The European Union in 2020: key events

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Introduction

The development and implementation of European Union (EU) social policies in 2020 were impacted by: a) the Covid-19 pandemic; b) the ongoing implementation of the European Green Deal; c) the adoption of the multiannual financial framework (MFF) 2021-2027 and the accompanying recovery plan; and d) the negotiations and decisions on pending social policy initiatives launched prior to 2020.

During the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (January–June 2020), the rapid spread of the Covid-19 virus was declared to be a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation in March 2020. In response, the European Commission launched new targeted public health initiatives to tackle the imminent threat: the centralised purchase of vaccines and their distribution among Member States and the funding of vaccine development, culminating with the EMA’s approval of the BioNTech/Pfizer vaccine at the end of the year. The EU4Health 2021-2027 was developed as a new and ambitious EU health policy programme: with total funding of EUR 5.1 billion, it is the largest-ever health programme in monetary terms. The EU also launched actions to address the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. In May, the European Commission presented NextGenerationEU (NGEU), the centrepiece of the European recovery plan with a budget of EUR 750 billion. The European Central Bank (ECB) enlarged its quantitative easing policy, notably by launching the pandemic emergency purchase programme (PEPP). In September, the Council of the EU, having received financial guarantees from the Member States concerned, approved the EUR 87.4 billion Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) assistance instrument.

Social policies were further impacted by the ongoing implementation of European Commission President von der Leyen’s European Green Deal (EGD) programme. The


3. Quantitative easing is one of the tools that the ECB uses to support economic growth across the euro area and to bring inflation to the target of 2%.
two main action plans relating to social policy are ‘A Strong Social Europe for Just Transitions’ and the ‘Sustainable Europe Investment Plan’. Among the EGD decisions closely linked to social policies, we note a Commission’s proposal for a regulation establishing a Just Transition Fund and the ‘Farm to Fork’ Communication which draws a new comprehensive framework for reducing the environmental and climate footprint of the EU food system as well as increasing its resilience.

Turning to social rights in the EU, the long-awaited Mobility Package I concerning the social protection of long-distance lorry drivers was adopted (July 2020). A social partner consultation on a European action for fair minimum wages in the EU was followed by a European Commission proposal for a directive (October 2020). Several other topics marked the 2020 social agenda. In March, the European Commission presented its gender equality action plan 2020-2025, dubbed ‘A Union of Equality’. However, interinstitutional negotiations have remained stalled, as is the case with other key elements of EU social policy such as the new regulation on the coordination of social security systems. Another growing social and political concern involves upholding the rule of law in several Member States (in particular Poland and Hungary). In response to this democratic backsliding, the European Commission adopted a new EU rule-of-law toolbox and presented its first annual report on the rule of law in each EU Member State (September 2020).

January

1 January: Croatia takes over the Presidency of the Council of the EU. Among its priorities are the negotiations on the EGD, the new European industrial strategy, the establishment of a future common framework for asylum and migration, the strengthening of long-term care in the EU, the implementation of the United Nations sustainable development goals (UN SDGs) and achieving progress in the negotiations on a partnership agreement with Africa to replace the Cotonou Agreement (www.eu2020.hr).

14 January: the President of the European Commission announces the launch of a social partner consultation on a European action to establish fair minimum wages in the EU. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) regrets that the Commission has not proposed the EU at-risk-of-poverty threshold (60% of the median equivalised disposable income) as a wage floor (EC, fs_20_51; ETUC Reply to the First Phase of Consultation of Social Partners under Article 154 TFEU on a possible action addressing the challenges related to fair minimum wages).

14 January: the European Commission presents its roadmap entitled ‘A Strong Social Europe for Just Transitions’. Initiatives include a social partner consultation on minimum wages and the creation of a Just Transition mechanism; a strategy document on gender equality and pay transparency legislation; a revision of the European skills strategy; the reinforcement of the European youth guarantee; a proposal for an EU unemployment reinsurance scheme; a European child guarantee; an action plan to beat cancer (EC, fs_20_41; ETUC on the Commission’s ‘Strong Social Europe’
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14 January: the European Commission issues a communication on the Sustainable Europe Investment Plan, the basis for the financing strategy of the EGD. The plan aims at mobilising EUR 1,000 billion over ten years to support the green transition. In addition to existing European funding instruments, newly designed funding mechanisms such as the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM) are to be used to cushion the socioeconomic consequences of the green transition on the most vulnerable regions and industries (COM(2020) 21).


16 January: the rule-of-law situation in Poland and Hungary is discussed in the European Parliament and is the subject of a resolution adopted by a large majority (EP, 2020/2513(RSP)).

22 January: the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers adopts a new 2020-2025 action plan for Roma and traveller inclusion. Its aims include combating discrimination and supporting access to education and training for Roma (Council of Europe, The Committee of Ministers adopts new action plan for Roma and traveller inclusion).

22 January: the European Parliament’s Committee on transport adopts the provisional agreement on the Mobility Package I legislation covering the controversial matter of the posting of lorry drivers, drivers’ rest periods, cabotage and market access. The text remains blocked in the Council. Nine Member States, particularly Central and Eastern European countries, call for the European Commission to conduct an impact assessment of the legislative package on the climate and environmental objectives set out in the European Green Deal (EP, Mobility package: Transport Committee backs deal with EU Ministers, press release).

28 January: the ETUC publishes a statement on the level of minimum wages in the Member States, showing that 17 of them set minimum wages below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. Speaking as BusinessEurope and SMEUnited, European employers stress that the European Commission does not have the necessary powers to propose binding legislation on minimum wages (BusinessEurope, Response to first phase social partner consultation on a possible action addressing the challenges related to fair minimum wages).

29 January: MEPs approve by a large majority the Brexit withdrawal agreement. The UK officially leaves the European Union on 30 January (EP, 2018/0427(NLE)).
30 January: the European Parliament adopts a resolution calling for implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, including the improvement of gender equality rights, rapid implementation of the directive on work-life balance, and policies to promote women’s employment and their financial independence (EP, P9 TA(2020)0025).

31 January: the European Commission releases EUR 10 million to be invested in research into the new vaccine against Covid-19 (EC, mex_20_175).

February

4 February: a report commissioned by the Commission highlights the need for an EU regulation on ‘due diligence’ in corporate supply chains (EC, Study on due diligence requirements through the supply chain).

5 February: the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and the European Public Service Union (EPSU) set out a series of recommendations on how to strengthen the roles of local and regional governments and the social partners in the European Semester. They also call for improving information and consultation of the social partners on budgetary issues (CEMR and EPSU, Localising the European Semester, Joint project 2018-2020, Final report).


26 February: the European Commission publishes the European Semester country reports. In addition to the macroeconomic recommendations, the reports now include a section on environmental and climate issues. Each report contains an annex listing the regions eligible for subsidies from the prospective Just Transition Fund (EC, 2020 European Semester: Country Reports and Communication).

March

4 March: EU interior ministers support Greece, Bulgaria and Cyprus in dealing with new arrivals of migrants at their borders after Turkey temporarily suspends implementation of the March 2016 Declaration (Council of the EU, Statement on the situation at the EU’s external borders, press release).

4 March: the European Commission presents its draft regulation for a European ‘climate law’ with the target of achieving climate neutrality for Europe by 2050. The emission reduction targets are to be revised every five years, in parallel with the five-yearly revisions of the Paris Agreement on climate change (COM(2020) 80).

4 March: the European Commission registers a European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI) to strengthen the existing rights of EU citizens to vote and stand in European and
municipal elections in their country of residence (ECI, *Voters without borders, full political rights for EU Citizens*).


5 March: the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) publishes a review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action4 in the EU Member States. It highlights a persisting gender pay gap and the greater vulnerability of women to the consequences of climate change, particularly for single mothers and older women on low pensions (EIGE, *Beijing + 25: the fifth review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States*).

6 March: the European Commission presents a series of actions to support the Greek authorities in dealing with the arrival of unaccompanied migrant children, strengthening intra-European solidarity and the voluntary transfer of these children from Greece to other Member States, as well as establishing lasting solutions for those remaining in Greece (EC, IP 20/406).

6 March: the European Commission issues its sixth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion. The report highlights that the 2008 economic crisis had a long-lasting impact, reversing the trend of converging GDP and unemployment rates between Member States (EC, *Investment for jobs and growth. Promoting development and good governance in EU regions and cities*).

10 March: the European Council adopts a range of measures to restrict the spread of Covid-19, to improve the supply of medical equipment to those countries hardest hit by the pandemic, to promote research and to authorise maximum flexibility in relation to European budget rules (Council of the EU, *Video conference of the members of the European Council of 10 March 2020*).

10 March: the European Commission announces the launch of the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative, aiming to mobilise EUR 25 billion within European funds not yet allocated to specific projects or instruments (EC, IP 20/440).

13 March: the European Commission publishes a study on the working conditions of digital platform workers. Devising a new definition of the terms ‘worker’ and ‘work’ is among its recommendations for providing sufficient protection to non-standard employees (EC, mex_20_461).


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16 March: the European social partners (European Trade Union Confederation, BusinessEurope, CEEP, and SMEunited) adopt a joint declaration urging the Eurogroup and Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) Ministers to endorse without delay the measures proposed by the European Commission to address the Covid-19 pandemic (ETUC, Statement of the European Social Partners ETUC, BusinessEurope, CEEP, SMEUnited on the COVID-19 emergency).


19 March: the European Commission announces the creation of a strategic reserve of medical and protective supplies to help those Member States hardest hit by the pandemic. Member States can contribute on a voluntary basis (EC, IP 20/476).

19 March: UN Secretary-General António Guterres calls for an exceptional response, on an exceptional scale and based on international solidarity, to the Covid-19 crisis - an unprecedented global, health, human and economic crisis (UN, UN Chief Addresses the Global COVID19 Crisis).

27 March: the EU supports the new dispute settlement mechanism of the World Trade Organization (WTO). This mechanism, although temporary, will be binding and will enable progress to be made on the disputes submitted to the Organisation by its members. The new system follows the blockage, by the United States, of the WTO appellate body (EC, EU and 15 World Trade Organization members establish contingency appeal arrangement for trade disputes).

30 March: the ETUC calls on large European companies to suspend dividend payments while the Covid-19 pandemic is wreaking havoc on the European economy (ETUC, Companies must suspend payouts to shareholders during coronavirus crisis).

April

1 April: the European social partners alert the European Commission to a legal text adopted by the Polish Parliament allowing the country’s authorities to revoke membership of the national social dialogue council during the pandemic. The social partners denounce this as a blow to the autonomy of social dialogue and demand the text’s withdrawal (ETUC, Joint letter of the European Social Partners to the European Commission on the situation in Poland).

2 April: the European Commission presents a proposal for a regulation establishing a European temporary support instrument to mitigate the risks of unemployment in emergency situations (SURE) such as the Covid-19 pandemic. The aim is to help Member States to provide financial support to employees and self-employed people
who are in a vulnerable situation by raising tens of billions of euros on the financial markets (COM(2020) 139).

2 April: the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) rules that the principle of equal treatment means that EU Member States must pay a family allowance for the child of a spouse or partner of a cross-border worker. In its judgement, the CJEU emphasises both ‘the importance of equal treatment of (frontier) cross-border workers’ as well as the respect of family and private life (CJEU, Case C-802/18).

14 April: the employers’ organisation BusinessEurope calls on the Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, Nicolas Schmit, to delay implementation of the revised Posted Workers Directive, originally planned for 30 July 2020. This request is strongly criticised by the ETUC and other national and transnational trade unions (IndustriAll and UNI Europa) in view of the fact that the Directive was adopted in 2018 (BusinessEurope, Posting of workers directive – Letter from Markus J. Beyrer to EU Commissioner Nicolas Schmit; EFBWW, Maintaining the transposition deadline of the revised posting of workers directive).

15 April: the G20 members agree to introduce a one-year moratorium on the poorest countries’ debt. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) strengthens its support capacity and revises the repayment conditions for the most vulnerable countries (G20, Virtual meeting of the G20 finance ministers and central bank governors on 15 April 2020).

May

5 May: the CJEU recalls that it alone has jurisdiction to rule on an act of a European institution. This statement follows a ruling of the German Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe establishing that the ECB should justify its quantitative easing programme with regard to the European Treaties (CJEU, Press Release n°58/20, 8 May).

11 May: the European Commission relaxes the rules applicable to the state recapitalisation of private companies during the pandemic, subject to certain conditions, including a ban on the payment of dividends (EC, IP/20/838). The European Parliament’s Committee on employment and social affairs proposes that companies benefiting from the SURE instrument5 should be required to comply with collective agreements and should refrain from paying dividends (EP, 2020/0030, NLE).

15 May: the European Commission registers a citizens’ initiative calling for the introduction of an unconditional basic income in the EU. The aim is to reduce regional inequalities and to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU (ECI, European Citizens’ Initiative for Unconditional Basic Income).

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5. SURE: Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency was set up in April 2020. Its aim is to support jobs and workers affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly national short-time work schemes.
18 May: British MPs vote in favour of ending free movement, from 2021 onwards, for workers from the EU. They also vote in favour of withdrawing specific rights for European Economic Area nationals (UK Parliament, *Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination*, EU Withdrawal Act).

20 May: the European Commission publishes a communication describing its ‘Farm to Fork’ strategy, a cornerstone of the European Green Deal. Targets include cutting the use of chemical pesticides by 50% and having at least 25% of agricultural land under organic farming by 2030 (COM(2020) 381).

27 May: the European Commission presents NextGenerationEU (NGEU), the centrepiece of the European temporary recovery plan with a budget of EUR 750 billion. Its main purpose is to help repair the immediate economic and social damage brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. Together with the multiannual financial framework, the total amount available under the recovery plan is EUR 1,824 billion, earmarked for supporting a twofold ecological and digital transition (EC, speech_20_941).

28 May: the European Commission proposes a Regulation on the public sector loan facility under the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM). This is a financial scheme to grant subsidies (EUR 1.525 billion in total) and to facilitate loans (EUR 10 billion in total) to public authorities in support of regions heavily dependent on carbon-intensive economic sectors (COM(2020) 453).

28 May: the European Commission proposes a new health programme, ‘EU4Health’. It includes actions to ensure adequate medical human resources, to secure the manufacture of medicines and supply of equipment, as well as access to essential goods and services. EU4Health would have an exceptionally high budget compared to previous health programmes: EUR 9.4 billion (COM (2020) 405).

June

2 June: more than 700 young activists, climate scientists, trade unionists, economists, entrepreneurs and politicians from the 27 EU Member States launch a call for a green recovery plan to finance a fair and ecological transition (www.climateandjobs.eu).

3 June: the European Commission launches a second social partner consultation on minimum wages. The planned European framework for minimum wages is designed to result in a decent wage, in reference to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Council of Europe (EC, IPp_20_979).

9 June: Eurofound publishes a report on the involvement of the national social partners in policy development in the EU, particularly in the design and implementation of reforms and policies recommended through the European Semester. The report again points to serious disparities among EU Member States in this area (Eurofound, *Involvement of national social partners in policy-making – 2019*).
11 June: the Eurozone Ministers of Finance agree to release the third ‘tranche’ of aid intended to facilitate repayment of the Greek public debt (Eurogroup statement on Greece).

16 June: The ETUC sets out its expectations for the European recovery plan. The ETUC deplores the slow pace of coordination at European level, as well as the use of the pandemic by some Member States to undermine the foundations of the rule of law and human and workers’ rights (ETUC statement on COVID-19 outbreak and recovery strategy).

17 June: the EU Covid-19 Vaccines Strategy is launched (EC, IP_20_1103).


22 June: at the Tripartite Social Summit, the European social partners (the ETUC and BusinessEurope, CEEP, SMEunited) sign a framework agreement on digitalisation. The agreement covers the need for investment in developing workers’ skills and the right to disconnect (ETUC, European social partners Framework Agreement on Digitalisation).

25 June: the CJEU rules that where a worker is unlawfully dismissed, the period between this dismissal and the worker’s reinstatement should be considered as a working period. The worker is therefore entitled to the paid annual leave accumulated over this period (CJEU, Joined cases C-762/18 and C-37/19).

July

1 July: Germany takes over the Presidency of the Council of the EU, being the first country of the new ‘trio’ – Germany, Portugal and Slovenia. The German Presidency programme has five main thrusts: a) a stronger and more innovative Europe; b) a fair Europe; c) a sustainable Europe; d) a Europe of security and common values; and e) a strong Europe in the world. Its focus is on the management of the Covid-19 pandemic in Europe (www.eu2020.de).

1 July: the European Commission proposes extending the eligibility age for the Youth Guarantee from 25 to 30, requesting that guarantees are focused on young people ‘not in employment, education or training’ (NEETs) (EC, IP_20_1193).

9 July: the European Parliament adopts the agreement negotiated with the Council on the Mobility Package I on the social protection of long-distance lorry drivers, after more than three years of interinstitutional negotiations. This agreement implies more precise
and binding rules on the posting of drivers, improved rules on rest times, and better application of the cabotage provisions (EP, P9_TA(2020)0185).

10 July: in light of the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic, the European Parliament adopts a legislative resolution containing guidelines for Member State employment policies. Member States should ensure that all workers genuinely enjoy fair working conditions, social rights and access to adequate social protection and improved representation (EP, P9_TA(2020)0194).

13–15 July: the EU Member State environmental ministers publish a joint call to ‘green’ the post-Covid-19 economic recovery, highlighting three priorities: the climate law, biodiversity and the circular economy. In turn, on 16 July, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopts an opinion recommending a minimum 55% reduction of greenhouse gases by 2030 (www.bmu.de, Joint Call for a Green Recovery by the EU Environment Ministers, 13 July; EESC, European Climate Law, 15 July).

16 July: the European Commission presents a new set of guidelines confirming the rights of seasonal workers (particularly agricultural workers) and cross-border workers, either posted or from third countries. Following many scandals involving the hiring of workers under precarious working conditions, on the pretext of the Covid-19 pandemic, these guidelines, drawn up at the request of the European Parliament,⁶ recall the principles of equality and non-discrimination (C(2020) 4813).

16 July: the CJEU clarifies the definition of ‘employer’ in international road transport, requested by the social security court of the Netherlands. The definition is as follows: ‘the undertaking which has actual authority over that long-distance lorry driver, which bears, in reality, the costs of paying his or her wages, and which has the actual power to dismiss him or her’ (point 61) (CJEU, Case C-610/18).


23 July: MEPs criticise the European Council conclusions (see previous item), adopting a resolution that ‘deplores the cuts made in future-oriented programmes’. The resolution calls for increasing the budgets allocated to specific programmes such as Horizon Europe and the Child Guarantee (EP, 2020/2732(RSP)).

27 July: Poland announces its intention to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention on action against violence against women and against domestic violence. This move is immediately condemned by the EU and the Council of Europe (www.⁶ EP, P9_TA(2020)0176.)
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theparliamentmagazine.eu, *EU policymakers condemn Poland over withdrawal from Istanbul Convention*.

**31 July**: GDP in the EU and the euro area fell by 11.9% and 12.1% respectively in the second quarter of 2020 compared to the previous quarter. According to Eurostat, these are ‘by far the largest declines observed since the start of the time series in 1995’ (Eurostat, *Preliminary flash estimate for the second quarter of 2020*).

**August**

**27 August**: the European Commission signs the first contract for the purchase of 300 million doses (with an option for 100 million extra doses) of the Astra-Zeneca vaccine (EC, IP_20_1524).

**September**

**7 September**: the European Parliament’s Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL), responding to the massive rise in teleworking, ‘requests that the Commission submit a proposal for an act on the right to disconnect’ which ‘should provide solutions to address the responsibilities of employers and the expectations of workers regarding the organisation of their working time when they use digital tools’ (EP, 2019/2181(INL)).

**8 September**: in their response to the Commission’s consultation on minimum wages, BusinessEurope, SMEunited and CEEP reiterate that they are not in favour of binding European action to encourage a ‘fair’ minimum wage at national level. According to these employers’ organisations, the EU does not have the competence to introduce a binding legal instrument to regulate minimum wages. For employers, these issues are the responsibility of the national social partners and the Member States (EP think tank, *Minimum wage in the EU*, Briefing, 9 October 2020).

**11 September**: the European Parliament’s Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) votes for the GHG reduction target for 2030 to be set at 60%, instead of ‘at least 55% and around 55%’, as initially proposed by the European Commission (EP, *EU climate law: MEPs want to increase emission reductions target to 60% by 2030*, press release).

**16 September**: the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, gives her address on the State of the Union. Having consulted the social partners, she confirms her plan for a legal proposal for minimum wages either through collective agreements or though statutory minimum wages. Concerning the EU GHG reduction targets, she ultimately proposes a decrease of ‘at least 55%’ by 2030 (EC, IP_20_1599).

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7. See 11 September 2020.
17 September: the Just Transition Fund (JTF) is adopted by the European Parliament by a large majority. This vote enables interinstitutional negotiations with the Council to be launched. The Parliament’s Regional Development Committee (REGI) suggests strengthening the third pillar of the JTM, i.e. loans to national public sectors, and having the rule of law introduced as a condition for granting loans (EP, P9_TA(2020)0223 ; EP, A-9-2020-0135).

17 September: the European Parliament calls on the European Commission to strengthen Roma integration policies as part of its action to tackle different forms of discrimination and to address the extreme poverty of these groups (EP, P9_TA(2020)0229).

17 September: the European Parliament votes a resolution on Maximising the Energy Efficiency Potential of the EU Building Stock. It recommends facilitating synergies between local public (municipalities) and private stakeholders (businesses, cooperatives, residents’ associations, etc.) and setting up information platforms, as proposed in the European Green Deal (EP, P9_TA(2020)0227).

21 September: the European Labour Authority (ELA), for the first time, gives its support to a concerted labour inspection of undeclared work in construction companies in Belgium, Lithuania and Portugal (ELA, The European Labour Authority coordinates its very first concerted inspection).

22 September: the European Commission proposes amending Directive 2004/37/EC which protects workers from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens and mutagens, adding acrylonitrile, a substance used in the textile and construction sectors and the cause of many types of cancer, as well as nickel compounds to the list of substances with occupational exposure limits (OELs)). Furthermore, the current OEL for benzene is proposed to be revised downwards (EC, IP_20_1691).

23 September: the European Commission issues a new Pact on Migration and Asylum with the aim of creating a stable framework to better coordinate national policies and decisions in the field of migration in ‘normal times and in situations of pressure and in crisis situation’ (COM(2020) 609).

24 September: the social partners in the construction sector – both employers and employees – call for the use of digital data bases. They further support the European Commission’s idea of a unique European social security number (FIEC, Joint statement by the European social partners in the construction sector).

25 September: the Council of the EU approves SURE assistance totalling EUR 87.4 billion EUR (in loans) from the EU to 16 Member States. The European Commission will raise funds on the international capital markets on behalf of the EU, subsequently providing them as back-to-back loans to the requesting Member States (Council of the EU, COVID-19: Council approves €87.4 billion in financial support for member states under SURE).
30 September: the European Commission presents the first-ever annual report on the rule of law in the EU. Assessing the 27 Member States, the report focuses on four specific areas: the justice system, the anti-corruption framework, media pluralism, and institutional checks and balances (COM(2020) 580).

October

5 October: the European Parliament asks for the negotiations on the proposal for a directive on gender equality on boards of directors of companies and organisations to be unblocked (EP, 2020/2808(RSP)).

7 October: the European Commission announces that it is adopting a Social Bond Framework — a financial instrument providing guarantees to investors that the funds raised will be used to meet the social policy objectives of the beneficiary Member States — for the purpose of implementing the SURE instrument (EC, IP_20_1808).

7 October: 37 MEPs send an open letter to Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos over the announcement of two analyst positions in Europe to monitor ‘threats’ to the company’s business, including trade unions (The Guardian, EU lawmakers ask Jeff Bezos whether Amazon spies on politicians).

8 October: the European Parliament calls for a Member State guarantee that young people in ‘Youth Guarantee’ schemes are offered ‘good-quality, varied and tailored job, training, apprenticeship or internship offers, including fair remuneration’. The adopted resolution condemns the practice of unpaid internships (EP, P9_TA(2020)0267).

9 October: the Council of the EU adopts conclusions on strengthening minimum income protection in the EU within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. It further expresses its intention to bridge the gaps in minimum income protection and the need to make effective use of EU funds, such as the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the NGEU. The conclusions also call on Member States to fully enforce EU and national legislation to improve seasonal workers’ working conditions and asks the EC to conduct a study to collect data on intra-EU seasonal work (Council of the EU, 11721/2/20; 11726/2/20).

14 October: the European Commission publishes a strategy document on the renovation of buildings in Europe. The aim is to promote building renovation with a view to climate neutrality and economic recovery with ‘high health and environmental standards’. Furthermore, ‘accessibility should be ensured, including persons with disabilities and senior citizens’ (COM(2020) 662; C (2020)9600).

14 October: the social partners (BusinessEurope, SMEunited, CEEP and ETUC) insist at the EU Tripartite Social Summit on the importance of being fully heard and taken into account at European and national level in the European Recovery Plan (European Council, Tripartite Social Summit video conference).
14 October: the European Commission publishes a recommendation on energy poverty, combining a call for general competition among energy producers and distributors with the need to protect the poorest households and ensure that they have access to services (EC, (EU) 2020/1563).

19 October: the ETUC and other trade union federations such as the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers, IndustriAll and UNI Europe send a joint letter to the Director of the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) and to the EU Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights. The federations criticise the work of the new ELA, notably as a series of abuse cases reported more than a year ago are still pending (ETUC, Trade union assessment of ELA operationality and follow-up to social partner cases).

21 October: the European Commission releases a first social bond worth EUR 17 billion for the purpose of implementing the SURE instrument. Later that month, Hungary, Italy, Spain and Poland submit requests for funds, followed, on 1 December 2020, by Belgium, Portugal and Slovakia (EC, IP_20_1954).

23 October: Lithuania takes action before the CJEU concerning several points of the Mobility Package I Regulation and is soon followed by five other Member States (Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania and Malta). The main bone of contention is still the requirement to return vehicles every eight weeks to the state where the company has its head office (CJEU, Case C-541/20).

28 October: the European Commission proposes a directive on a fair minimum wage in Europe, yet without encroaching on the competences of the Member States or the national social partners. It proposes a system of adequate national minimum wages, either statutory or established via collective agreements, while at the same time calling on Member States to promote collective bargaining on wage setting. Moreover, countries with statutory national minimum wages are asked to use indicative reference values to guide their evaluation of the appropriate level of adequate statutory minimum wages. Finally, the proposal introduces a non-regression clause preventing governments from reducing minimum wage levels (COM(2020) 682).

30 October: the Council of the EU unanimously adopts a recommendation to update the Youth Guarantee: ‘A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee’. Among the new measures, young people are to be offered employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or traineeship within a period of four months from becoming unemployed or leaving formal education (Council of the EU, 11320/20).

30 October: the European Commission brings proceedings against France before the CJEU for non-compliance with its obligation to protect citizens against poor air quality (fine particulates and nitrogen dioxide), particularly in Paris where the limit values are substantially exceeded (EC, IP_20_1880).
November

4 November: the ETUC publishes a ‘model’ proposal for a directive on pay transparency. It calls for a definition of work of equal value, the establishment of job evaluation and classification systems free from gender bias, wage transparency and collective bargaining on equal pay matters (ETUC, Model Proposal for a Directive on strengthening the principle of equal pay between women and men through pay transparency).

7 November: Joe Biden wins the US presidential elections. His challenger, Donald Trump, strongly challenges this outcome, kicking off a period of uncertainty as to the validity of the election outcome (The New York Times, Biden Wins Presidency, Ending Four Tumultuous Years Under Trump).

10 November: the Council of the EU, the European Parliament and the Commission reach political agreement on all elements of the EU’s Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2021-2027 and the Economic Recovery Plan to overcome the Covid-19 crisis (EP think tank, EU financing for 2021-2027: Political agreement on the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the NextGenerationEU (NGEU) recovery instrument and new own resources, Briefing).

10 November: the European Commission announces a second issue of social bonds in implementation of the SURE instrument8 (EC, mex_20_2089).

12 November: the European Commission presents the EU’s first-ever strategy (2020-2025) for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, non-binary, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) equality. It sets out a series of targeted actions around four main pillars: tackling discrimination, ensuring safety, building inclusive societies, and leading the call for LGBTIQ equality around the world (EC, IP_20_2068).

13 November: the European Parliament adopts a resolution sounding a warning to governments: restrictive policies presented as measures to curb the spread of the pandemic could become instruments to curb freedoms or to discriminate against particular groups in society (EP, P9_TA(2020)0307).

16 November: Hungary and Poland block the adoption of the legal texts on the EU multiannual financial framework 2021-2027 and the EU Recovery Plan due to their rule-of-law ‘conditionality’ clauses (BBC, EU budget blocked by Hungary and Poland over rule of law issue).

18 November: the European Parliament and the Council of the EU reach agreement on the REACT-EU regulation, the first agreement in the framework of NGEU to combat the consequences of the coronavirus (Council of the EU, COVID-19: Presidency and Parliament reach political agreement on REACT-EU).

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18 November: the CJEU, in a case relating to supplementary maternity leave grants to mothers, recalls the principle of equality between men and women. However, the Court rules that additional maternity (or parental) leave may be granted to the mother provided that it is intended to protect workers in connection with significant effects of pregnancy or motherhood, or with a mother protecting her child (CJEU, Case C-463/19).

19 November: the European Commission together with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) publishes its annual report on the state of health, concluding that the pandemic has revealed ‘latent weaknesses in health systems that existed before the epidemic’ (EC and OECD, Health at a Glance: Europe 2020).

20 November: the EU Ministers responsible for equality and tackling violence against women take the decision to create a European emergency phone number for women victims of violence during the first informal meeting (www.eu2020.de, EU Conference on Gender Equality: Ministers demand Europe-wide helpline number).

24 November: the European Parliament adopts a resolution inviting the Commission to take stronger measures to help Member States prioritise the reduction and eradication of homelessness in the action plan for implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights, in line with the UN SDGs (EP, P9 TA(2020)0314).

25 November: the European Commission and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy present an action plan on gender equality and women’s empowerment in all EU external actions, entitled Gender III: ‘Putting women’s and girls’ rights at the heart of the global recovery’ (EC, IP_20_2184).


26 November: the European Parliament adopts a resolution condemning the Polish court decision proposing a drastic reduction in women’s access to abortion (solely in cases of rape, incest or risk of death for the mother) (EP, P9 TA(2020)0336).

December

2 December: the Council of the EU adopts conclusions entitled ‘Tackling the Gender Pay Gap: Valuation and Distribution of Paid Work and Unpaid Care Work’. The European Commission, for its part, postpones its proposal on equal pay to 2021 (Council of the EU, 13584/20; ETUC, Commission goes a year without delivering ‘100 days’ pay transparency promise, 1 December).
3 December: the EU and 79 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries reach political agreement on the ‘modernised’ partnership that will take over from the 2000 Cotonou Agreement (EC, IP_20_2291).

7 December: the European Commission launches a public consultation on ‘Health & Safety at Work – EU Strategic Framework (2021-2027)’, the results of which are expected in 2021 (EC, Consultation 12673).

8 December: the CJEU dismisses the actions brought by two Member States, Hungary (Case C-620/18) and Poland (Case C-626/18) concerning the Posted Workers Directive. The Court concludes that the 2018/957 Directive respects the fundamental principles of the Treaty of Rome (CJEU, Document 62018CJ0620).

9 December: the Council of the EU and the European Parliament reach agreement on the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund for the period 2021-2027. The Fund will amount to €9.882 billion in current prices (Council of the EU, Migration and asylum pact: Council adopts EU asylum agency regulation).

10 December: the ECB decides to ‘recalibrate its monetary policy instruments’. In response to the new problems (second wave of the pandemic in Europe and waiting for the vaccination campaign), the ECB decides to increase its large-scale asset purchase programme of mostly public assets to EUR 500 billion and to extend it to June 2022 (ECB, Monetary policy decisions).

14 December: the ETUC reports that six EU Member States totally or partially exclude self-employed workers from receiving support from SURE: Germany, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Spain, Hungary and Italy (ETUC, Self-employed excluded from job support schemes in 6 Member States).

14 December: the European Investment Bank (EIB) publishes the ‘Climate Bank roadmap 2021-2025’ setting the institution’s long-term objectives. The EIB highlights its ambition to become ‘Europe’s Climate Bank’ and announces a package worth EUR 1,000 billion of green investment to be engaged by 2030 (EIB, Group, Climate Bank Roadmap 2021-2025).

15 December: the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission reach provisional agreement on the European health programme EU4Health. The text includes the idea of providing for stocks of medicines and replacement medical staff in the event of a crisis. It also provides for at least 20% of the budget to be set aside for disease prevention and health promotion (Council of the EU, Protecting people’s health: the Council and the European Parliament agree provisionally on the EU4Health programme for 2021-2027).

16 December: the European Parliament votes through the revised Drinking Water Directive guaranteeing safer access to drinking water for all Europeans. It ensures the
highest standards in the world for drinking water, in line with an environment free of toxic substances. This new text is partly in response to the European citizens’ initiative ‘Right2water’ launched in 2013 (Directive 2020/2184).

**16 December**: the Council of the EU endorses the new EUR 17.5 billion Just Transition Fund. The Fund particularly targets those regions which will need to gradually move away from the production and use of fossil resources or to transform their carbon-intensive industries. The Fund will cover the socio-economic costs triggered by the climate transition, including establishing schemes for reskilling workers, job-search assistance and the active inclusion of jobseekers’ programmes (Council of the EU, *Just Transition Fund: Council endorses the political deal with the Parliament*).

**17 December**: the European Parliament adopts a resolution on the need for a dedicated Council configuration on gender equality (i.e. a new Council format where Ministers and Secretaries of State in charge of gender equality would meet) (EP, P9_TA(2020)0379).

**18 December**: negotiators from the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union reach an inter-institutional agreement on the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), the budgetary instrument at the heart of the €750 billion NGEU Recovery Plan and complementing the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) (EC, IP_20_2397).

**24 December**: the negotiations on the ‘trade’ agreement between the UK and the European Commission are concluded, marking the end of the Brexit period. The agreement is to apply provisionally as of 1 January 2021, the date on which the UK is set to leave the Customs Union and the Single Market (EC, IP_20_2531).