



**Proposed Theme for Discussion
at the Meeting of Presidents and Secretaries General of the Economic and
Social Councils
in Dublin in November 2012**

Theme: Labour Market and Welfare/Benefit Reforms

Across the EU, the crisis has focused attention on labour market and welfare reforms. In many member states, the severe recession has given rise to high unemployment, particularly among the young. At the same time, public finance pressures—and, in the case of some member states, reliance on programmes of EU, IMF and inter-state borrowing—has prompted governments to examine the resources available for welfare transfers and investment in labour market programmes. These pressures and reform trajectories may differ significantly across the member states: between those inside and outside the euro area, between ‘debtor’ and ‘creditor’ countries, and between those with different traditions and institutions of social dialogue. It may also be the case that the crisis has drawn attention to labour market and welfare problems which pre-date the current crisis, and were not adequately addressed during the years of strong growth.

As well as having a general discussion of this theme in November, some national Economic and Social Councils (ESCs) may wish to report briefly on the main directions of labour market and welfare reform in their country, and to describe the approach of the ESC to discussing and advising on these issues. In preparing for this discussion, it may be of value to consider some of the following questions:

1. Prior to the recession:
 - a. how urgently and with what effects were labour market and welfare reforms being pursued in your country?
 - b. how united and influential were your social partners in setting the long-term objectives of these reforms *and* the principal strategies and policies for attaining them?
 - c. was your Council particularly involved in discussing and offering opinions on these reforms?

- d. was participation in the European Employment Strategy (including the National Reform Programme, NRP) being used to significant effect in this national process (and, if so, by whom)?
2. How has the current recession affected:
 - a. the tradition of social dialogue or the formation of social pacts in your country (if this had been a practice beforehand)?
 - b. the urgency with which labour market and welfare reforms are viewed?
 - c. the particular strategies and policies that are considered desirable, timely and feasible to pursue?
 - d. the relative contributions being sought from private and public sector workers in bearing the 'burden of adjustment'?
 - e. the role and participation of your Council in responding to the pressures that have come on your labour market and welfare state?
3. Are particular **institutions** (e.g., the Public Employment Service, Social Insurance Funds, etc.) or **policy instruments** (e.g., Employment Legislation Pensions, Payroll Taxes, Further Education and Training, Direct Employment Programmes, Conditionality and Sanctions, etc.) being accorded larger roles at the current time?
4. Is a particular **discourse or paradigm** for communicating the overall strategy guiding labour market and welfare reform becoming more or less used in your country (e.g., 'flexicurity', 'activation' 'social investment', etc.)?
5. Do you expect the contribution and relevance of **how employment and social policies are monitored** by European institutions (including the Europe 2020 targets and the 'National Job Plan' that is to be part of a NRP) to become more or less significant in your national context in the years ahead?