



Civil Society Forum under the Korea-EU Free Trade Agreement

12th meeting in Seoul – 28-29 September 2026

**Joint Conclusions of the Korea Domestic Advisory Group (Korea DAG)
and the EU Domestic Advisory Group (EU DAG)**

Introduction

The Civil Society Forum (CSF) under the Korea-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) held its 12th meeting in Seoul on 28-29 September 2026. It was co-chaired by Professor Joo-hyoung Lee, University of Seoul, Chair of the Korea DAG, and Krzysztof Pater, European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Chair of the EU DAG.

The CSF welcomed the opportunity for members of both DAGs to meet and provide their expertise on trade and sustainable development (TSD), and advise on the implementation of the respective chapter in the Korea-EU FTA. Building on the 11th meeting in Brussels, members reaffirmed the value of regular dialogue and practical cooperation among representatives of workers, employers and other civil society organisations.

They were also pleased that the CSF was held in conjunction with the meeting of the Committee on Trade and Sustainable Development (CTSD), giving the co-chairs the opportunity to address the Parties to the Korea-EU FTA. The CSF would appreciate the possibility for the whole presidency of both DAGs to be given the opportunity to address the CTSD in the future.

The CSF reaffirms the essential contribution of a vibrant and independent civil society to the objectives of the TSD chapter. The active participation of workers' and employers' organisations and other non-governmental organisations fosters mutual understanding and closer cooperation between Korea and the EU in enhancing the contribution of trade to sustainable development.

The CSF identifies the following shared priorities for continued engagement:

- Strengthening partnership, mutual trade and social dialogue in a changing international environment;
- Advancing a just energy transition that benefits workers, enterprises and communities;
- Supporting cooperation on sustainable products policies and greener supply chains;
- Promoting gender equality at work, including job quality, career continuity and equal pay for work of equal value;
- Continuing constructive engagement on the fundamental principles and rights at work and on the implementation of the TSD chapter by both Parties;
- Fostering responsible AI and fair platform work, and harnessing AI for environmental sustainability.

Building a Sustainable Future through Partnership, Social Dialogue and Civil Dialogue

1. In an international environment marked by uncertainty and energy and supply chain challenges, the CSF underlines the importance of the Korea-EU partnership. Members recognise the value of an open, sustainable and predictable rules-based trading system and of cooperation at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels. Exchanges on economic security, industrial partnerships and resilient supply chains should reinforce mutual trust and shared social and environmental objectives.
2. The CSF reaffirms that effective social dialogue among governments, employers and workers' organisations, as well as between the social partners, is central to managing a just green and digital transition. Together with meaningful engagement with wider civil society organisations involved in civil dialogue, it can support inclusive economic development.
3. Marking the 15th anniversary of the Korea-EU FTA – the first EU agreement to include a chapter on 'Trade and Sustainable Development' and to establish advisory groups (DAGs) of civil society on both sides – this forum acknowledged the significant growth in bilateral trade between Korea and the EU over the years.
4. The CSF also noted that the EU and Korea's policy directions are fostering cooperation to drive the green transition on both sides with trade as a tool. Participants recognised that the two sides have evolved from trade partners to green transition partners and emphasised the overarching need for a just transition. The CSF highlighted three priority areas in support of sustainable development: regulatory compatibility, industrial cooperation and a stronger partnership with civil society. The CSF encourages efforts to translate research and innovation partnerships into practical cooperation on sustainable production and supply chains, drawing on the experience of enterprises, workers and other civil society organisations on both sides.

I. Trade, Labour and Environment

Just Energy Transition and Trade

5. The CSF recognises the close links between energy security, climate action, industrial competitiveness and social well-being. It welcomes opportunities to advance clean energy cooperation, including renewable energy, in the spirit of the Korea-EU Green Partnership. Taking account of respective circumstances and transition pathways, both sides seek to combine decarbonisation with reliable and affordable energy and a just transition for workers and communities.
6. The energy transition should be accompanied by social dialogue, timely planning and appropriate social protection. The CSF encourages exchanges on policy coordination across relevant authorities to link energy transition planning with employment support and economic diversification in affected regions.

7. Drawing on the renewable energy policies presented, the CSF identifies opportunities for cooperation on solar and wind energy, including offshore wind, energy storage, grid integration and other clean energy solutions. Joint research, technical exchanges and demonstration projects can help improve system stability, reduce costs and support investment. Sharing experience on workforce development and community participation can strengthen the social acceptance and long-term sustainability of these initiatives, provided that such cooperation does not lead to any lowering of regulatory, safety, environmental or labour standards and contributes to fair competition and sustainable industrial development.
8. The CSF emphasises the importance of responsible clean energy supply chains, including human rights and environmental due diligence, in particular in the extraction and processing of critical minerals, labour standards, environmental safeguards and the meaningful participation of affected communities. Cooperation should address safety and resource efficiency throughout the life cycle of energy infrastructure and components, from installation and operation to decommissioning and recycling. Transparent governance and opportunities for local communities to share in the benefits can help ensure that the transition is fair and accountable.
9. The CSF encourages mutual learning on the practical conditions for renewable energy deployment, including infrastructure planning, permitting and financing, while maintaining environmental safeguards and community participation. Such exchanges can also contribute to broader international discussions on climate and trade, taking account of different national and regional circumstances. The DAGs will explore a joint contribution on just transition and trade, and the CSF invites the Parties to keep the DAGs regularly informed of the just transition dimensions of the Korea-EU Green Partnership.

II. Trade and Environment

Cooperation on Green Supply Chains and Sustainable Product Regulations

10. The CSF recognises the shared objectives of industrial decarbonisation, resource efficiency and circularity. Members exchanged perspectives on corporate responses to the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR) and the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR). The discussion highlighted the importance of cooperation among producers, importers and other supply chain participants in translating environmental objectives into practical improvements in emissions management, products and production processes.
11. The CSF encourages continued dialogue between the relevant authorities, economic operators and civil society organisations to promote a clear understanding of product-specific requirements, implementation schedules and the respective responsibilities of economic operators. Such exchanges should clearly distinguish between adopted requirements, proposals and guidance, while supporting effective implementation, maintaining environmental ambition and avoiding unnecessary administrative burdens, particularly for SMEs and smaller suppliers participating in cross-border supply chains. Cooperation on implementation should not delay or dilute the environmental objectives of these instruments and should include workers' organisations and communities affected along supply chains.

12. Building on existing information and support initiatives, the CSF encourages product- and sector-specific cooperation, as relevant to the respective regulatory frameworks, on emissions data, testing, verification, technical documentation and digital product passports. A shared understanding of data requirements and formats can facilitate reliable information exchange between suppliers and importers and help them fulfil applicable regulatory obligations. Cooperation should also seek to reduce duplication in data collection, verification and documentation and promote practical and proportionate approaches to compliance. Such exchanges should respect applicable legal requirements, data protection and legitimate commercial confidentiality, while improving the usability and reliability of information throughout supply chains.
13. The CSF highlights the importance of enabling small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to participate effectively in greener supply chains without facing disproportionate compliance and administrative burdens. Cooperation among public authorities, industry associations, technical experts and businesses can provide targeted guidance, training and shared technical resources, taking into account the more limited administrative and technical capacity of SMEs. Both sides are encouraged to exchange good practices on the decarbonisation of production processes, emissions management, sustainable product design, packaging, reuse and recycling, helping enterprises connect compliance preparation with innovation and improved environmental performance.
14. The CSF further encourages feedback from producers, importers, business organisations, workers' organisations and other civil society organisations on both sides on the usability of guidance and supply chain data. Such feedback can help technical dialogue address difficulties encountered in day-to-day compliance while supporting shared environmental objectives.

III. Trade and Labour

Gender Equality at Work

15. The CSF underlines that employment growth should be accompanied by better job quality, career continuity and equal pay for work of equal value, in line with ILO Convention No 100, which Korea and all EU Member States have ratified. Promoting equal opportunities in recruitment, training, job assignment and advancement, and addressing gender gaps in pay and access to decision-making positions, are shared priorities.
16. The CSF took note of the presentation by the Korean side on recent changes in the Korean female labour market, and of its view that parental leave, flexible working arrangements and support for a sustainable return to work are necessary to advance gender equality at work. According to the presentation, such policies should help both women and men reconcile work and care responsibilities and sustain careers after leave, and should be made usable in practice, including in smaller enterprises and for people in diverse forms of employment, with appropriate support for workers and employers. The CSF took note of the presentation by the EU side on the EU Pay Transparency Directive as an essential tool to help close the gender pay gap.

17. The CSF recognises that gender equality is both a fundamental value and a driver of economic growth, competitiveness and resilience, and underlines that progress on gender equality at work cannot be taken for granted and should be sustained and built upon, in line with the principle of the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation under Article 13.4.3.
18. The CSF took note of the information provided by the Korean side that its gender wage gap, while narrowing steadily, remains among the widest in the OECD, and notes with interest the plans presented to introduce an employment-equality disclosure regime requiring large companies and public institutions to disclose gender-disaggregated employment and wage information. The CSF notes that a significant gender pay gap also persists across the EU, where the Pay Transparency Directive is now being transposed and implemented.

Follow-up to the 2021 Panel of Experts' Recommendations

19. The CSF notes that Korea has ratified nine of the ten ILO fundamental Conventions and further highlights that Korea still needs to make continued and sustained efforts towards ratifying ILO Convention No 105 on the abolition of forced labour. Recalling its 2025 conclusions, the CSF encourages the Korean Government to continue the progress made on these efforts, taking into account the domestic legal framework through technical cooperation with the ILO. It equally reiterates its 2025 call to those EU Member States that have not yet done so to urgently ratify the fundamental Conventions on occupational safety and health.
20. Under its standing item, and with the contribution of the ILO, the CSF considered follow-up to the recommendations of the 2021 Panel of Experts established under Article 13.15 of the FTA. It acknowledges the legislative, administrative and judicial developments concerning freedom of association, trade union participation and collective bargaining. The CSF welcomes the progress made by Korea since the Panel of Experts' report, including the ratification of ILO Conventions Nos 29, 87 and 98 and the developments concerning the trade union membership of dismissed and unemployed persons, the eligibility of trade union officers and the range of persons able to exercise freedom of association. It notes the assessment presented by the Korean side that the panel's recommendations have substantially, although not fully, been addressed. The CSF values the opportunity to recognise progress, exchange information and consider matters warranting further attention in a constructive and forward-looking manner.

21. The CSF points out that, under Article 13.4.3, the Parties: commit to respecting, promoting and realising, in their laws and practices, the principles concerning fundamental rights, namely freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour, the effective abolition of child labour and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation; reaffirm the commitment to effectively implementing the ILO Conventions that Korea and the Member States of the EU have ratified respectively; and will make continued and sustained efforts towards ratifying the fundamental ILO Conventions as well as the other Conventions that are classified as ‘up-to-date’ by the ILO. It welcomes continued updates from the Committee on Trade and Sustainable Development on its work in overseeing the implementation of the TSD Chapter and in monitoring the implementation of the Panel of Experts’ recommendations. The CSF will continue to devote its full attention to monitoring the implementation of the TSD Chapter as a whole, in addition to the follow-up to the 2021 panel’s report. To this end, the CSF will consult on including two agenda items in its next meeting: a review of the effective implementation of ratified ILO Conventions by both Parties, including by the Member States of the European Union, and an update on the cooperation activities listed under the TSD-related Annex 13, on the basis of information provided by the Parties. The follow-up to the recommendations of the 2021 Panel of Experts will be discussed by the CSF, as an advisory body to the TSD Committees, until they have been fully addressed.

Workshop on Emerging AI Governance and Challenges in Labour and the Environment

22. On 29 September, the workshop addressed emerging AI governance and challenges in labour and the environment under the theme ‘KOR-EU Shaping New Trade Rules in the AI Era’. Building on the previous year’s exchanges, participants considered the trade, business, labour and environmental dimensions of artificial intelligence (AI). The CSF encourages cooperation on trustworthy AI that supports innovation, sustainable enterprises and the protection of fundamental rights.
23. The exchange on AI governance highlighted the value of mutual understanding on ethics, data protection and related areas. The CSF took note of the presentation by the Korean side on Korea’s legal response to the use of AI in the world of work, according to which the AI Framework Act has been in force since January 2026 and treats hiring-related judgments as ‘high-impact AI’, amendment bills concerning AI in the workplace are pending before the National Assembly, and a tripartite committee on the AI transition has been established under the Economic, Social and Labour Council. The presentation observed that AI is already used in Korea in recruitment, monitoring and performance evaluation, that labour-specific provisions remain under development, and that social dialogue among government, business, labour and civil society is regarded as key to balancing worker protection with technological progress. The CSF encourages continued exchanges on these developments, while respecting each side’s legal framework and legitimate public policy objectives.
24. The CSF recognises the complementary importance of improving the environmental sustainability of AI itself and using AI to advance energy and environmental objectives. Cooperation could include exchanges on renewable energy forecasting, efficient grid operation, water management and climate-related early warning systems, drawing on practical experience and appropriate human oversight. The expansion of AI infrastructure should be considered alongside its electricity and water use, resource requirements and life-cycle impacts.

25. Both sides are encouraged to share experience on reliable data, technical standards and the skills needed to deploy such applications effectively. Assessing actual environmental benefits alongside resource demand can help identify applications that support decarbonisation and climate resilience. Such cooperation should connect innovation with measurable public benefits and responsible resource management. The workshop discussed the importance of workers' involvement and protection in the use of AI applications in the workplace.
26. The CSF welcomed the exchange on platform work, including the presentation by the EU side on the implementation of the EU Platform Work Directive and the information on ongoing discussions in Korea. Participants recognised that digital labour platforms create new opportunities for workers and businesses while raising challenges concerning employment status, social protection, collective rights, health and safety and algorithmic management, and underlined the need to ensure fair competition and quality employment. The CSF took note of the adoption of ILO Convention No 193 on Decent Work in the Platform Economy in June 2026, and encourages continued exchanges between Korea and the EU on regulatory approaches, labour market developments and good practices relating to platform work, as well as continued engagement of the Parties with their respective Domestic Advisory Groups on developments in this area.

Final Remarks

Outlook and Continued Engagement

27. The CSF encourages the Parties to take these conclusions into account in their continuing work on trade and sustainable development and welcomes continued and regular engagement with the respective Domestic Advisory Groups and the CSF as a whole. Maintaining communication with the relevant authorities through the established TSD mechanisms can help connect civil society perspectives with follow-up on the themes discussed at this meeting. In this respect, the CSF would welcome the Parties' comments and reaction to our conclusions in writing.
28. The EU DAG thanks the Korea DAG for hosting this year's CSF and its hospitality, and both DAGs express their intention to maintain dialogue and collaboration, and continue the welcome and established practice of intersessional engagements between the Korea and EU DAGs on matters they deem of mutual interest on further advancing the TSD objectives. They support exploring further thematic exchanges, including online workshops, on issues of common interest, with priorities and arrangements to be determined jointly. The CSF looks forward to building on this meeting through cooperative engagement that advances decent work, environmental sustainability and mutually beneficial trade relations between Korea and the EU.