

# Workers' Group

## EESC OPINIONS REVIEW

SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER 2023



**Workers' Group**  
**EESC**

**ADOPTED OPINIONS**  
with Rapporteurs/Co-rapporteurs  
from the Workers' Group





## **Workers' Group EESC**

EESC Workers' Group

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*The summaries of the adopted opinions presented here were prepared by the Secretariat with the only intention of communicating their content, highlighting the key issues for the Trade Union environment, European Workers, and other relevant partners.*

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<b>SOC</b>	762	Civil society support and funding in the area of fundamental rights, the rule of law and democracy	YILDIRIM	FR	September
<b>SOC</b>	772	Multiannual strategic policy for European integrated border management	MORENO DÍAZ	ES	September
<b>SOC</b>	777	Employment guidelines	TRINDADE	PT	September
<b>SOC</b>	769	The impact of education on wages and labour productivity	ROMELE	LV	October
<b>SOC</b>	774	Digital skills and education package	BABRAUSKIENĖ	LT	October
<b>SOC</b>	776	Update of the anti-corruption legislative framework	MORENO DÍAZ	ES	October
<b>SOC</b>	768	For an EU framework for national homeless strategies based on the principle of "Housing First"	BARRERA CHAMORRO	ES	December
<b>INT</b>	1021	For a resilient, sustainable and responsible European Union supply chain of critical raw materials	DEL RIO	IT	September
<b>INT</b>	1020	Modern Business Responsibility – Avenues for elevating MSMEs ability for successful transformation	WYCKMANS	BE	October
<b>INT</b>	1033	Competitiveness and Industry	PAGLIARA	IT	October
<b>INT</b>	1037	Social economy package	DESIANO	FR	October
<b>NAT</b>	903	EU and Agenda 2030: strengthening the implementation of the SDGs	NIKOLOPOULOU	ES	October
<b>NAT</b>	893	The role of youth in rural development	MERLO	IT	December
<b>NAT</b>	915	Advancing the EU's just transition policy framework: what measures are necessary?	DE LEEUW	BE	December
<b>ECO</b>	607	Mid-term evaluation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility	DOZ ORRIT	ES	September
<b>ECO</b>	616	Digital Euro	PALMIERI	IT	September
<b>ECO</b>	621	The Recovery and Resilience Facility and cohesion policy: towards cohesion policy 2.0	BARRERA CHAMORRO	ES	September
<b>ECO</b>	622	New economic governance rules fit for the future	DOZ ORRIT	ES	September
<b>ECO</b>	625	Mid-term revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework	PALMIERI	IT	September

<b>ECO</b>	620	Additional considerations on the Annual Sustainable Growth Survey 2023	DOZ ORRIT	ES	October
<b>ECO</b>	623	Environmental, social and governance ratings	MONE	IT	October
<b>ECO</b>	626	Next generation of own resources	VON BROCKDORFF	MT	October
<b>TEN</b>	810	European Maritime Safety Agency	VASK	ET	September
<b>TEN</b>	816	Minimum breaks and rest periods for occasional passenger transport	SZYMAŃSKI	PL	September
<b>TEN</b>	817	Revision of the Directive on Maritime accident investigation	HÄGGLUND	SE	September
<b>TEN</b>	819	Revision of the Directive on compliance with flag State requirements	BUZEK	DE	September
<b>TEN</b>	801	Individual and collective energy self-consumption as a factor in the fight for the green and energy transition, and for economic and social balance	COULON	FR	October
<b>TEN</b>	802	Equity and efficiency considerations for maritime transportation	COULON	FR	October
<b>TEN</b>	811	Revision of the Weights and Dimensions Directive 96/53/EC	FORNEA	RO	October
<b>TEN</b>	814	Harmonised measurement of transport and logistics emissions	PAGLIARA	IT	October
<b>TEN</b>	820	Rail capacity and traffic management	PAGLIARA	IT	October
<b>TEN</b>	822	Posting of drivers in the European transport sector - challenges and opportunities	SZYMAŃSKI	PL	December
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<b>CCMI</b>	209	Umbrella Opinion "A call for an EU Blue Deal"	MARIN	RO	October
<b>CCMI</b>	212	Securing Europe's medicine supply: envisioning a Critical Medicines Act - promotion during EESC plenary	STUDENT	DE	December

CCMI	216	Initiative on virtual worlds	MONE	IT	December
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# Summaries of adopted opinions

## September

### SOC/762 – Civil society support and funding in the area of fundamental rights, the rule of law and democracy

Ozlem Yildirim

In 2017, the EESC adopted an own-initiative opinion on the topic of "Financing of CSOs by the EU" (SOC/563). Given the quick evolutions in the area of civic space over the past five years, it would be necessary to update the EESC vision on the topic, and to bring a particular focus on support and financing of CSOs working in the area of fundamental rights, the rule of law, and democracy. EU support for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) does not at all match the centrality of their role and responsibilities envisaged in various reform packages.

Despite the hopes invested in them for addressing democratic vulnerabilities and preventing authoritarian drifts, they do not have the proper support needed to fulfil their critical mission. It is more than concerning that the EU budget has so few resources dedicated to CSO support. For the Workers' Group, this is unacceptable and has to be immediately addressed.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!hRNjnX>

### SOC/772 – Multiannual strategic policy for European integrated border management

José Antonio Moreno Díaz

According to Frontex's Strategic Risk Analysis (SRA), there are a number of geopolitical challenges affecting the management of external borders. The Workers' Group stresses the importance of having a shared strategy for the better management of external borders, ensuring the internal security of the European Union and the safety of its residents, as well as the protection of fundamental rights and guarantees for the free movement of people within the EU. It regrets that European Integrated Border Management (EIBM) reinforces the narrative that turns immigration and asylum into potential risks for the European Union.

Considering irregular immigration as a threat on the same level as human trafficking, arms trafficking or terrorism is totally unacceptable and distorts and contaminates the responses to be given to persons seeking irregular access to EU territory, who may be in need of international protection. The Workers' Group insists on the need to set up a genuine Common European Asylum System that is effective, safe and secure, common and mandatory for the 27 Member States, while reaffirming its position that legal, safe and effective channels of access should be provided for immigration for work purposes.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!mJ8hcw>

## SOC/777 – Employment guidelines

Carlos Manuel Trindade

Coordinating employment policies is key to promoting upward convergence and we call for this principle to be applied to labour market operation. The current political instability and high levels of inflation are having an extremely negative effect on citizens' purchasing power and investment decisions, which could jeopardize the implementation of these guidelines. In this difficult context, the role of the social partners in designing and implementing employment policies should be strengthened and the Workers' Group warns against reinstating austerity measures which will only exacerbate the situation, as it has been seen in the past. As regards the issue of promoting equal opportunities for all, we stress the importance of designing effective inclusion policies.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!fvXx8X>

## INT/1021 – For a resilient, sustainable and responsible European Union supply chain of critical raw materials

Cinzia del Rio

The opinion identifies, as a priority, the social and environmental responses to the impact of the increasing use of critical raw materials in value chains in third countries. In the current geopolitical context, the main priority of governments and of the EU today is to secure the most essential raw materials to support greening and digitally transforming the industrial system. Ideally this should go hand in hand with respect for social and environmental standards throughout the value chains.

Therefore, the Workers' Group proposes a set of objectives and measures to achieve a resilient, sustainable and responsible EU supply chain. For our group is key to ensure binding compliance with all international rules and standards in trade agreements, starting with those on illicit trade in resources, including trade-related sanctions.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!XfMNWM>

## ECO/607 – Mid-term evaluation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility

Javier Doz Orrit

The EESC takes part in the European Commission evaluation report of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, in this case in selected countries. The findings include a widespread opinion of the economic, social, and political relevance of RRF objectives, but found problems in the lack of administrative capacity for fund absorption in member states, with transparency and information access, as well as lack of coordination between national strategies and the RRF. Likewise, for the Workers' Group it would be important to establish a clear, structured, and permanent framework for the participation of Organised Civil Society with a more balanced representation of all stakeholders.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!gQCFNN>

## ECO/616 – Digital Euro

Stefano Palmieri

The digital Euro offers possibilities in keeping the euro's continued role as monetary anchor, and ensuring access and use to public money within the current framework of growing digital payments. Currently, these payments are dominated by very few non-EU companies. For the Workers' Group a broader discussion is needed of its merits and risks, but the digital euro, properly implemented, holds potential to guarantee the role of public money free of fees for the user and that can be used like cash in a complementary role.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!JrYXMN>

## ECO/621 – The Recovery and Resilience Facility and cohesion policy: towards cohesion policy 2.0

Maria del Carmen Barrera Chamorro

Social, economic and territorial cohesion is rooted in the TFEU and is one of the aims of cohesion policy. These aims have been hampered by the pandemic crisis, the effects of which have not yet been overcome and which provoked the largest recession since 1945.

The Workers' Group stresses that the fundamental principle of cohesion policy according to which "no one should be left behind" remains accurate and valid, and that civil society partners are ready to continue working towards it. Cohesion policy needs to be more diversified and flexible in order to be able to pay more attention to people, especially the most vulnerable, and to better address the inequality of opportunities faced by many. The range of instruments and approaches should be broadened, modernised or revised to build a strong, effective, flexible and renewed cohesion policy.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!yrTVKq>

## ECO/622 – New economic governance rules fit for the future

Javier Doz Orrit

The Workers' Group welcomes the simpler and more transparent economic governance framework, the reduction of the pro-cyclical bias, the improvement in national ownership and strengthened enforcement, the differentiation and more tailored fiscal adjustment path of each Member State, based on a common-risk framework. However, the Workers' Group proposes replacing the requirement obliging any Member State with a budget deficit of over 3% to cut that deficit by an average of 0.5% of GDP annually, and emphasises that the "technical trajectory" should be first in the hands of national governments and, at a second stage, be the result of a technical dialogue with the European Commission.

In due time, but by 2026 at the latest, an EU fiscal capacity should be established to meet at least some of the investment needs for common priorities and to allow Member States the fiscal space to meet the fiscal costs of the multiple transitions. The Workers' Group reiterates its call for the social partners and civil society organisations to be involved in the proposed regulation, with an obligation for permanent and structured consultation procedures at the different stages of the new economic governance framework.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!ttqpy8>

## ECO/625 – Mid-term revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework

Stefano Palmieri

The Workers' Group considers that the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) is an important tool for financing programmes and actions in all policy areas, in line with the EU's long-term priorities, providing guidance as to where the EU's priorities are heading. After adopting the MFF 2021-2027, the Union faced numerous unforeseen challenges, including Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing energy crisis, which drove up inflation and borrowing costs.

The Workers' Group fully supports the urgent need to reach a swift agreement on the mid-term revision of the MFF. But the changes proposed in the revision are limited, showing a lack of ambition and amounting to merely patching up the framework. The revision does not address the strained budget's effects on employment and companies and the reduced purchasing power of the MFF due to high inflation. Key issues such as Europe's ageing society and changing demographics are also missing and the Workers' Group believes that the MFF should better reflect all the EU's main priorities.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!d4xPXB>

## TEN/810 – European Maritime Safety Agency

Kaia Vask

The proposal to expand the activities of the Agency is an important step towards improving maritime safety and sustainability. With the right amount of human and financial resources to match this expansion, the Agency could play an important role in supporting the training of Port State Control inspectors of the Member States and officials of the Flag State Administrations to conduct targeted inspections as regards the implementation of seafarers' rights and working and living conditions on board ships.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!wYGr88>

## TEN/816 – Minimum breaks and rest periods for occasional passenger transport

Mateusz Szymański

The sector of transport drivers suffers a chronic shortage of staff, and it is only likely to get worse in the coming years. This, as trade unions have pointed out, is linked to the often bad working conditions and insufficient pay for a very taxing job. For the Workers' Group, while the fact that no changes are proposed to the minimum duration of breaks is positive, the idea of adding more flexibility to these breaks is worrying, as it will worsen working conditions. For our Group it is also important to raise the issue of individual consultations, which cannot disregard or circumvent the consultation with social partners and the role of social dialogue.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!VQwPnN>

## TEN/817 – Revision of the Directive on Maritime accident investigation

Sam Hägglund

The revision of the directive aims at increasing maritime safety and the protection of the marine environment. Particularly important elements are the inclusion of small fishing vessels and of a reference to the fair treatment of seafarers, the additional support to the Member States by providing them with more legal clarity and resources and the need to ensure consistency between IMO regulations and the relevant EU legislation. The Workers' Group stresses the need to make the facts about a maritime accident published as soon as possible for the families of the victims to allow for closure.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!bJjwpc>

## TEN/819 – Revision of the Directive on compliance with flag State requirements

Tanja Buzek

On 1 June 2023, the Commission published its proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2009/21/EC on compliance with flag State requirements (COM(2023) 272 final). It is part of the Commission's Maritime safety package to support clean and modern shipping. The Workers' Group shares the Commission's assessment that the COVID-19 pandemic was a stark reminder of the key role that maritime transport and, in particular, its workers play. Revamped EU policies need to support the industry and its workers and consider the importance of a sector that operates 75% of the EU's external trade, with global shipping even moving 90% of world trade. While the maritime sector has proved considerably resilient during the pandemic, it has nonetheless revealed substantial challenges of disrupted supply chains in global trade and an unacceptable crew-change crisis stranding half a million seafarers on board their ships.

The Workers' Group welcomes the update and alignment of the Directive on flag State requirements with the international rules to provide better consistency and legal clarity. However, the Workers' Group regrets the missed opportunity to lead beyond international minimum requirements and would also strongly welcome a substantial contribution from the social partners as well as other relevant maritime industry stakeholders.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!YhcT8R>

## REX/573 – EU Global Health Strategy

Carlos Manuel Trindade

The Workers' Group is in favour of adopting a comprehensive renewed approach to the EU Global Health Strategy by addressing the social, economic and environmental determinants of health opportunities in terms of ensuring universal health coverage, climate change, decreasing biodiversity and increasing environmental pollution, as well as new opportunities provided by better knowledge and technological innovation.

The Workers' Group is particularly concerned with the challenges posed by the current shortage of healthcare workers in Europe and globally. Therefore, it recommends that the EU Global Health Strategy reinforces its health workforce policies taking into account (a) that health personnel must benefit from improved working conditions through upward convergence and upward levelling of working conditions within the EU and globally, and that (b) the health care workforce migration is certainly a complex and difficult issue, but one that needs to be properly and urgently addressed – the concept of "circular migration" must be taken into account in this context.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!VVHPG7>

## REX/576 – The EU Maritime Security Strategy and its Action Plan

Mateusz Szymański

The evolving security environment has resulted in rising tensions at sea, with the maritime domain becoming increasingly subject to power politics. The Workers' Group acknowledges the alignment of the new strategy with the Strategic Compass and considers that the EU Maritime Security Strategy has to preserve EU sovereignty, security and competitiveness. By prioritising the maritime domain, the EU can advance its key policy principle of multilateralism in its external actions.

The EU needs to intensify engagement with international partners to collectively tackle shared concerns, including people smuggling and human trafficking. Employing social dialogue and the promotion of collective bargaining agreements is necessary to effectively address the dimension of working conditions and achieve higher work standards. The Workers' Group emphasises the utmost importance of providing seafarers with access to reskilling and upskilling programmes to acquaint themselves with automated systems and emerging technologies, while acquiring the necessary skills to combat cyber threats and address various security incidents.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!rcmHgt>





## October

### SOC/769 – The impact of education on wages and labour productivity

Linda Romele

Tackling the skills-related challenges will require significant political efforts and systemic reforms in education and training and smart investments in human capital from both public and private sources. There are three important basic criteria to take into consideration: (1) the quality of education available, (2) access to education and (3) the rate of employability.

It should be ensured that SMEs have easier access to funding, since the majority of employees are concentrated in them. The Workers' Group recommends that the new paradigm for the development of skills in Europe be reflected in diversity, gender equality, youth and disability policies.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!fwFHHh>

### SOC/774 – Digital skills and education package

Tatjana Babrauskienė

Digital skills and competences are important for learners of all ages, apprentices, entrepreneurs and employees within up- and reskilling provisions, given their importance for social life and the labour market.

The Workers' Group notes the growing need for AI roles in public and private entities and for AI skills training for workers, and recognises the impact of generative AI such as ChatGPT on education and training for all age groups, especially on the working conditions of teachers, academics, researchers and other education personnel.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!7ydK4b>

### SOC/776 – Update of the anti-corruption legislative framework

José Antonio Moreno Díaz

Corruption is a serious problem that affects all EU Member States and democratic coexistence itself. The Workers' Group believes it should be discussed whether the proposal for an EU Directive could be accompanied by a parallel legal framework addressing in a binding way the Union legal system. This parallel framework should most likely be contained in a Council decision in order to extend the competences of the European Public Prosecutor's Office to corruption.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!t6Tpgr>

## INT/1020 – Modern Business Responsibility – Avenues for elevating MSMEs ability for successful transformation

Ferre Wyckmans

Modern business responsibility of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) entails a proactive and voluntary approach to economic, social and environmental sustainability. MSMEs need support and encouragement to manage the broad entirety of business responsibility.

To ensure the necessary skills and competences, the Workers' Group believes that learning/training alliances of MSMEs must be promoted and facilitated, and cooperation must be enhanced between labour market institutions, social partners, professional chambers and associations, and various training entities and CSOs.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!Nq9R73>

## INT/1033 – Competitiveness and Industry

Angelo Pagliara

Improving the competitiveness and productivity of industry is a key lever for the EU to support economic growth, deliver on the green and digital transition to a net-zero economy, promoting quality jobs and keeping the European social model. The EU must preserve the principles of free but fair trade.

Europe's response to the many unprecedented challenges and megatrends affecting industrial competitiveness must be built on social dialogue. The Workers' Group calls for a competent industrial 4.0 workforce, which means dealing with labour market shortages and developing overall and digital skills at all levels of the workforce.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!Gc8mnX>

## INT/1037 – Social economy package

Carole Desiano

The Commission's recommendation to the Member States aims to develop framework conditions for the social economy in line with the 2021 relevant action plan. The Workers' Group welcomes the recommendation as a contribution to a fair and sustainable economic and industrial development based on a culture of solidarity.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!WhCbxt>

## NAT/903 – EU and Agenda 2030: strengthening the implementation of the SDGs

Maria Nikolopoulou

Apart from a long-term political commitment beyond 2030, the EU needs a comprehensive strategy with ambitious long-term goals, in order to accelerate progress on the SDGs at the European and global level. The crucial role of civil society in the implementation process is underlined.

For the Workers' Group, key enablers in accelerating SGD implementation are societal acceptance by proportionately sharing the costs and benefits of the transition and a proactive communication strategy against the anti-2030 agenda.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!QR4KNb>

## ECO/620 – Additional considerations on the Annual Sustainable Growth Survey 2023

Javier Doz Orrit

The Workers' Group believes that monetary policy in the coming months needs to balance the need to reduce inflation, avoiding excessively stalling growth and to contribute to public debt reduction plans. In view of the inflation, the social partners and governments should negotiate and agree on national income pacts to reduce inflation without undermining investment and growth, and these pacts should be accompanied by targeted measures to support the vulnerable parts of the population.

The Workers' Group calls to ensure that future legislative proposals take the impact on the EUs competitiveness into account without forgetting to improve the conditions of workers in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!mhxqtF>

## ECO/623 – Environmental, social and governance ratings

Andrea Mone

The Workers' Group fully supports the proposal of the Commission to regulate for the first time environmental, social and governance (ESG) ratings in order to facilitate their contribution to the transition to a climate-neutral economy.

As a matter of transparency and reliability, all rating methodologies that refer to decent work, employment, decent wages to fight in-work poverty and social dialogue as part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 8 or SDG 16) should reveal how workers' representatives from the rated entities have been involved.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!rQd8Jb>

## ECO/626 – Next generation of own resources

Philip von Brockdorff

The Workers' Group acknowledges the Commission's efforts to propose new own resources and guarantee a solid and sustainable EU budget, but finds that the issue of EU own resources and budgetary capacities has not received the visibility needed to address all its aspects. An in-depth but time-bound debate involving the social partners and civil society organisations should take place without delay and in accordance with the next term of office of the EU institutions.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!vMB4PK>

## TEN/801 – Individual and collective energy self-consumption as a factor in the fight for the green and energy transition, and for economic and social balance

Pierre Jean Coulon

The development of self-consumption is perceived as supporting the energy transition and as a vehicle for rolling out the energy transition at local level and as close to individuals as possible. Local and regional authorities must favour collective projects as they provide citizens the possibility to benefit from affordable energy.

The widespread use of smart meters compatible throughout the EU is recommended as are good practices, such as not-for-profit initiatives for collective purchase of renewable energy installations.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!TXV9Ng>

## TEN/802 – Equity and efficiency considerations for maritime transportation

Pierre Jean Coulon

Maritime and inland water transportation development should be considered a top priority as regards mobility and facilitating trade, since they contribute to European equity and efficiency objectives. Investments in maritime infrastructure should focus on better safety, eco-friendly and cheaper transportation, new investment should go into resilient ports and hubs. For the Workers' Group, the revision of the regulatory framework should focus on the effective implementation of rules on substandard shipping and seafarers' rights to equal terms of employment, with a greater role for EMSA. The participation of women as well as training in sustainable shipping and tourism should be promoted.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!CdyFPC>

## TEN/811 – Revision of the Weights and Dimensions Directive 96/53/EC

Dumitru Fornea

The Workers' Group is worried that the adoption of this Directive would generate a reverse modal shift, as highlighted by the railway community and many trade unions representing railway workers and NGOs.

The revision of the directive should address the following problems: (1) fragmentation of the market for the use of oversized and overweighted vehicles, (2) insufficient uptake of alternatively fuelled and zero-emission vehicles and aerodynamic rear devices and cabs, and (3) ineffective and inconsistent enforcement of cross-border transport rules for heavy-duty vehicles. In addition, the directive needs to help meet the climate ambitions of the European Green Deal.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!PW6GQ7>

## TEN/814 – Harmonised measurement of transport and logistics emissions

Angelo Pagliara

Considering the crucial role of the transport sector in achieving Europe's climate goals and the need for clear and reliable information to allow consumers to make sustainable decisions regarding transportation, we support the initiative for a harmonised European framework to measure greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions for transport services. The current fragmentation in calculation methods leads to divergences and could compromise the comparability of GHG emissions and provide inaccurate information that could undermine the single market's functioning and fair competition. Therefore, a common framework would foster transparency and behavioural change towards sustainable transport. For the Workers' Group, a transport sector strategy that ensures a just transition by addressing social issues, protecting workers and guaranteeing accessible and affordable transport services, and specific measures to protect consumers and workers could encourage the use of sustainable transport.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!c979dm>

## TEN/820 – Rail capacity and traffic management

Angelo Pagliara

We welcome the proposal on the use of railway infrastructure capacity and the ambitious goals for rail transport which is a crucial pillar of a green and sustainable transport system.

An active investment policy is needed, focusing not only on international and high-speed long-distance lines but also on local and regional lines. Also, rail transport should be made more attractive, accessible to people with disabilities and affordable for the public.

The Workers' Group underlines the importance of a meaningful social dialogue in the introduction of any new digital tools and new methods and tools for planning the infrastructure capacity and the need for a thorough assessment of the impact on workers and the additional training requirements.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!6N9rTN>

## CCMI/209 – Umbrella Opinion "A call for an EU Blue Deal"

Florian Marin

Water is a vital but an increasingly scarce resource. Inadequate freshwater supplies are putting an increasing strain on human communities, especially the poor. Globally, 2.2 billion people lack access to safely managed drinking water. In the summer of 2022, Europe saw the most severe droughts in 500 years and other recent crisis such as floods, but also heatwaves and fires, have revealed the immediate consequences of climate change.

According to the European Environment Agency (EEA), about 20% of Europe and 30% of Europeans are affected by water stress during an average year. Considering the challenges at stake, the current EU policy framework is not fit for purpose. The Workers' Group calls on the European Commission to start addressing water as a priority at European scale. The objective is formalised in an umbrella opinion calling on European Institutions for a "Blue Deal".

More info at <https://europa.eu/!ChnDkk>





## December

### SOC/768 – For an EU framework for national homeless strategies based on the principle of "Housing First"

Mari Carmen Barrera Chamorro

The Workers' Group welcomes the launch of the European platform on combatting homelessness and calls for homelessness to remain a social policy priority for the EU also in the long run. It stresses the need to include the fight against homelessness in the European Semester exercise and wants a better, more systematic integration into EU work programmes and funding projects, underpinned by a dedicated structural budget.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!XWmv83>

### NAT/893 – The role of youth in rural development

Nicoletta Merlo

Europe needs the vision, commitment, and participation of young people to build a better future for all, and rural areas play a vital role in economic and social cohesion. The EESC highlights the importance of ensuring quality employment opportunities, access to education, support for entrepreneurship, and access to land for young people in rural areas. This is why the Workers' Group supports holistic and cross-sectoral approaches to address challenges present in rural areas, such as rural proofing and the EU Youth Test, to ensure the effective and lasting implementation of EU policies.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!8g3Yy3>

### NAT/915 – Advancing the EU's just transition policy framework: what measures are necessary?

Rudy De Leeuw

The concept of a Just Transition should guide the political agenda of the EU and be taken into account by all EU institutions. Its framework should be based on social, economic, and environmental sustainability, assuring the right to a decent life, to protect social rights, to allow for fair competitiveness, all within planetary boundaries. For the Workers' Group, the key is to create a directive on Just Transition, and encourage Member States to update their welfare systems to ensure equitable sharing of benefits and burdens. A golden rule and social and environmental conditionalities for investment should also be considered.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!7MtjgH>

## TEN/822 – Posting of drivers in the European transport sector - challenges and opportunities

Mateusz Szymański

The importance of fully enforcing the new rules on the posting of drivers (Mobility package I) is stressed in this opinion and the Commission and the European Labour Authority are urged to assist the Member States and the road transport sector with a coordinated interpretation of the package, and the introduction of a control methodology, in order to ensure fair competition. Closer cooperation and exchange of information among Member States are particularly important in fighting the phenomenon of letterbox companies.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!3MPMbH>

## REX/571 – Strengthening multilateralism and core international principles for a rules-based order in a rapidly changing world – The importance of the civil society contribution to the UN system

Tanja Buzek

The EESC stresses the EU's duty to uphold universal values and align with the UN Charter's principles. The EESC calls for EU Member States' commitment to strengthening the UN through fundamental reform and improved coordination for the UN to become more representative, inclusive, and effective. The EESC also highlights the UN's importance as a dialogue platform but acknowledges the risk of obstruction by individual Member States, proposing restrictions on participation and voting rights for those violating the UN Charter or their commitments under UN agreements or conventions. Furthermore, the Workers' Group expects the UN to achieve goals like promoting peace, sustainable development, and human rights.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!TBKxYb>

## REX/572 – Global battle of offers – from the Chinese Belt and Road initiative to the EU Global Gateway: the vision of European organised civil society

Stefano Palmieri

Eight years after the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the EESC evaluates its impact on EU policies. The EESC stresses that BRI and Global Gateway projects must undergo an economic, financial, social, environmental, and legal impact assessment, demonstrating their suitability and compatibility with EU values and objectives. The Workers' Group regrets the limited involvement of local European stakeholders, such as civil society organisations and social partners, in the overall process of developing, monitoring, evaluating, and implementing BRI projects in the EU. In this regard, the EESC would like to play a more active role in the key stages of the decision-making process for development projects associated with those two initiatives.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!yTpHF9>

## CCMI/212 – Securing Europe's medicine supply: envisioning a Critical Medicines Act - promotion during EESC plenary

Thomas Student

The EESC highlights the importance of mitigating dependencies and strengthening the resilience and the strategic autonomy of the EU, and calls for an urgent and robust action plan to attract the production of active pharmaceutical ingredients and finished medicines to the European Union. For the Workers' Group, legislative, administrative and financial incentives are key to favour existing manufacturers in the EU, stimulate R&D and encourage the relocation of production from third countries, as well as pricing mechanisms that ensure a fair remuneration of research and production costs as well as affordability of finished medicines for the public.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!RTRwww>

## CCMI/216 – Initiative on virtual worlds

Andrea Mone

The Workers' Group supports the four pillars laid out in the communication, but calls for more attention to be paid to the social dimension of virtual worlds, focusing especially on how virtual worlds impact working conditions, health and safety of those using or working in them, as well as vulnerable people. Future legislation in the field should foster global industry standards and interoperability protocol standards, enforce existing legislation (such as competition, data protection, intellectual property) and promote carbon neutrality.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!dDGYmH>

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