



EESC Workers' Group statement of solidarity for Belgian workers during the general strike on 29 March

The Workers' Group of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) expresses its full solidarity and support to all Belgian workers taking part in the general strike on 29 March and their trade union confederations. We stand with Belgian workers taking action to defend their right to decent pay, including higher minimum wages for the lowest paid workers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a difficult time for all, including workers and businesses. However, the 0.4% pay increase offered by the Belgian employers' organisation in the negotiations on the interprofessional agreement is a slap in the face for many workers, who have kept the economy and our society going during the past year, often at great cost to themselves. During the pandemic, many of us have clapped to show our appreciation for these frontline essential workers. However, the time for clapping is over: it is now time to reward these workers - particularly the most precarious - by giving them the decent pay they deserve.

In its opinion on the European Commission's proposed directive on adequate minimum wages adopted at the March plenary session, the EESC expresses support for achieving adequate minimum wages and strengthening collective bargaining systems across the European Union, for making work pay, fighting poverty, and strengthening the role of social partners and social dialogue, in line with national industrial relations systems. It also outlines its concern about the increase in the proportion of people who work but still face poverty. Currently, 5% of Belgians who work are living in poverty, as they are not being paid enough.

Belgium has a strong tradition of social dialogue and collective bargaining. Regrettably however, as in many Member States, we observe that dialogue with employer organisations concerning improving wages and working conditions is becoming more difficult. While recognising the difficult economic climate, the pandemic has not affected all businesses and sectors equally and we call on employers to show solidarity.

Workers in Belgium and across the EU deserve fair wages, guaranteeing a decent standard of living and social protection for them and their families!