

OUR PRIORITIES FOR SOCIAL PROGRESS

Executive Summary

In times of crisis, we do not back down, we do not blame the least fortunate or the most vulnerable, we do not abandon our fight for the environment, for workers or our defence of human rights. We take a stand for the kind of society we want.

We strive to forge an equal, strong and independent Europe in a fairer world, where both the burdens and the benefits are shared fairly, using social dialogue to set the solid foundations of a democratic and free society. We turn ideas into policy actions to build a Europe that leaves no one behind.

Social Challenges

Considering the current geopolitical context and the ongoing digital and green transitions, the EU must ensure that its social market economy model perseveres and social cohesion in the EU is not endangered. Political agendas promoting regulatory simplification must not lead to deregulation that erodes workers' rights and the involvement of trade unions. The Workers' Group advocates sustainable competitiveness that allows for innovation and productivity without compromising on social rights.

An important aspect of this is to continue promoting the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), effectively implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights and using the European Semester to monitor indicators. There is a need to democratise work, meaning that workers' participation must be strengthened, board-level representation should adhere to mandatory minimum floors, while collective bargaining and social dialogue should be promoted. All EU policies must undergo social impact assessments.



**Workers'
Group**

Improving services of general interest, fighting all forms of poverty, dealing with demographic change through intergenerational solidarity, securing adequate pensions and ensuring the right to lifelong learning remain social priorities for the Workers' Group. Quality jobs must be guaranteed in view of the current transitions. The Workers' Group will continue to fight precarious work and social dumping and advocate the protection of migrant workers. Moreover, we will continue supporting equal rights, especially in the workplace, by promoting equal pay for equal work, combatting the gender pay gap, condemning discrimination in the workplace and gender-based violence and advocating LGBTIQ+ rights.

Economic Challenges

Job insecurity, increasing precarious employment, the cost-of-living crisis, climate change, demographic ageing and growing geopolitical tensions, including Russia's war against Ukraine and new US tariffs, are accelerating the need for coordinated EU action to strengthen economic and social resilience.

As the EU embarks on a new cycle of economic and governance reforms, modernisation must not become a pretext for deregulation or for diverting resources away from social investment. Instead, reforms should safeguard quality jobs, public investment, territorial cohesion and fair, progressive taxation to ensure that economic progress delivers tangible benefits for working people.

To achieve this, the Workers' Group calls for strengthening the social dimension of the European Semester, reinforced social dialogue and collective bargaining, a more ambitious EU budget and cohesion policy, decisive action against tax dumping, tax avoidance and tax havens, and a just green and digital transition grounded in quality jobs, sustainable finance and robust social and environmental standards.

Environmental Challenges

The green transition, decarbonisation and the circular economy, together with digitalisation, are reshaping the nature of jobs and creating new occupations while eliminating others. These transformations are interlinked and mutually reinforcing and require coordinated economic, industrial and social policies.

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 be achieved without a real just transition. A just transition should actively involve workers, trade unions and social partners, safeguard quality employment, public services and territorial cohesion, promote gender equality, and ensure that social and economic progress advance together so that no worker, sector or region is left behind.

To achieve this, the Workers' Group calls for a strong Just Transition Directive and a green and digital transition grounded in quality jobs, gender equality and robust standards. This requires reinforced social dialogue, guaranteed access to reskilling, an ambitious industrial strategy and increased Social Climate Funds.

Digital Transformation

The digital landscape is deeply altering the foundations of work and social relations, with both benefits and challenges for workers. In particular, the growth of platform work and jobs with algorithmic management require special attention, as workers suffer increased surveillance, isolation and lack of possibility to voice concerns, and the Platform Work Directive must be extended to cover them if no other legislation is passed.

Digital infrastructure and services should be considered services of general interest and democratic oversight, security and

public ownership promoted. It is key to keep the human-in-command approach, to guarantee the right to disconnect, to provide decent minimum standards for telework, and to bridge the digital gap and promote digital literacy at work.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) deserves special mention for its transformative potential and impact on the job market. AI must enhance human labour, not substitute it. Its ethical implications (democratic manipulation, deepfakes, use of human culture, etc.) as well as energy and environmental impact (massive demands for energy, water and raw materials) must be ingrained in its regulation and argue against its reckless deployment. This concerns, in particular, the risks of deregulation (as per the Digital Omnibus). Instead, AI use and development must be rooted in human-in-control principles, due diligence, sustainability, privacy protection, transparency and anticipation. It must have labour and social progress and social transformation for a fairer world as goals.

Industrial Change

Industrial change in Europe is accelerating, driven by the twin green and digital transitions, geopolitical shifts and the reconfiguration of the supply chain. It comes with innovation and growth, but also with job destruction, rising inequalities and territorial divergence. It is also affected by the uncertainty surrounding green transition policies due to recent political shifts.

A successful industrial transformation requires having a strong European industrial policy, focused on delivering quality jobs and strengthening labour and environmental standards, and relying on collective bargaining and social dialogue to anticipate restructuring. It should promote a 'Made in Europe' approach in strategic sectors and include social conditionality in EU industrial funding, bringing a stable, predictable, long-term push for a just transition.

Migration

The answer to migration challenges must be rooted in human dignity and human rights, building a common migration and asylum system that creates real, safe and effective pathways. The weight of migration in the political debate has only increased with time, as the far right frames the issue exclusively as a security problem and its views permeate mainstream politics. Europe's response must build on the integration of immigrants, preventing labour abuses and exploitation. It must not shy away from combatting human trafficking mafias and protecting the lives of refugees and migrants.

The EU must also tackle root causes of migration that provoke brain drain in countries of origin and put people at risk in the first place, enhance cooperation with third countries, and ensure Member States share responsibilities and can count on effective cooperation mechanisms.

Rule Of Law and Fundamental Rights

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 and pluralistic society. However, they are increasingly under pressure from far-right movements, which challenge pluralism, judicial independence, gender and other forms of equality, the universality of human rights, civil society and social partners.

The deterioration of workers' and trade union rights across Europe, including restrictions on the right to form and join a trade union, collective bargaining, the right to strike and freedom of expression, highlight the urgent need to strengthen democratic safeguards and protect social rights.

Our key proposals focus on promoting democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights, and supporting organised civil society in its fight against shrinking space,

discrimination and misinformation. We also aim for stronger monitoring of social rights, including the right to strike and collective bargaining, and to push for their full application and compliance throughout the EU. Finally, we seek to combat populism and extremism, with a particular focus on addressing gender-based violence and racism.

Global Agenda Based on Peace, Solidarity, Equality and Inclusion

The EU needs to speak with one voice on the international stage, yet new wars and crises have shown that this capability is limited, weakening its capacity to support the rights of workers worldwide. The EU's external policy should remain committed to reviving multilateralism, fighting protectionist measures, and ensuring that trade agreements are fair and enhance the protection of workers' and trade union rights. We must recentre the EU's external policy on the idea of the EU as a peace project, rejecting militarisation and subsequent diversion of investments.

EU-UK relations should be fostered, emphasising the principle of non-regression for workers' rights. Support for Ukraine remains a priority, while its accession and that of other candidate countries must include the implementation of workers' protections and rights. Free trade agreements and investments under the Global Gateway must include strong social conditionalities and stakeholder consultations.

Better Policy-making and Foresight

Foresight must remain embedded in EU legislation and the activities of the Workers' Group, especially in times when the Commission's omnibus packages fail to include impact assessments and disregard better regulation rules. The Workers' Group and our network of trade union organisations are best placed to sense underlying trends that shape the future. Our foresight activi-

ties include raising awareness and capacity building, strengthening cooperation with other EU institutions and adopting opinions using foresight methodology. Concretely, this should develop a long-term vision of the EU's desirable and achievable future even beyond the 2025–2030 mandate.

CONTACT US

gr2.eesc@gmail.com

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



EESC Workers' Group



EESC Workers' Group



[@Workers-eesc.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/Workers-eesc.bsky.social)



[@WorkersEESC](https://twitter.com/WorkersEESC)

