

The Committee on Labour and Social Affairs

The Committee on Labour and Social Affairs is one of the German Bundestag's 22 permanent committees. It was created in the 16th electoral term to reflect the areas of responsibility of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. It focuses primarily on the fields of pensions and the labour market, both of which are challenging: the pension system is facing the greatest test in its history and unemployment is at a high level. Germany's welfare systems and labour market are in urgent need of further reform. Hardly anything worries citizens as much as these issues. This makes the Committee's work all the more of a challenge and underlines its great significance for Germany's future and internal peace. Policy-makers have a duty to keep welfare systems functional, ensure social integration and create the conditions for more employment. Close cooperation between the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Committee on Labour and Social Affairs is vital for success in the field of social policy. The Committee is at the centre of the parliamentary decision-making process.

Composition of the Committee

The Committee on Labour and Social Affairs is composed of 36 titular members and 36 substitute members. Its membership reflects the relative strengths of the parliamentary groups in the plenary¹. The Committee comprises:

- 13 Members of the Bundestag from the SPD parliamentary group
- 13 Members of the Bundestag from the CDU/CSU parliamentary group
- 4 Members of the Bundestag from the FDP parliamentary group
- 3 Members of the Bundestag from the Alliance 90/The Greens parliamentary group
- 3 Members of the Bundestag from the Left Party parliamentary group.

In the current 16th electoral term, the **Chairman of the Committee** is **Gerald Weiß** (CDU/CSU), and the **Deputy Chairwoman** is **Angelika Krüger-Leissner** (SPD).



Tasks of the Committee

The plenary refers all items of business which are of relevance to the fields of labour and social affairs to the Committee, where they are deliberated on in detail. The plenary then takes a final decision on the basis of the Committee's recommendation.

As the parliamentary counterpart of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Committee is the 'committee responsible' (i.e. it alone is entitled to submit recommendations for decisions and reports to the plenary) for the following fields, inter alia:

- Labour market policy, promotion of employment
- Employment of foreign nationals, unemployment insurance
- Labour law, occupational health and safety
- Social security, questions of social policy
- Pension law
- Ensuring the participation of people with disabilities
- International employment and social policy

¹ Calculated using the Hare-Niemeyer system

In the case of other items from the plenary which relate to the fields of labour and social affairs but for which the Committee is not the committee responsible, it is asked for an opinion by the relevant committee responsible and submits its vote after it has deliberated on the item. The plenary of the Bundestag then holds a final discussion on the item as presented in the recommendation from the committee responsible.

In addition to deliberating on items of business, the Committee regularly requests reports from the Federal Government on its specialist field, enabling it to recognise relevant developments in society at an early stage. These reports are the subject of intensive discussion, resulting in the Committee submitting recommendations and calls for action to the Federal Government.

The European Union has set itself the aim of harmonising the labour and social standards of its Member States. Many of the items deliberated on by the Committee therefore come from European bodies. The Committee on Labour and Social Affairs regularly requests reports from the Government on pending issues before and after meetings of the EU Council of Ministers. This gives the Committee an opportunity to influence EU decisions before they are taken.

The Committee's business is conducted according to a strict procedure

- The Chairman convenes and conducts meetings. He is the Committee's representative and organises its business in agreement with the spokespersons of the parliamentary groups on the Committee.
- Each parliamentary group has a spokesperson on the Committee. These spokespersons come to agreements on the Committee's work schedule, agendas, procedural questions etc.
- For every item for which the Committee is to submit a report, the Chairman appoints one or more rapporteurs nominated by the parliamentary groups. The rapporteurs are specialists in the subject concerned whose function is to help the members of the Committee reach decisions. They are also responsible for the Committee's report.

In addition to the Committee's continuous work on parliamentary items, a member of the Federal Government can provide the Committee with a general, up-to-date briefing on important events, topical issues and problems in the area of labour and social policy at the request of a Member of the Bundestag, a parliamentary group or the Federal Government. The Committee also has the right to take up an issue on its own authority, which enables it to deal with these issues in another way, if appropriate.

The Committee can invite experts to discussions and public hearings on individual items or important topical issues. Experts from academia, associations and other relevant institutions are invited to attend and questioned on the matter concerned. The discussions and hearings are intended to make concise and reliable information available to the members of the Committee, thus supporting the opinion-forming process. The information obtained is incorporated in the political process. The Committee is obliged to hold hearings on items for which it is the committee responsible if a quarter of its members so demand. This is an important minority right which enables the Opposition to influence the course of deliberations in the Committee.

The Committee is supported in its work by a secretariat. The head of the secretariat and other subject specialists within it help the Chairman to conduct meetings and provide information on specialist and organisational questions. To help the members from the same parliamentary group on the Committee determine a joint position, they are supported by the working groups of the parliamentary groups.

Committee meetings

The Committee meets regularly on Wednesdays during weeks when the German Bundestag is sitting; however, the Committee frequently also meets on other days because of its workload. The agenda is drawn up by the Chairman of the Committee in agreement with the spokespersons of the parliamentary groups on the Committee, and is adopted at the beginning of each meeting.