



Workers' Group
EESC

OUR PRIORITIES

for social progress

2023-2025



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Forging a future that is not only social and sustainable but also upholds the principles of the rule of law, human rights, gender equality, solidarity and diversity. Empowering our democracy and society, and every individual in it.

Our journey is an ongoing commitment, demanding unwavering determination as we strive to shape a society marked by shared prosperity and equality. By sending our priorities to the leaders of democratic groups at the European Parliament, we aim to infuse our vision into their campaign manifestos for the pivotal 2024 European Parliament elections and push for real and sustainable social progress for the next EU mandate.

SOCIAL CHALLENGES

Too many people are suffering hardship or are excluded from society because of poverty, discrimination, lack of education, or other disadvantages. Jobs and working conditions need to be improved, also to combat the ongoing mental health crisis.

We need a Sustainable Development and Social Progress pact, with quality jobs for everyone. The Social Pillar must be implemented fully and effectively. EU economic governance must have as a goal to reduce inequality and foster wage convergence. A Social Progress Protocol in the EU treaties is necessary. In addition, we need ambitious and binding due diligence and corporate accountability mechanisms.

Social partners must be at the core of policymaking: involving collective bargaining and workers' voice at the workplace, integrating social dialogue into the European Industrial Strategy, protecting and restoring collective bargaining coverage levels, and assisting in the fight against the far right is crucial.

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

Geopolitical tensions, job insecurity, precarious work, climate change, the cost-of-living crisis and digitalisation

provide new economic challenges to European workers. It is vital to reshape the EU economic governance, the European Semester, the MFF and the EU own resources.

The Social Economy Action Plan must be implemented. The Stability and Growth pact must be reformed before it is reintroduced, and a deep reform of taxation with justice and solidarity in mind, and securing the EU own resources for a strong common budget must be a priority.

Sustainability in social, economic, and environmental terms must guide economic policy, ensuring the European semester is tied to the Just Transition goals and the Green Transition policies are carried forward. Investment, finance, and public procurement must also be based on sustainability, which must also guide the idea of competitiveness and drive our economies beyond GDP.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

Climate change poses an existential threat to human civilisation, to our societies. Tackling it, deploying policies to minimise it, the green transition, decarbonisation and the circular economy, along with digitalisation, are all having an impact on the world of work in terms of changing the nature of jobs and tasks, and creating new occupations, while eliminating others. These transitions are interlinked and mutually reinforcing.

The idea of a Just Transition must guide all related policymaking, supporting citizens and workers, reskilling and upskilling, offering quality jobs and involving workers at every stage. The Just Transition Mechanism and the Social Climate Fund must be expanded and accompanied by a directive for a Just Transition.

Regional imbalances and vulnerable groups must be taken into special consideration, and the Green Deal should

be central to trade agreements. The electricity market should also be reformed in depth to ensure stability and affordability, as well as security of supply, diversification and sustainability.

DIGITAL TRANSITION

Digitalisation has brought about economic and societal benefits for employees, such as increased flexibility, autonomy, and opportunities for achieving work-life balance. It has also created an undesirable work culture where workers should be continuously available and connected for work-related requests and has opened the way for increased workers' surveillance. These harmful consequences on workers need to be addressed.

We need to protect working conditions, in particular of platform workers, ensure that digital literacy is accessible and widespread, close the digital gap, provide life-long learning and upskilling opportunities, and make it inclusive for all.

Artificial Intelligence must be used for the common good, preventing the ethical issues it presents. Humans must remain in control, collective bargaining in AI-related work environments must take place, biometric surveillance must be banned, and a reform of the social security system must take place so that robotisation does not hamper our social systems' functioning.

MIGRATION

Mass migration is a massive human challenge, and has become a highly political issue, particularly with the far right. An answer in line with human rights and respect for the value of human life is needed, where solidarity is a guiding principle to ensure the most effective asylum policies, the possibility to find a safe haven, and safe and legal pathways to reach Europe. It must be coupled with support for border EU member states and effective cooperation mechanisms with a long-term plan to provide stability, democracy and prosperity to the EU neighbourhood and beyond.

We need to finalise the Pact on Migration and Asylum to protect people's integrity and rights. We must push for information campaigns showing empirical evidence on migration, and for establishing effective search and rescue

systems in the sea and also review the Dublin Agreements on asylum and first countries.

RULE OF LAW AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

Democracy rests not just on the will of the majority, but also on the respect for minorities and political differences, with everyone subject to the rule of law and entitled and protected by fundamental rights. The far right, disinformation campaigns, and the spread of fake news, pose an existential threat to it.

We need to fight against any kind of discrimination, tackle the spread of fake news and disinformation and ensure a working civil and legal framework for the independence of civil society, trade unions and business associations. It's important to combat extremism, monitor social rights, and promote democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights, including economic and social rights.

GLOBAL AGENDA

In the current geopolitical environment, we must defend a global agenda driven by a multilateral approach and multilateral institutions, rather than protectionism and unilateralism, with respect and support of human rights and working for peace and security in the world.

Priority must be given to fair trade agreements, the functioning of EU-UK relations and the protection of social conditions. We also need support for Ukraine and for Russia's withdrawal, long term investment with Africa and Mercosur, and fostering enlargement of the EU.

BETTER POLICYMAKING AND FORESIGHT

Foresight must be an open and pluralist exercise that continuously involves organized civil society, in particular the EESC, at each stage of the foresight process and the definition of reference scenarios. The reference scenario of the foresight exercise should aim at the well-being of European populations through a fair socio-ecological transition giving public health concerns a fair place.



POLITICAL OVERVIEW

In recent times, the EU has been faced with many difficult challenges, such as war, geopolitical tensions, climate urgency, soaring living costs, pandemic scars, migration strains, and the relentless spread of misinformation.

In this radically new context, European workers have emerged as a driving force behind groundbreaking social decisions at the European level. At the EESC, the Workers' Group has been an architect of change, ensuring that all sections are committed to building a strong, democratic, social, and inclusive Europe.

THE MOST NOTABLE MILESTONES INCLUDE PROGRESS ON THE MINIMUM WAGE DIRECTIVE, THE WAGE TRANSPARENCY DIRECTIVE, AND THE PLATFORM WORK DIRECTIVE.

In April 2023, the EESC underwent a mid-term renewal, marked by changes in leadership within both the EESC

and the Workers' Group, injecting fresh energy to tackle emerging challenges. Oliver Röpke assumed the role of EESC president, transitioning from his previous position as president of the Workers' Group. Simultaneously, Lucie Studničná was elected as the new president of our group.

These changes resonate with the outcomes of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE). The EU has heard the clear aspirations of its citizens and their need for change. Now, credible proposals are essential to propel us into the next phase of the European project.

UNDER THE BANNER "PUSHING FOR SOCIAL PROGRESS," THE NEW WORKERS' GROUP PRESIDENCY EMBARKED ON A JOURNEY TO RECALIBRATE OUR PRIORITIES.

To understand and influence these crucial issues, a series of political debates with high-level speakers and experts were organized from July to the end of November 2023. The updated priorities were adopted at our group meeting on 13 December 2023.

OUR GOAL FOR THE NEXT YEARS IS TO FORGE A FUTURE THAT IS NOT ONLY SOCIAL AND SUSTAINABLE BUT ALSO UPHOLDS THE PRINCIPLES OF THE RULE OF LAW, HUMAN RIGHTS, GENDER EQUALITY, INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY, AND DIVERSITY.

To forge a future that seeks to elevate and empower our democracy, societies, and every individual, irrespective of their circumstances.

Our journey is an ongoing commitment, demanding unwavering determination as we strive to shape a society marked by shared prosperity and equality. By sending our priorities to the leaders of democratic groups at the European Parliament, Commissioners and Member States' heads of state and government, we aim to infuse our vision into their campaign manifestos for the pivotal 2024 European Parliament elections and push for real and sustainable social progress for the next EU mandate.





LEADING THE CHANGE

A proper course of action – based on the success factors identified by the Workers’ Group – is needed to achieve the best possible results with respect to achieving the political priorities.

The influence of the Workers’ Group relies on:

- A shared vision and priorities (shared content).
- Representativeness– in relation to members’ background organisations.
- Internal coherence and consistency – “speaking with one voice”.
- Making full use of Group members’ positions in various EESC bodies and tasks.
- Constructive relations with members of other Groups.
- Synergies with ETUC and ETUFs.
- Active interaction and cooperation with EU institutions and other organisations: political visibility.
- General visibility via communication, social media.

Workplan

After a painful financial crisis that began in mid-2007, we were engaged in finding solutions to cope with climate change and making the best of the digital transformation. Then, we were confronted with an unprecedented pandemic and, more recently, with war back in our continent and neighbourhoods. It is high time for us, European Trade Unions, to reinforce the European Union for new times ahead.

WE NEED STRONGER TOOLS TO DEFEND SOCIAL EUROPE, DEMOCRACY; TO DEAL WITH CLIMATE CHANGE AND

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION; TO IMPROVE EDUCATION, SOCIAL COHESION, GENDER EQUALITY AND HEALTH.

The Workers’ Group will work in close cooperation with the new European Parliament, new European Commission and the forthcoming Council Presidencies, always putting social issues at the heart of European policy-making.

The Trio Presidency countries of 2023 and 2024 (Spain, Belgium, Hungary) have expressed their commitment to fostering a Social Convergence Framework and the Social Investments Returns.

WE ARE WORKING WITH THEM TO SUPPORT UPWARD CONVERGENCE AND SOCIAL COHESION.

We will also start working with the next Trio Presidency countries of 2025 and 2026 (Poland, Denmark and Cyprus) focusing in particular on Social Resilience, Green Transition, Just Transition and Digital Transition.

SOCIAL CHALLENGES

Stronger EU action is needed in employment and social policies to ensure a fundamental internal social, economic, and territorial cohesion in the overall process of the twin ecological and digital transitions.

Economic progress will not be sustainable without social progress. Sustainable productivity and competitiveness are key elements of a positive synthesis. The principles of a minimum wage, minimum income, access to lifelong learning, the eradication of child and youth poverty, access to care services to enable gender equality and the general connection between all kinds of jobs and social protection in terms of benefits and contributions have become critical elements of a sustainable European social and economic model. Although the European model is an example for much of the world, there are still too many people suffering hardship or excluded from society because of poverty, discrimination, lack of education, or other disadvantages. The Workers' Group will continue to push for a fairer future for Europe. Among many things, this includes, social dialogue, collective bargaining, protecting the rule of law and fundamental rights such as the right to organise and strike, and preventing union busting.

KEY PROPOSALS

- **Adopt a Sustainable Development and Social Progress Pact:** Our fight for quality jobs also means ensuring that everyone has the possibility to work with decent working conditions. We will continue to combat unemployment and will not leave the long-term unemployed behind when there is so much useful social and environmental work to be done. We will continue to put workers' welfare and social justice at the centre of our activities and policy actions.

- **European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and European Semester:** a clear and effective implementation of the EPSR through a strong Action Plan, making the economic governance fully social and sustainable. There is a need to reduce inequalities and close the widening gap in wage incomes and gender gap, as well as for clear rules for a level playing field to avoid social dumping.

- ♦ The European Pillar of Social Rights to continue guiding the next European Commission. We will fight for the full implementation of all 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights and its inclusion in the EU institutional framework.

- ♦ The EPSR implementation of the action plan initiatives at national level should be linked to the European Semester. The European Semester must include new indicators in the social scoreboard with concrete objectives implementing EPSR items. These items should be followed up and progress measured through the Action Plan at national level.

- ♦ The Semester should be the tool to measure the indicator on collective agreement coverage and on workers' participation (in companies' decisional bodies a percentage of workers' representatives should be encouraged). On EU social dialogue, an indicator could be the numbers of autonomous agreements negotiated.

- ♦ Economic Governance through the Semester should have as goal reducing inequality with upward wage convergence in Europe.

- **There is a need for "Democratizing Work"** - the participation of workers is essential for the success of green and digital transitions. In times of accelerated change due to powerful drivers such as digitalisation and automation, and the climate change challenge, structural weaknesses and deficiencies of the EU Acquis on information, consultation and participation of workers have become more visible. There is a need for a stronger and a more ambitious framework that involves more than just a "New Start of Social Dialogue". That is why we advocate for a stronger legal framework of information, consultation and participation of workers. Such a stronger European framework would require the following in particular:

- ♦ A "mainstreaming of workers' participation" as a cross-cutting structural element in all European legislation



and initiatives that have an impact on working and living conditions.

- ◆ A regulatory framework that guarantees early information and consultation of workers in cross-border restructuring and prevents fraudulent and/or practices to circumvent legal requirements.

- ◆ A European Works Council (EWC) Directive that better matches realities and needs of transnational restructuring and reflects the need to equip EWCs with necessary resources and competences to engage in transnational information and consultation at eye level.

- ◆ A level playing field of workers' board level participation and an approach that actively develops and promotes a mandatory minimum floor of participation rights and dynamic European minimum standards of representation rather than engaging in strategies to avoid such rights.

- ◆ Adopting an ambitious and binding Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive and Forced Labour Regulation to make European companies accountable for the social, human rights and environmental conditions throughout their value chains.

- ◆ Strengthening collective bargaining at all levels, including extending its coverage and restoring collective bargaining systems in particular in the countries that were forced to decentralise collective bargaining to have access to financial assistance and economic adjustment programmes. Increasing collective bargaining coverage to at least 80%, in line with the Adequate Minimum Wages Directive and incentivising collective bargaining by allowing trade unions in well-functioning national self-regulatory systems room to negotiate collective agreements. Trade unions' role in the management of the just transition must also be reinforced by strengthening democracy at work both at the national and European level.

- ◆ Preventing union busting through the protection of social partners' rights, including (personal and digital) union access to workplaces, the right to organise, the right to bargain collectively and the right to strike. Negative impact and misuse by employers or yellow trade unions must be prevented.

- ◆ Expanding the scope of collective bargaining to include provisions for green clauses and ensuring that it is a fundamental part of any energy and digital transitions-related measures.

- **Improve EU-level social dialogue**

- ◆ Develop capacity-building mechanisms for social dialogue and worker participation, and support worker involvement.

- ◆ To include a network of coordinators in all directorates in the European Commission to promote social dialogue.

- ◆ Integrate the industrial relations and social partner involvement system in the European Industrial Strategy in an inclusive and cooperative way, promoting the European strategic autonomy and a global competitive system based on the European Social Model.

- ◆ Support the inclusion of a Social Progress Protocol in the EU Treaties to guarantee that workers, trade

union and social rights take precedence over economic freedoms in the event of conflict.

- **Jobs and working conditions:** Quality jobs must be as socially sustainable as they are environmentally sustainable, with decent working conditions, fair wages, equal pay for equal work at the same place and work of equal value, and a fair labour mobility.

- ◆ The digital transition and the emergence of telework as a central mode of production provide opportunities for work-life balance, but also many challenges regarding the right to disconnect and gender equality, among others.

- ◆ Artificial intelligence and Generative AI systems are going to produce big changes in the world of work and in labour markets. Big opportunities and big challenges concern new jobs and jobs that may be displaced. Women jobs are twice more concerned than male ones by a risk of destruction. This may create greater inequalities, leaving behind millions of workers. A stronger workers' counterpower at all levels able to anticipate, negotiate and challenge the use and the choice of technologies is a necessary tool to mitigate and avoid the negative effects on workers.

- ◆ There is an urgent need for active labour market policies, particularly upskilling / reskilling of workers and life-long learning during paid working time.

- ◆ There is a need for a European Directive for a Just Transition, emphasising anticipation and management of change, with social dialogue and collective bargaining as guiding principles regulating new jobs resulting from the digital and green transition, including taking care of young workers in increasingly precarious situations.

- ◆ To fight all types of precarious work. Platform workers and new forms of work in particular need an updated framework to cover them, which calls for the adoption of an ambitious Platform Work Directive by the end of this legislative mandate. Defend workers' right to disconnect and push forward a reduction of working time keeping the same salary level and adjusting staff numbers via collective bargaining or legislation.

- ◆ Gender gaps are persistent or even growing in different areas including in family life and working life. Recovery efforts that invest in the female workforce tailored to each individual's needs are necessary. Gender is a cross-cutting issue that should be continuously implemented throughout all policy-making processes.

- ◆ As part of the EU Gender Equality Strategy, we ask for a gender oriented vision and push for the eradication of gender-based violence for all ages -including violence at the workplace - through tools like the EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence - including rape - and by adding gender-based violence to the list of EU crimes.

- ◆ Fight unfair competition and social dumping to enable fair labour mobility. Support the increase of resources and reach of labour inspections, including strengthening the mandate of the European Labour Authority with the capacity to act with initiative and investigative and sanctioning powers to combat social dumping and labour exploitation effectively.

- ◆ Build on the success of SURE to make it a permanent instrument to be prepared for future crises.

- **Poverty and social exclusion:** in many countries, new groups are entering into poverty. An integrated anti-poverty plan is necessary, including:

- ◆ Protecting the most vulnerable, developing a strategy against energy poverty, ensuring social and territorial cohesion, and considering energy a social service of general interest.

- ◆ Strengthening national social protection systems and protecting the unemployed from poverty and other risks.

- ◆ Fight inequalities through quality public services and investment strategies.

- ◆ Access to adequate social security benefits for all workers, including self-employed and clarity of rules on applicable legislation as well as cross-border enforcement.

- ◆ Minimum income is often the last social safety net. National minimum income schemes must be strengthened across the EU in order to improve the lives of citizens throughout the continent.

- ◆ Ensuring adaptation of minimum wages and minimum income to inflation to fight poverty among the working poor.

- ◆ Implementation of the Child Guarantee.

- ◆ Combatting homelessness to remain a social policy priority for the EU in the run-up to the European elections and beyond. What is needed is a strategic shift in focus from managing homelessness to actually ending it. We call for the development of an EU homelessness strategy in which the EU Platform for Combatting Homelessness is fully embedded, making it possible to include national policies to combat homelessness in the European Semester exercise. This strategy should be underpinned by a Council Recommendation on homelessness.

- **Quality health services**

- ◆ We demand to make health a priority.

- ◆ Access to quality healthcare, prevention and early detection of diseases is a fundamental part of our model of society. To that end it must be ensured that Member States invest adequately in public health and social care.

- ◆ Covid-19 drew attention to the fragmentation of the EU's health architecture. A genuine, inclusive European Health Union must go beyond pure crisis management and ultimately aim for a Europe where everyone enjoys the highest achievable health standard with equal access to high quality treatment. It should initiate systemic change to be better prepared not only for the next pandemic but also for other cross-border health challenges such as antimicrobial resistance, and the obesity and non-communicable disease epidemics affecting all European countries. It should also adopt the "one health" approach, working on the link between human, animal and environmental wellbeing to preserve our health.

- ◆ Appropriate measures should be taken to improve the working conditions and health and safety of health workers.

- **Tackling mental health** - Implement an EU Mental Health Strategy by promoting a preventive approach and early detection and screening and provision of a person-centred approach in the community.

- ◆ Reduce precarious work, performance and work pressure and the prevalence of the associated mental health problems, to make sure that the European and national legislation establishing quality, healthy working and employment conditions is fully implemented and enforced.

- ◆ Step up measures to monitor and audit compliance with this legislation, subject to adequate resources being allocated to the competent public authority and to ensure appropriate financial sanctions for non-compliance.

- ◆ Claiming and promoting an EU legal framework (directive) to eradicate and prevent psycho-social risks at the workplace.

- ◆ Introduce debarment from public procurement tenders and public aid for businesses and organisations that do not guarantee compliance with this legislation, in line with the current public procurement Directives.

- **Intergenerational solidarity** - The next Commission Work Programme should give a high priority to topics related to the young, the elderly, and active ageing.

- ◆ Importance of involving the youth not only in the labour market, but in society and in the policy-making process.

- ◆ Ensure the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in all EU Member States.

- ◆ An intergenerational approach is needed to ensure quality traineeships and provide resources for active ageing.

- ◆ All internships, traineeships and apprenticeships must be paid.

- ◆ Implement the Council Recommendation on the revision of the Barcelona targets on early childhood education and care.

- ◆ Importance of tackling the demographic change, including the living conditions of pensioners and promoting strong pension standards, allowing for decent life in old age across the EU.

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

Geopolitical tensions, job insecurity, precarious work, climate change, the cost-of-living crisis and digitalisation provide new economic challenges to European workers.

It is vital to reshape the EU economic governance, the European Semester, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and EU own resources to ensure that social justice goes hand-in-hand with economic competitiveness and that people's well-being is the objective of economic policies. Other priorities are combating tax dumping and tax evasion and establishing fairer, more progressive, and better coordinated taxation systems in the EU. Social security needs to be part of the economic development. Population ageing affects the size of the labour supply and the economic growth potential. It is crucial to adopt policies aimed at mitigating these effects. Investment in social policy is crucial for a sustainable growth model.

The Workers' Group closely monitors topics related to productivity and competitiveness, and welcomes initiatives aimed at reducing energy dependency, tackling supply chain constraints, and giving the EU

more strategic autonomy. We must take charge of economic reform to ensure that the direction of change is determined by the needs of the people, rather than allowing large corporations to dictate the terms. The EU requires competitiveness, but it must also ensure that such competitiveness is sustainable.

KEY PROPOSALS

- **Stability and Growth Pact:** remains suspended for now and will need to be reformed to better reflect the investment needs of our societies, with more credible targets, duties, and obligations to avoid social regression. We call for public investment to be treated separately when deciding whether any excessive deficit procedure should be opened, to allow all Member States to undertake the public investment needed to address the common priorities. To prevent a return to old fiscal rules and to manage a shift towards a prosperity-focused and a new and modernised fiscal framework, it is necessary to resume the review process.

- **The European Semester** must be tied to the goals of the just transition and social progress.

National plans should be linked to recovery goals and focus on ensuring social cohesion and reducing inequality and socio-economic insecurity.

- ♦ 'Make the European Semester social': in case of any reform, workers' interests have to be carefully respected and adequate public investment is necessary.

- ♦ The European Semester must be complemented with instruments to address social imbalances by introducing a Social Convergence Framework.

- ♦ Social partners, in particular trade unions, and civil society must be involved in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans and other instruments under the MFF; currently the rules are non-binding and the social dialogue is left at the goodwill of the national governments. We therefore call for the establishment of binding conditionality for such consultation, as involvement varies between countries and regions, also as regards other instruments under the MFF, on the basis of minimum standards defined at EU level.

- **SMEs represent an important cornerstone of the EU economy.** However, it is equally important that SMEs respect human rights and the environment in the conduct of their business, and that they are given the opportunity to unleash their potential to contribute to sustainable development not just with jobs, but more importantly with fair wages, safe and healthy working conditions, democracy at work and high socio-environmental standards.

- **Implement the Social Economy Action Plan:** social enterprises represent around 10 per cent of all enterprises



in the EU. By implementing the Social Economy Action plan, the regulatory framework and the visibility of social economy enterprises will be adapted while creating an environment for the social economy to thrive, including the necessary access to markets and finance offering opportunities for them to start up and expand their activities; thereby providing public policy to support social enterprises on an equal footing with other forms of enterprise.

- **Taxes & the need for fiscal reform:**

- ◆ There is a need for a tax on financial transactions that eight countries already have in place and another on digital transactions.

- ◆ We call for fair and progressive taxation, including the introduction of a progressive wealth tax to finance the necessary investments for a just transition.

- ◆ We need a shift in taxation from mostly labour-based to adapt to new realities of capital-intensive businesses and not penalise labour-intensive ones.

- ◆ Proposal to tax more and in a temporary period, the richest taxpayers, linked to the after-Covid crisis.

- ◆ There is a need for a minimum corporate tax level at European level.

- ◆ The fight against tax fraud and tax evasion as well as against money laundering must remain high on the agenda.

- ◆ Qualified Majority Voting is needed in tax matters instead of unanimity, which is blocking any progress.

- **The EU needs a strong common budget** to operate, including having sufficient own resources to pursue the necessary policies. As seen in the case of the American Inflation Reduction Act, the EU needs more resources, in order to foster investment and sustainable growth, taking into account as well the new setting of state aid and the problems derived from the very high energy costs that consumers and companies face in Europe.

- **The next Multiannual Financial Framework:**

- ◆ Must ensure a strong Cohesion Policy, while promoting measures to support the efficient and full use of the available funds.

- ◆ Must ensure that access to European funding is linked to social conditionalities, including clear collective bargaining conditions, and that companies that do not comply with labour rights are excluded from it.

- ◆ Must support the timely and full implementation of the rule of law conditionality mechanism alongside other tools and mechanisms aimed at protecting the EU's financial interests.

- **Beyond GDP:** Well-chosen statistical indicators will be crucial for monitoring the progress towards achieving the SDGs and the objectives of the European Green Deal, as well as for assessing the success of the recovery and

resilience plans within the European Semester process. We need an economy of well-being.

- **Public procurement:** There is a need to revamp the rules, ensuring that contracts by the public administration promote collective bargaining and social dialogue, and gender equality with conditionality both on that and on fair working conditions.

- **Green transition:** Despite the turbulence linked to the global challenge of COVID-19, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the war that has followed, and the current war in Gaza, efforts towards a more sustainable and socially inclusive economic model, the Sustainable Development Goals and, in particular, towards the transition to a green model of growth must continue. The transition to the European Green Deal, if fairly implemented, creates a particular opportunity for the development of businesses based on the social economy model. This means that companies have to contribute to a Green and Social Deal within their particular capacities. Notwithstanding their goal of being profitable and competitive, they can and should contribute to make the Green Deal, the Recovery and Resilience Plans and the industrial transformation successful and socially beneficial.

- **Sustainable finance:**

- ◆ The necessary financial resources need to be redirected towards sustainable investments with a long-term approach, which takes into account environmental, social and governance aspects and policies. Building on the work already done and the renewed Sustainable Finance Strategy published in mid-2021, efforts need to be continued to establish and reinforce the EU sustainable finance framework in a harmonised way that is supported by all stakeholders, including particularly workers and consumers, as well as financial institutions, companies, and authorities.

- ◆ The concept of sustainable finance must include not only economic and environmental but also social and governance criteria in financial rules and should be made extensive to the concept of sustainable competitiveness.

- **Sustainable competitiveness:**

- ◆ Sustainable competitiveness is based on the well-being for all, social progress, equity, stabilised resilience, environmental sustainability and productivity.

- ◆ Sustainable competitiveness is the set of institutions, all players in the economic development: independent workers, enterprises (micro enterprises, SME's, social enterprises, large enterprises, European Champions), workers, public sector (at national, regional and local level), and policies and factors that determine the level of productivity.

- ◆ Sustainable competitiveness is therefore a key priority for workers and citizens at large: it ensures that competitiveness is a process that improves society, rather

than a race to the bottom. It is better for everyone in the long run, as everyone has – so far – the need for a planet. And it is in the interest of employers, too: not only does it help them have environmental and social stability, but it also encourages fair competition and respects the work of honest companies.

- **Sustainable investment:**

- ◆ Investment is critical for a sustainable economic growth model in line with the twin transitions. The levels needed however cannot be attained with the current cut-backs to investment applied EU-wide.

- ◆ A social taxonomy for sustainable investment: taxonomy should follow not only ecological, but also social criteria, providing a reliable taxonomy which makes companies that contribute to social sustainability more visible.

- ◆ Public support for investment into social projects should be exempt from the deficit rules.

- When deepening the Banking and Capital Market Union, financial market stability, economic sustainability and social fairness should be prioritised. This means for example solid consumer protection standards.



ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

The green transition, decarbonisation and the circular economy, along with digitalisation, are all having an impact on the world of work in terms of changing the nature of jobs and tasks, and creating new occupations, while eliminating others. These transitions are interlinked and mutually reinforcing.

Although policies to combat climate change can lead to major socio-economic changes, social progress is not possible without sustained economic progress, and the latter cannot take place without a socially and employment-just transition.

The twin green and digital transition will lead to profound socio-economic changes. To make this transition socially just, so that it leads to a fairer, greener and more digital society, we need to create the necessary social and legal framework. If we can do this, we can create and sustain good green jobs that enable a good life for all - in the EU and beyond. The EU has already taken a number of initiatives in the areas of digitization and climate protection, such as the AI Act, the DSA and the DMA on the one hand, and the EU Climate Law, Fit for 55 and RepowerEU on the other, to name just a few. Nevertheless, much remains to be done to achieve the goal of climate neutrality by 2050 and the associated necessary digitization and, above all, to make this socially equitable.

Nevertheless, the EU must work harder to put people at the heart of the green and digital transition. Both national and European legislation still focus far too little on people and how their everyday lives and, above all, their work will be changed by the green and digital transformation. For this to change in the future, we need to establish legislation that ensures that worker representatives are involved in the aforementioned transformation processes as early and as closely as possible. This is not for the benefit of employees, but also of businesses.

Experiences so far show that transition processes that involve, at all levels, the social partners are more likely to succeed in terms of socio-economic justice. It is therefore necessary to work together on a comprehensive approach that reinforces investment policies, as well as social compensation policies, for the benefit of the most vulnerable households. Industrial, labour and social protection measures must prevail, accompanied by training and retraining, to ensure the preservation and creation of as many sustainable and quality jobs as possible.

The challenge is the integration of the social partners at the different levels of governance, with participation in the design and monitoring, with particular attention to the local and regional level.

Another challenge is to ensure the protection of workers and their participation in the socially just management of the ecological transition in companies. There must be room in collective agreements for a just transition that benefits workers and leaves no one behind. We must also talk about green social protection.

Therefore, we must ensure that the territorial green transition plans are accompanied by fair social concertation agreements, and green collective agreements with a gender perspective, in which the creation and protection of quality sustainable employment, as well as the support of people, are necessary conditions for companies to have access to financing for the green and socially just transition. In short, there must be no green transition with a negative impact on employment.

Existing employment forecasts highlight a clear green skills deficit. The digital and green skills gap exists, and it hits vulnerable groups hardest. Full qualification to meet these challenges must become a real right for all people, based on validated and certified training in digital and green skills.

In this framework, social dialogue and collective bargaining are absolutely necessary to be able to adjust retraining and retraining programmes to the real needs arising from the double transition, ensuring that everyone has the possibility of training. Social dialogue also plays a role in setting decent working conditions, decent wages and delivering job security, and investment in technology.



Social dialogue is also highly relevant to the less visible moves to green production in companies across the economy, which involve adapting work organisation, job profiles and skills strategies.

It is essential that workers have the time to train in these skills, which is why paid training leave, together with the implementation of a shorter working week, must play a crucial role in the transition and in boosting women's participation in the labour market.

The success of the green and digital transition will depend to a large extent on the policies that are put in place. Therefore, the move towards a green economy is, in addition to the obvious positive impact on the environment, a great opportunity to improve labour standards through social agreements between the social partners for a just transition. Experience suggests that negotiated outcomes can be more balanced and sustainable, and that giving an effective voice to those directly affected contributes to better designed jobs.

KEY PROPOSALS

Sustainability in light of a Just Transition must be implemented from a cross-cutting approach that includes environmental, economic, and social sustainability, and integrates the principles of the EPSR. In all this process, the protection of Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights must remain a priority.

- In order for the measures of the Green Deal to be successful, they need the support of EU citizens. In particular, the Green Deal must support citizens that will be most affected by changes (such as industrial restructuring, coal-dependent regional economies, etc.):
 - ◆ Reskilling and upskilling of workers.
 - ◆ Quality jobs must be offered as alternatives.
 - ◆ Social protection of all workers involved in the process.
 - ◆ Workers' Voice, information, consultation, and participation; workers must be an integral part of the transformation, guided by social dialogue.
 - Collective bargaining is a good vehicle for facilitating the adaptation of organisations and employment, as well as working conditions, to the effects of climate change, and it makes it possible to assess and present companies' investment costs in order to maintain them and adapt them to the requirements of fair and sustainable competitiveness.
 - Social responsibility clauses included in collective bargaining agreements to become a complement to the green public procurement included in social responsibility.
 - Developing, among other measures, a concept of designated employees that act as environmental transition representatives or contact points for matters related to the environmental and ecological transition of the workplace.
 - Push companies to create decarbonisation plans and strategies in close cooperation with trade unions and worker's representatives.

- **A new framework for investment must be developed**, allowing Member States and private money to flow towards a sustainable future. We would like to stress again the need to increase the ambition of the European Green Deal investment plan, which needs to be accompanied by massive public investment plans to support the European Green Deal objectives.
- **A deep, comprehensive reform of the electricity market**: the current crisis has shown that the present design of the market does not provide useful mechanisms to weather shocks, can encourage relatively easily windfall profits, and fails to acknowledge the current needs of decarbonisation and protection of consumers.
- **Monitoring the implementation of the Just Transition Fund and the Social Climate Fund** that ensures solidarity and convergence in Europe. The size of these funds should be increased to ensure appropriate financing to all territories facing socio-economic challenges deriving from the decarbonisation process, supporting workers and providing the adequate measures of social protection, reskilling, quality jobs, and workers' involvement.
- **We need a European Directive for a Just Transition**, emphasising anticipation and management of change, with social dialogue and collective bargaining as guiding principles. The social dimension/initiatives to address the challenges of the European Green Deal remain fragmented and underdeveloped compared with the other hard-law Fit for 55 initiatives.
- **The Just Transition Mechanism and Social Climate Fund**, which have limited scope and purpose, and the non-binding Council Recommendation on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality do not offer the comprehensive policy platform that the EU needs to deal with the impacts of the transition on affected workers, regions and vulnerable individuals.
- **Provide indicators** to check how money of recovery and public funds is spent. Sanctions to countries which do not spend in line with social and environmental European priorities.
- Regional imbalance (particularly with coal-dependent regions in the EU)
 - ◆ Recovery plans specifically for coal regions.
 - ◆ Recovery plans for regions which suffered the crisis specially.
 - ◆ Role of regional and local authorities in the Green Deal.
- **For the case of Trade Agreements**, the Green Deal must occupy a central place, especially on the provisions on the Paris agreement and compliance with human rights, ensuring they are a tool for sustainability.
- **Ensure the adequate support of vulnerable groups** and areas directly impacted by climate change and biodiversity loss with early prevention, adaptation, and financial assistance mechanisms. Focus on fast rehabilitation services for people and areas already hit by forest fires, floods and other natural disasters and step-up international efforts for nature restoration.



DIGITAL TRANSITION

The digital landscape is rapidly reshaping the foundations of work, compelling us to confront critical questions about the future of labour in an increasingly digital and automated world.

Within this paradigm, European workers emerge as central actors in shaping the trajectory of the digital transition.

Although it has undoubtedly brought about economic and societal benefits for employees, such as increased flexibility, autonomy, and opportunities for achieving work-life balance, it has also created an undesirable work culture where workers should be continuously available and connected for work-related requests and have opened the way for increased workers surveillance. These harmful consequences on workers need to be addressed.

Among the new forms of labour created by the digital transition, platform work is experiencing rapid growth in Europe. Unfortunately, it frequently results in low and unpredictable income, lacking the same level of protection and rights afforded to traditional employment. Platform workers often operate in isolation, facing limited

opportunities to voice concerns directly, with algorithmic management tools further exacerbating these challenges.

Key proposals

- Protecting jobs and working conditions.
- **To implement an ambitious Platform Work Directive**, ban zero-hour contracts and fake self-employment in all sectors and fight all types of precarious work. Platform workers and new forms of work in particular need an updated framework to cover them, particularly taking care of young and migrant workers who constitute most of the workforce in platform. The directive has to be extended to all workers when algorithm management practices are concerned. No decision impacting workers life and workers' conditions should be taken solely by machine. The human in command approach must be applied.
 - ♦ Defend workers' right to disconnect.
 - ♦ Establish minimum standards for telework.
- **Digital literacy**
 - ♦ There is an urgent need for active labour market policies, particularly upskilling / reskilling of workers and life-long learning during paid working time.
 - ♦ Life-long learning.
 - ♦ Increasing the digital literacy of vulnerable groups.
 - ♦ Making digitalisation accessible to all regardless of age, gender, socio-economic status and disability.
 - ♦ Ensuring more participation of women in digital training.
 - ♦ Ensuring the accessibility of digital public services and products.
 - ♦ Equal access to the internet for all as a fundamental right.
 - ♦ Closing the digital gap by fostering inclusive access to digital skills and education.
 - ♦ Fight against disinformation.
 - ♦ Increased safety online.
 - ♦ Protection of privacy and data protection.
 - ♦ Protection of children and young people related to early overexposure to addictive algorithms presents in devices such as smartphones.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE - FOSTERING THE OPPORTUNITIES WHILE PREVENTING AND MANAGING THE RISKS

Artificial intelligence (AI) opens up great opportunities but progress in the sector is advancing at lightning speed



and there is a risk that we will be overcome by innovation. The use of AI has to be regulated to ensure a human in command approach. The absence of social dialogue must be urgently addressed because workers must have the proper tools to face these challenges and remain in the labour market. Some of the jobs will disappear and most of them will undergo transformation. These evolutions will require new skills and training.

AI also poses threats to people who face digital poverty (low income, lack of digital skills, disabilities etc.). The idea of leaving no one behind should also extend to the use of AI in digital services.

Another important aspect is ethics: in order to avoid manipulation of our democracies, but also in order to uphold transparency and fairness as well as the protection of the individual in all social and economic scenarios, AI use must be transparent and regulated.

KEY PROPOSALS

- **The transversal implementation** of the principle of Meaningful Human Control (MHC) which ensures that a human must always be the one to make final decisions and that every action generated by AI can be monitored by a human.
- **Ban on AI for biometric surveillance**, emotion recognition, and predictive policing. Disclosure of AI content in text production and a correct definition of risks.
- **A specific directive on the use of AI** at work that regulates use of AI in the workplace and that guarantees the role of social partners (“when IA is used, workers must be on board”); it must guarantee AI systems in which humans remain in control, which is compliant with labour rights and a sound use of personal data. Trade unions and workers’ representatives must be key actors in developing and implementing AI systems.
 - ♦ **Such a directive must make sure** that workers are informed and consulted prior to the introduction of digital technologies that impact working conditions (for example when whole processes are managed by AI without considering the needs of humans participating in these processes);
- **Social standards must not be undermined:** where AI replaces human work, the result should not be layoffs but social progress in terms of reduced working time and better work/life-balance.
- **Encourage dialogue** between employers, trade unions and the educational system, to ensure the necessary skills for the transformation of work.
- **A structure of the social security system** which takes into account the irregular and atypical working time and the precarity of jobs.

- **A pension rights system adapted to the flexibility** imposed by new technologies such as AI.
- **Adapting health and safety systems** to the context and the work environment.
- **Legislation on AI must also guarantee independent audit** of any AI use for the evaluation and/or recruitment of staff, which explicitly includes non-discrimination and the protection of workers’ rights. **Independent review and complaints mechanisms** must ensure compliance with the specific requirements in the workplace.
- **Guarantee equal rights of access to digital services** in systems which are using AI.
- **Push for a fair and ethical sharing** of AI benefits through regulation and public policies.
- **Guarantee of transparency** of any use of AI and its algorithms in any process.



MIGRATION

We witness massive migration flows due to the catastrophic economic, social, political situation in many countries, something that is not likely to improve in the future. This leads to the massive arrival of migrants to certain EU border countries such as Italy, Greece, and Spain, where the pressure on resources is high and the standards at the reception facilities low.



Moreover, there is an unwillingness of certain EU countries to share the responsibility of taking care of migrants – lack of solidarity towards migrants but between EU Member States as well.

Regarding the rescue missions in the Mediterranean, there is a lack of cooperation mechanisms between Member States for the management of rescues operated by private vessels and the implementation of effective search and rescue systems in European seas. Moreover, the reluctance of governments to let in boats carrying migrants poses a major humanitarian challenge. The human smuggling and trafficking networks must also be taken into consideration and tackled, to develop safe, legal, and realistic pathways for immigration.

Inward migration is ultimately a major driver of economic growth and potentially of sustainable development. In the context of the demographic decline in Europe and the need to refresh the working-age population, inward migration is essential. Therefore, proper integration and inclusion of all migrants, including asylum seekers, refugees, and undocumented migrants in society and the labour market are important priorities for the Workers' Group.

Far right, Eurosceptic parties have taken on immigration as a major item in their electoral programs, and are enjoying increasing support across the EU, campaigning against not just the EU, but also democracy and human rights. Therefore, the question of migration cannot be ignored. It needs solutions based on the respect of human rights and the value of human life to ensure the most effective asylum policies and the possibility for people fleeing war and prosecution to find a safe haven and safe and legal pathways to reach Europe. These measures must be coupled with support for Member States in the EU borders and effective cooperation mechanisms, in line with the principle of solidarity, along with a long-term plan to provide stability, democracy and prosperity to the EU neighbourhood and beyond.

KEY PROPOSALS

- **There is a need for developing a common European legal migration and asylum framework system** which is mandatory, safe and effective, and ensures all Member States respect international human rights law. Public services dealing with asylum particularly in the EU border Member States should be sufficiently staffed and trained and their accountability mechanisms should also be improved.
- **The matter of migration was addressed in the Conference on the Future of Europe**, which stressed the need to fight human trafficking, improving the access

to the labour market for migrants, work in countries of origin to tackle the roots of mass migration, deploying measures to ensure the security of migrants, review the Dublin Agreements on Asylum and first countries, and overall approach migration and asylum from a humane perspective.

- **Integration of migrants must be seen as an asset to society:** Understanding integration as a bidirectional process that affects and involves both the host society and the group of arrival, with decent work as the main factor for integration and equal rights as a mechanism for incorporation.
- **Regarding asylum, there is a need to address arbitrary handling of asylum criteria**, illegal detention at borders and forced return even to states where the refugees risk serious harm or persecution.
- **The need to implement effective search and rescue systems in European seas**, with cooperation mechanisms between Member States for the management of rescues operated by private vessels.
- **Finalise the adoption of the Pact on Migration and Asylum**, for a fair, safe, sustainable, and predictable approach to asylum and migration, based on protecting the individual right to asylum ensuring safeguards of people's rights, high standards of protections and solidarity between Member States, particularly in the form of relocation. We will monitor its implementation at national and EU level.
- **Promote the need to tackle climate change-induced migration.**
- **Push for major public information campaigns based on empirical evidence** to explain the critical prerequisite for inward migration and to challenge the prevalence of misconceptions.
- **Targeted measures to fully reflect the gender dimension of migration** and the vulnerable position of unaccompanied minors and children.

RULE OF LAW AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

Democracy rests not just on the will of the majority, but also on the respect for minorities and for political differences, and on the fact that everyone is subject to the rule of law and protected by fundamental rights.

This is increasingly contested by far-right movements which challenge the universality of human rights, the separation of powers in the state, or the independence of journalists and civil society and social partners, to name a few issues.

The protection of fundamental rights and the rule of law is a cornerstone of EU construction and of democracy at large, as they are the basis for a functioning democratic society. One of the main threats is disinformation, by which extremist right wing parties thrive, spreading rumours and fake news at a rate that cannot be effectively countered, and profiting electorally from it.

The fight against discrimination, present and future (anticipating new challenges posed by changes such as the development of AI), is fundamental. The building of human rights can only stand if the rights of every single person are respected.

Key proposals:

- **Promote democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights**, including social and economic rights, and support Organised Civil Society in its fight against discrimination and misinformation.

- **Ensure a working civil and legal framework** for the independence of civil society, for free and independent trade unions and business associations.
- **Analyse and expose the misinformation behind the far right narratives**, particularly when they claim to protect workers and defend democratic interests.
- **Monitor social rights, including the right to strike and of collective bargaining**, and push for their application and compliance throughout the EU. Extend these demands via public procurement conditionality and as clauses in trade agreements and due diligence mechanisms.
- **Combat populism and extremism**, focusing specially on the fight against gender-based violence and racism.



GLOBAL AGENDA BASED ON SOLIDARITY, EQUALITY, AND INCLUSION

The crises seen in the recent years have provided a mixed image of Europe: while the reaction to the pandemic, despite its first slow steps, was largely a common effort (for issues like buying doses of the vaccines) and the EU has kept a unified front in Ukraine, the current war in Gaza has again divided completely the EU external policy.



This serves as a clear warning that there are limited stances in which the EU is able to speak with a single voice in the international stage. However, enough tools must be devised so that, when possible, this unified voice can carry a weight. The retreat of democracy both in the EU and its neighbourhood is still occurring, now with war at the gates of the EU, and with the largest crisis in the Middle East in decades. Living conditions around the EU are worsening in many cases, and the scarcity of wheat and other agricultural outputs with the Russian invasion in Ukraine threaten with harsh price hikes for European consumers, and risk starvation in poorer countries. These can further destabilise a neighbourhood ridden with geopolitical conflicts, civil strife, and often political autocracy and religious extremism.

We need fair Trade Agreements that will help in the creation of decent jobs and the protection of fundamental and human rights, including workers' and trade union rights. They should include the preservation of the environment and biodiversity and the conformity with the Paris Agreement on climate change; safeguard high-quality public services; and strengthen Europe's industrial basis. We must respond to the current wave of growing protectionism with fair trade, with upwards social conditions not just within the EU, to ensure the interdependence does not mean an inherent weakness, and at the same time seize the opportunity posed by the challenges of the energy market to create a functioning electricity market that protects consumers, fosters renewable energy, and provides affordable prices.

Solidarity means that all Member States have to share responsibilities, and that Member States with external borders should not be left carrying the burden alone.

- Therefore, a new mechanism to determine the Member State responsible for dealing with an asylum request should be in place, which comes closer to the principle of solidarity; in that context Member States should not get the opportunity to hide behind a return sponsorship scheme.

In the case of labour migration, realistic, legal and safe pathways are needed (modelled according to the blue card directive, which was also proposed in the Conference for the Future of Europe) in order to address the strong mismatches between demand and supply of skills, the demographic decline in Europe and to maintain growth, productivity and innovation.

- Cooperation on legal migration with countries of origin and transit.
 - ♦ Need to intensify integration efforts, targeted at long-term needs of migrant communities. Employment and labour market integration are key to successful

inclusion as is the involvement of social partners in the process, also as a rampart against migrant exploitation.

- Proper integration policies, with good practices exchange between local actors as integration takes place at the local level – collaboration of the EESC with partners in the framework of the European Partnership for Integration.

- Public information policy about the benefits of migration to combat hatred and xenophobia against asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in general.

Worst practices must be sanctioned: Member States and their specialised bodies must confront the cases of abuse and exploitation.

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) is a useful framework for exploring international migration governance mechanisms involving the countries of origin, transit and destination and emphasising the respect of human rights and decent work.

Cooperation to fight the structural causes of forced migration between governments and social partners in the EU and third countries, especially in the Mediterranean, East Neighbourhood and Sub-Saharan countries. And strengthen cooperation (political and economic) with countries of origin to reinforce the national economy, provide assistance in education and vocational training, states administration, etc.

KEY PROPOSALS

- **We must defend a global agenda** driven by a multilateral approach and multilateral institutions, rather than protectionism and unilateralism, with respect and support of human rights and working for peace and security in the world. We must keep supporting the cause of peace in Ukraine: Russia must retreat its invasion forces.
- **The neighbourhood policy must be strengthened**, namely by integrating the whole of the Western Balkans and Ukraine into Euro-Atlantic structures; this must also include supporting sovereignty and reforms by providing support to countries to address security challenges and find solutions to ongoing conflicts, such as the case of Ukraine.
- **Help to mobilise the richest countries** to help the poorest ones to cope with the current crises.
- **In late 2023, the European Commission adopted the 2023 Enlargement Package**, providing a detailed assessment of the state of play and the progress made by Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye, and for the first time also Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia on their respective paths towards accession to the EU. In view of

the impulse gained by the new enlargement wave, it is more urgent than ever to highlight the need for a treaty reform, to transform the decision-making structures of the EU preventing the current deadlocks, which would only increase with more Member States. This should provide for a more objective and transparent accession mechanism and give back to the EU its main tool for foreign policy in its neighbourhood.

- **As the enlargement countries face a series of challenges in the areas of the rule of law**, including judicial independence, the fight against corruption and organised crime, and media freedom, as well as economic development, environmental protection and social cohesion, civil society organisations, and in particular trade unions, can make a significant contribution to addressing these challenges. Transparent, accountable and competent civil society organisations are essential partners in achieving long-term societal change leading to full EU membership. EU support to civil society in those countries must continue.

- **During the enlargement process**, the EU must make sure that candidate countries fulfil, before joining, all required social standards, be stable democracies, respect the rule of law, human rights and minorities. They must also ratify ILO core conventions, especially those on freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining and the right to equal pay.

TRADE - CHALLENGES OF THE FUTURE TRADE AGREEMENTS

- **Enforcing the labour provisions in the Trade Agreements** while ensuring sanctions for violations of labour rights.
- **Due Diligence requirements** for investors.
- **Implement the Green Deal** in all Trade Agreements.
- **Strengthen the dialogue** with civil society.
- **Reform of the global organisations**, like UN and the WTO, to make them more efficient and fit for new realities.
- **Need for a UN Treaty of Business and Human rights** and the establishment of an ILO Convention on decent work in global supply chains.
- **Inclusion of the respect for labour standards** in all the policies and future multilateral trade agreements and initiatives.

EU-UK RELATIONS

- **Enforcement of the non-regression clause** to the

whole EU social acquis and any other EU law provision affecting working conditions.

- **Requirement for the UK to keep pace** with future improvements of the EU social and employment standards.
 - ◆ Efficient implementation of Trade and Cooperation Agreement provisions on the level playing field to prevent the UK from falling behind future improvements of the EU social and employment standards.
- **Application of the place of work principle.** The same pay for the same work in the same place must be guaranteed.

- **The UK should guarantee that no existing rights** will be changed or watered down, now or in the future.

- **Involvement of trade unions** in trade negotiations and in monitoring the agreement.

- **Reinforce the role of the DAG** in enforcing and monitoring the procedures of the Agreement by submitting complaints.

- **Need for level playing field** particularly in the area of social standards and protection for workers' rights, as well as in environmental protection principles.

- **Public services should be protected** from privatisation in any trade deal. Workers would not support further liberalisation of public services through this Agreement.

- **Guarantee of financial support** in the fisheries and associated industries to ensure the preservation of jobs or opportunities of alternative employment.

- **Protect peace in Northern Ireland** and prevent disruptions that would underpin the Good Friday Agreement.

- **While careful to avoid any interference in the UK's sovereign decision making**, we are committed to continue working for maximum cooperation between the EU and the UK and to enhance links across the entire Civil Society spectrum.

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

- **Establish dialogue** with the civil society in Belarus and provide support and cooperation in the process of democratization.

- **Support Ukraine in its efforts to achieve peace**, ensuring the steady integration into the EU and its formal steps once Russia retreats from Ukraine, together with the rest of candidate countries.

RUSSIA

- **Provide support for free civil society** and Trade Unions in the country.

- **Provide support for Rule of law**, and protection of human rights.

- **Revise and upgrade existing sanctions** to ensure Russia cannot circumvent them, reducing to the maximum the dependency from Russian resources.

- **Develop monitoring tools to tackle active misinformation campaigns**, cybernetic warfare and other forms of aggression from Russia to the EU Member States.

- **Establishing a special international tribunal** on crimes of aggression against Ukraine.

- **Develop an EU legal framework** for designation of states as sponsors of terrorism and states which use means of terrorism.

- **Breaking off cooperation with Russian companies** and organisations that support Putin's policies.

AFRICA

- **Long-term investment in intra-African infrastructure** to foster regional value chains and a sustainable local economy makes economic sense.

- **Support of the agricultural and food industries in Africa** to improve cultivation, reduce harvest losses and enhance quality standards.

- **Support for African countries** in tax policy, migration, development, the environment, education, health, and working and living conditions.

- **Empowerment** of women in Africa.

MERCOSUR

- **Need for proper mechanisms** in the Trade Agreement to enforce environmental and labour standards.

- **Concerns about the overall working conditions in Mercosur** countries and the potential impacts of the EU-Mercosur Agreement, and the lack of transparency and the opacity with which the negotiations are being conducted, particularly in the Mercosur countries.

- **Need to ratify** various basic ILO conventions in the region.

CHINA

- **Overall improvement of the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment** (ratifying the ILO conventions, lack of human rights clause in the agreement and protection of minorities and others).

- **Reflection on the influence** of China in Africa and Latin America.

DOMESTIC ADVISORY GROUPS (DAGS)

- **Strengthen the role** and the impact of the DAGs.

- **Common priorities** for greater consistency across the DAGs.

- **Better cooperation** between ETUC and EESC.

- **Better internal organisation** and communication in the DAGs.

INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS

- **Defend human rights** and the importance of multilateral dialogue and peaceful settlements for conflicts arising or entrenched in time and in which there is neither a unified EU position nor always an evident and viable solution in sight, with full implementation of UN regulations and respect for international law.

- **Use the UN Resolutions as a guideline** and make use of the different tools the EU has with the single market and development aid to both incentivise and deter certain actions in these territories, in line with fundamental human rights, respect for decent working conditions, and democratic freedoms.



BETTER POLICYMAKING AND STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

The objective of strategic foresight is to anticipate. It aims to identify multiple plausible scenarios for the future, to prepare for them and thus to design a future as close as possible to the individual and collective expectations of citizens.



A structured exploration of alternative futures, foresight is more about shaping the future than predicting it.

Foresight is a call to action. It seeks to coordinate and place the policies followed in a perspective, which makes it possible to get out of silo thinking and the fragmentation of action, it being understood that foresight is an aid to decision-making and that it should not replace it.

For the first time, the Commission has just released a communication in which it proposes to integrate foresight into the political cycle of the European Union.

KEY PROPOSALS

- For the Workers' Group, this is a first positive step which nevertheless needs to be clarified on certain points:
- For this first exercise, the Commission chose the theme of resilience, analysed under the four dimensions "social and economic", "geopolitical", "green" and "digital", by identifying for each of them the strong points and the weak points. Special attention must be paid to:
 - ♦ who chooses the baseline scenario(s), and how.
 - ♦ what will be the components of the complete foresight cycle.
 - ♦ the concrete link between foresight and the Better Regulation program, which should aim to improve the quality of legislation and not constitute a deregulation exercise.
 - ♦ the link between foresight and the European impact assessment system.

Foresight must be an open and pluralist exercise that continuously involves organized civil society, in particular the EESC, at each stage of the foresight process and the definition of reference scenarios.

Through its opinions, the EESC is able to detect and warn of systemic risks, as it has already done regarding, for example, the effect of austerity policies on public health policies, the effect of job insecurity on income and poverty, supply and provision of rare earths, etc.

Foresight is a relevant tool for detecting new social, economic and environmental perspectives with a view to revitalizing the social market economy model. It is indeed urgent and essential to bring about profound changes to the current software of the European Union marked by the preponderance of competition on the economic, ecological and social dimensions.

The Workers' Group welcomes the European Commission's recognition in its communication that "economic growth is not an end in itself" and refers to work on well-being and

beyond GDP. It is indeed important to build new indicators of well-being, to be integrated into the foresight cycle and into the design and management of European public policies. The reference scenario of the foresight exercise should aim at the well-being of European populations through a fair socio-ecological transition giving public health concerns a fair place.

