

Informal Meeting of Labour and Social Affairs Ministers (EPSCO)

The informal meeting of ministers responsible for employment and social affairs will take place in Prague at the Congress Centre on 13-14 October 2022. At this meeting, Member States' representatives responsible for the employment agenda and social policy will meet with representatives of European social partners and European non-profit organizations.

- On the first day they will discuss the topic of integration of refugees from Ukraine into the labour market.
- The second day will be devoted to the debate on the energy crisis and its impact on the social situation in Europe. The main speaker will be a representative of the Eurofound agency.

Supporting Labour market and social integration of people fleeing Ukraine

In the recent EMCO/SPC survey, EU Member States identified several challenges that they face and will continue to face in the upcoming months. First, Member States are providing Ukrainian refugees with accommodation, access to healthcare, the labour market and education. Ensuring sufficient capacity for pre-school care and after-school activities for children is essential for women, and parents more generally, to participate in the labour market and to ensure their independence. Member States face further challenges in the area of social protection. Currently, the extent to which Member States allow refugees to benefit from their national social protection systems, is not uniform. There are differences in the range of benefits that persons under temporary protection can claim in Member States.

The ministers will discuss whether the Member States consider the existing EU financial assistance sufficient and what forms of assistance they expect if the refugee crisis deepens as a result of the winter. Furthermore, a success stories (and/or a challenges) of a targeted policies or programmes aimed at promoting labour market integration of people fleeing the war will be shared.

Energy poverty

Energy prices started rising in the summer of 2021 in the context of the recovery from the pandemic and increasing tensions in the international energy market and grew rapidly since, due to war of aggression against Ukraine. Besides the sharp rise in energy prices, food prices also increased significantly representing the second largest contributor of the overall inflation in Europe. The key challenges resulting from the steep increase in energy prices must be looked at from both short- and long-term perspective. They must be addressed by a comprehensive policy response, both at national and European level. Member States are encouraged to take policy action across different areas such as the adaptation of the social protection systems and taxation, ensuring access to affordable essential services and housing for persons most affected by the green transition, mobilising public and private funding to provide incentives into renewable energy sources, implementing measures to improve energy efficiency of housing stock. Member States are also invited to empower energy consumers by offering advice and counselling to consumers to better manage their energy use, targeting especially vulnerable households and communities.

The discussion will cover what have been the most effective policy measures in each country to tackle the impact of the rising energy prices on the population and the energy poverty so far, if the Member States see gaps in the mechanisms and instruments in place, both financial and policy, to address the energy crisis and its impacts on the most affected households and to prevent more citizens falling into energy poverty, and how the Member States plan to address energy efficiency in low-income and middle-income households in the long term.