**Decent work: the EU must awaken consumer social responsibility and involve stakeholders in legislation**

**The recent crises, together with the colossal economic and social challenges of our time, threaten the principle of decent work. At its September plenary, the European Economic and Social Committee adopted an** [**opinion on Decent Work Worldwide**](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/decent-work-worldwide) **calling for stakeholders involvement, consumer social responsibility, and effective global regulatory frameworks.**

The climate crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, the recent technological advances, and the rise of the gig economy and zero-hour contracts have all contributed to keeping decent work beyond the reach of millions of workers across the globe. To address this issue, the European Commission presented a [Communication on Decent Work Worldwide](https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=25260&langId=en) in February 2022.

In its opinion, the Committee supports the Commission's initiative to promote decent work in all sectors and fields at the local and national levels, as well as the proposal to include mechanisms to assess and monitor the value chain of companies to ensure decent work. However, the EESC regrets the fact that these mechanisms do not provide for dialogue with social partners.

EESC president **Christa Schweng** opened the debate in plenary by urging for an "all hands on deck" approach to achieving decent work: "*Decent work puts people at the centre of development. The EU, as a responsible global leader, is reaffirming its commitment to decent work worldwide. I salute that many responsible businesses are putting in place good practices and programmes to make decent work integral to their business model."* Involving employers, trade unions and civil society is key to ensuring decent work throughout the supply chain and they can also provide guidance and support in developing new and effective regulatory frameworks.

The opinion emphasises the fact that decent work affects the demand side as well as the supply side. Consumers are increasingly demanding goods and services that are produced or delivered in a humane, equitable, and sustainable manner. Therefore, the EESC calls for this socially responsible role of consumers to be further promoted through better information and training.

**Addressing decent work within and outside the EU**

The EESC rapporteur of the opinion, **María del Carmen Barrera Chamorro,** urged the EU to continue to strengthen its role as a socially responsible leader in the world: "*This is a call for social justice around the world, but it also represents a condition for sustainable development and economic growth".*

With regard to the EU's bilateral and regional relations, the Committee particularly appreciates the EU's proposal to use trade policy as an instrument to encourage third-country companies to comply with international labour standards. The opinion emphasises that one of its objectives is to facilitate imports from countries whose companies respect social, labour and environmental requirements, including decent work.

Promoting decent work and social justice is also at the core of the regulatory frameworks and policies of the International Labor Organisation (ILO). The regional director of the ILO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, **Heinz Werner Koller**, stated that "*In our times of uncertainties, it might be timely to remember the ILO Constitution's key words from 1919, according to which "lasting peace can be established only if it is based on social justice". As you can see, we are not yet there. Achieving decent work remains a worldwide challenge. The ILO and the EU are close allies on this issue because we fight for the same values. I see a large space for exchanges and collaboration in the future."*

The EESC welcomes the fact that the European Commission's proposal for a global package of actions and tools is based on the ILO principles, with the elimination of child labour and forced labour at the heart of these efforts. For this reason, the opinion advocates for the ratification of international labour standards as well as EU support for a binding UN treaty on business and human rights and an ILO convention on decent work in supply chains.