the Council<sup>(22)</sup>, to foster employment, social investments, social inclusion and accessibility, and to promote upskilling and reskilling opportunities of the workforce, lifelong learning and high-quality education and training for all, including digital literacy and skills.

Member States are also to make full use of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund for Displaced Workers established by Regulation (EU) 2021/691 of the European Parliament and of the Council<sup>(23)</sup> to support workers made redundant as a result of major restructuring events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, socioeconomic transformations that are the result of globalisation, and technological and environmental changes. While the Integrated Guidelines are addressed to Member States and the Union, they should be implemented in partnership with all national, regional and local authorities, closely involving parliaments, as well as the social partners and representatives of civil society.

- (13) The Employment Committee and the Social Protection Committee are to monitor how the relevant policies are implemented in light of the guidelines for employment policies, in line with their respective Treaty-based mandates. Those Committees and other Council preparatory bodies involved in the coordination of economic and social policies are to work closely together. Policy dialogue between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission should be maintained, in particular as regards the guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States.
- (14) The Social Protection Committee was consulted,

HAS ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

#### *Article 1*

The guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States, as set out in the Annex to Decision (EU) 2020/1512, are maintained for 2021 and shall be taken into account by the Member States in their employment policies and reform programmes.

<sup>(18)</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility (OJ L 57, 18.2.2021, p. 17).

<sup>(19)</sup> Regulation (EU) 2020/2221 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 December 2020 amending Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 as regards additional resources and implementing arrangements to provide assistance for fostering crisis repair in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its social consequences and for preparing a green, digital and resilient recovery of the economy (REACT-EU) (OJ L 437, 28.12.2020, p. 30).

<sup>(20)</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013 (OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 21).

<sup>(21)</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1056 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the Just Transition Fund (OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 1).

<sup>(22)</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/523 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 March 2021 establishing the InvestEU Programme and amending Regulation (EU) 2015/1017 (OJ L 107, 26.3.2021, p. 30).

<sup>(23)</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/691 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 on the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund for Displaced Workers (EGF) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1309/2013 (OJ L 153, 3.5.2021, p. 48).

*Article 2*

This Decision is addressed to the Member States.

Done at Luxembourg, 15 October 2021.

*For the Council*  
*The President*  
J. CIGLER KRALJ

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