

Workers' Group

EESC OPINIONS REVIEW

JANUARY-JULY 2021



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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Body	Number	Name	Rapp/Co-Rapp	Country	Plenary
SOC	649	A New Pact on Migration and Asylum	MORENO DÍAZ	ES	January
SOC °	664	Adequate Minimum Wages Directive	DEL RIO	IT	March
SOC	662	Teleworking and Gender Equality	KOLLER	HU	March
SOC	660	Challenges of Teleworking	TRINDADE	PT	March
SOC	663	Promoting skills for a more just, cohesive, sustainable, digital and resilient society	BABRAUSKIENĖ	LT	April
SOC	667	Union of Equality: LGBTIQ equality strategy 2020-2025	BARRERA CHAMORRO	ES	April
SOC	671	New strategy for the implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights	BÄUMLER	DE	June
SOC	672	European Democracy Action Plan	TRINDADE	PT	June
SOC	673	Strengthening of Europol's mandate	VON BROCKDORFF	MT	June
SOC	678	Binding pay transparency measures	RISTELÄ	FI	June
SOC	679	Action plan on the implementation of the EPSR	TRINDADE	PT	July
SOC	682	EU strategy on the rights of the child/Child Guarantee	BARRERA CHAMORRO	ES	July
SOC	684	Adult learning	BABRAUSKIENĖ	LT	July
INT	925	The role of social economy in the creation of jobs and in the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights	DEL RIO	IT	April
INT	930	Communication on cybersecurity strategy	VON BROCKDORFF	MT	April
INT	931	e-CODEX	YILDIRIM	FR	April
INT	902	Towards circular procurement to provide high quality goods and services	WYCKMANS	BE	June
INT	903	No Green Deal without a Social Deal	KLUGE	DE	June
INT	937	European partnership/Metrology	VON BROCKDORFF	MT	June

INT	953	Emissions EMNR/ Effets de la Covid	LEFÈVRE	FR	June
INT	934	Review of the Roaming Regulation	LEFÈVRE	FR	July
INT	943	Digitalisation for all	VON BROCKDORFF	MT	July
NAT	801	Revised action plan for the Atlantic strategy	TRINDADE	PT	January
NAT	808	Application of the Aarhus Convention – Access to Justice in Environmental Matters	CAÑO AGUILAR	ES	January
NAT	806	Evaluation on the CAP's impact on territorial development of rural areas	KÁLLAY	HU	April
NAT	807	Chemicals strategy for sustainability towards a toxic-free environment	NIKOLOPOULOU	ES	April
NAT	809	How to implement harmonisation of market entry for food supplements in the EU	MITOV	BG	April
ECO	538	Euro Area Economic Policy 2021	VORBACH	AT	January
ECO	531	Package for fair and simple taxation	DOZ ORRIT	ES	February
ECO	534	Digital Finance Strategy for the EU	DANDEA	RO	February
ECO	542	Brexit Adjustment Reserve	MARIN	RO	February
ECO	543	VAT – new implementing powers for the Commission	LEFÈVRE	FR	April
ECO	546	Administrative cooperation in the field of excise duties – electronic registers	PODRUZZSIK	HU	April
ECO	548	NextGenerationEU funding strategy	VORBACH	AT	July
TEN	718	Hydrogen Strategy	COULON	FR	January
TEN	723	A Renovation Wave for Europe	COULON	FR	February
TEN	732	Revision of the TEN-E Regulation guidelines	CHARRY	FR	March
TEN	729	Strategy for sustainable and smart mobility	BUZEK	DE	April

TEN	728	Evaluation – 2011 White Paper on Transport	COULON	FR	June
REX	533	Enhancing the accession process - A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans	ZORKO	SL	March
REX	539	Trade Policy Review – An open, sustainable and assertive Trade Policy	QUAREZ	FR	July
CCMI	177	Critical Raw Materials Resilience: Charting a Path towards greater Security and Sustainability	FORNEA	RO	March
CCMI	178	Sustainability requirements for batteries in the EU	UHLIG	FR	March
CCMI	179	Action Plan on Synergies between civil, defence and space industries	GARCÍA SALGADO	ES	July

Summaries of adopted opinions

January

SOC/649 - A New Pact on Migration and Asylum

José Antonio Moreno Díaz

The lack of coordination in migration has created an urgent need for effective and accurate security policies, which could ensure a coordinated response in line with the EU's values and objectives. Although the focus is on strengthening external borders and returning migrants who do not meet eligibility criteria, the attention should be paid more to safe and legal immigration pathways and integration and inclusion of immigrants and asylum seekers. The PMA should also take onboard the debate about the United Nations' Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration 2018 as it plays a crucial role of a multinational precursor for global migration management. Furthermore, there should also be established link to the Sustainable Development Goals UN Framework, where EU institutions and Member States can coordinate their migration and mobility strategies. On the one hand, the PMA rightly emphasises the need for solidarity between member states and points out significant inconsistencies. On the other hand, the Workers' Group is uncertain about the results of voluntary and selective solidarity, which can undermine the coordination and management of migration in the whole Union. Moreover, the PMA lacks enough guarantees for the respect of fundamental rights in the pre-entry screening system or reception conditions for migrants.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!Xc88um>

NAT/801 - Revised action plan for the Atlantic strategy

Carlos Manuel Trindade

The Workers' Group welcomes the update of the priorities of the Atlantic action plan on account of the contribution this will make, especially against the backdrop of the COVID-19 crisis, towards economic recovery, safeguarding and creating jobs, while also boosting the preservation of coastal and marine ecosystems and contributing to sustainability objectives. The role of ports in the sustainable development of coastal tourism, aquaculture, shipbuilding, ocean renewable energy and innovation, the development of blue skills thanks to the promotion of ocean literacy, the role of marine renewable energy as a vehicle for the energy transition and a drive for a healthy ocean and resilient coasts are all aspects included in the action plan. However, concrete measures are needed for fisheries and tourism, and archipelagic areas highly dependent on sea economy. Clear objectives with respect to partnerships with European third countries are equally urgent, as is proper dedicated funding for projects under this plan. Finally, we call for the re-establishment of the Atlantic Forum and the involvement in it of trade unions, public authorities and private operators for the successful implementation of the action plan.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!HG64Bc>

NAT/808 - Application of the Aarhus Convention - Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

Isabel Caño Aguilar

The United Nations Aarhus Convention grants individuals and civil society, when complying with national law criteria, access to judicial actions against private or public actors contravening environmental protection. The Commission proposal broadens the conditions under which the public can access and challenge acts for environmental reasons. However, several issues worry the Workers' Group; in particular, the lack of inclusion of social partners and specially Trade Unions is a very problematic point. Trade Unions are key players and fundamental for environmental protection, and should be given equal footing in access to justice for environmental reasons. Alongside, the proposal should consider the large impact that binding non-legislative acts at EU level can have in the member states.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!Rg83nW>

ECO/538 - Euro area economic policy 2021

Judith Vorbach

The Commission's recommendations to support recovery, to increase investment, to foster fair working conditions and to ensure the effective involvement of social partners in policy making should take centre stage. Moreover, the impact of the crisis on inequality and socio-economic insecurity should be more carefully considered. For the Workers' Group, an equal distribution of the benefits of the recovery will be decisive in order to strengthen confidence and stabilise demand, without ignoring that modernised and prosperity-focused fiscal rules are well overdue.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!Gh78Xf>

TEN/718 - Hydrogen strategy

Pierre Jean Coulon

Clean hydrogen can play a fundamental role in a new model for society, providing a sustainable alternative where decarbonisation cannot be applied effectively, in a renewable mix fueling our industry and transport. A first step, however, would be to stop subsidising fossil fuels. And to ensure the success of this strategy, all the stakeholders should be involved, and workers should be given a greater role by means of direct, representative consultation and participation.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!Cm88xU>

February

ECO/531 - Package for fair and simple taxation

Javier Doz Orrit

Each year, an average of more than €200 bn a year, in VAT, corporate tax, income and others, is lost to tax evasion and fraud in the EU, despite recent improvements applying some anti-BEPS measures and legal efforts by the EU combatting tax fraud in the past. The relevance of this massive gap in public income is even more evident amid the pandemic, when state resources are badly needed to keep people alive and the economy afloat. For this, the Workers' Group welcomes the Commission's Action Plan to both combat tax evasion and make citizens' lives easier in terms of red tape. Notwithstanding member states' prerogative in tax matters, coordination is essential to have a minimum corporate tax rate and to avoid unfair tax competition among countries. Trade Unions and civil society at large should be involved in this effort to make the single market work properly with a coherent fiscal framework.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!gg49HV>

ECO/534 - Digital Finance Strategy for the EU

Petru Sorin Dandea

The field of digital financial services is undergoing a major transformation, and the strategy drafted by the commission is focused on four priorities surrounding it: tackling fragmentation in the digital single market for financial services, ensuring the EU regulatory framework facilitates digital innovation, creating a European financial data space to promote data-driven innovation, and addressing the new challenges and risks from digital transformation. For these tasks, several legislative and non-legislative proposals are included; the Workers' Group welcomes in particular the idea of setting up a EU digital finance platform, and strongly urges the Commission to consider including Trade Unions and civil society in it. For the group, while acknowledging the role of strong European market participants, the part of specialised, cooperative, regional or mutual local providers must not be overlooked. More importantly, the Commission fails to take into account that the current transformation means many employees in the financial sector risk losing their jobs in the near future, and demands the cooperation with the social partners in the affected sectors.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!hw97TW>

ECO/542 - Brexit Adjustment Reserve

Florian Marin

To address the negative economic and social consequences of Brexit in all member states, supporting employment and businesses, the Commission has proposed a Brexit Adjustment Reserve with an amount of €5 bn over the following 30 months, outside of the MFF plans for the period. Despite the positive sign of the Trade and Cooperation agreement, many things remain unclear, with the potential losses impossible to quantify and supply chains likely disrupted by the new costs and delays. Moreover, the Workers' Group is concerned that the free movement of people and services have no agreement yet once the transition ends on 30th June this year. Rising unemployment and reduced income from Brexit must mean the Social Pillar is prioritised and mutual recognition of titles further negotiated. Trade Unions and civil society are key for a real partnership EU-UK, and also to raise awareness of the new rules in place for workers across the EU.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!HK96PQ>

TEN/723 - A Renovation Wave for Europe

Pierre Jean Coulon

Homes and buildings in the EU account for 40% of all energy consumption, thus making their reform into more efficient and sustainable places a key feature for the future. These changes are a potential 'win-win-win': win for the climate, for jobs, and for sustainable and affordable housing for all, solving a large part of the energy poverty situation many people live in right now. The renovation strategy can create 200,000 jobs until 2030 and improve directly the lives of more than 100 million people. However, to ensure that this benefits all, financing must be made easily accessible to renovate. For the Workers' Group, Trade Unions have a key role to play in oversight, ensuring the process is fair and transparent. Moreover, it would be a great opportunity to develop an ERASMUS+ for workers in those construction works, too.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!Fp76qG>

March

SOC/664 - Adequate minimum wages directive

Cinzia del Rio

Adequate minimum wages are a key component of social cohesion, combatting in-work poverty and inequality. However, many in Europe work under very harsh conditions, particularly precarious workers. And while in some countries collective bargaining is strong enough to ensure good working conditions, that is not the case everywhere. The absence of social protection brings dire consequences, particularly when other problems mount, as it is currently the case with the brutal health and social crisis brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. Against this situation, the Commission Proposal intends both to ensure no one in Europe works without a decent living wage, and that collective bargaining is strengthened and extended, all while respecting the different traditions of member states in social dialogue. Through national action plans, agreed in a tripartite process with the social partners, upward wage convergence can be attained while combatting pay discrimination of any kind, as well as in-work poverty. The Workers' Group welcomes the effort and recognises the need for such a set of measures, as well as the proven legal grounds for the directive; however, the current proposal, with only general principles about the adequacy of wages, could be improved greatly by setting binding indicators to guide member states and social partners in their assessment of the adequacy of statutory minimum wages and in identifying and introducing relevant measures in the national action plans.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!GU68Ny>

SOC/662 - Teleworking and gender equality

Erika Koller

Teleworking can be an important tool to help workers balance their work and private lives. For parents and carers in particular, when both parents telework, it can allow more equal sharing of caring responsibilities and domestic work. However, a proper gender analysis is required as there is also a risk that teleworking could perpetuate existing gender inequalities at work and in society. Policies that appear gender 'neutral' may in fact be gender 'blind' and negatively impact on women. Teleworking can lead to a lack of visibility in the work community, missing out on formal and informal support structures, and access to information resulting in workers being overlooked for promotion and training opportunities, and lacking important information relating to pay. For women, this risks exacerbating workplace inequalities such as the gender pay gap. There is also the risk that teleworking is seen as offering flexibility for women to balance caring obligations with work, thus perpetuating gender stereotypes where women continue to shoulder the unequal burden of caring responsibilities and unpaid domestic work. The situation during the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly highlighted this danger.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!Nj99Vy>

SOC/660 - Challenges of Teleworking

Carlos Manuel Trindade

During the COVID-19 pandemic, teleworking has helped to ensure that the economy has continued to function and has saved jobs in the EU. But, the rapid shift to teleworking as a way to address the health crisis has created huge challenges for workers, businesses and society. In this respect, we acknowledge the far-sightedness of the European social partners in their 2002 Agreement on Telework and call for the continuation of social dialogue and collective bargaining and for drawing up rules tailored to each country and sector. In this regard, it is essential for Member States to implement the Work-Life Balance Directive. Other key issues are to ensure that teleworking is voluntary and reversible and to guarantee the effectiveness of teleworkers' rights, health and safety conditions at work, as well as the right of workers to disconnect. This includes the responsibility for employers to provide the equipment needed and for paying workers the extra costs incurred when working at home, and appropriate mechanisms to measure normal working hours and overtime that respect workers' privacy.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!kf44WQ>

REX/533 - Enhancing the accession process - A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans

Andrej Zorko

Integrating the Western Balkans into the EU represents a geostrategic investment in the peace, security and economic growth of the entire continent. Therefore, a credible accession perspective is essential also as a driver of transformation in the region, which in turn enhances our collective security and prosperity, and an essential tool for promoting democracy, the rule of law and respect for fundamental rights, which are also the main engines of economic integration, regional reconciliation and stability. Furthermore, current political but also economic and social challenges and the COVID pandemic prove that the EU and the Western Balkans region share similar interests and problems that should be jointly addressed, while ensuring strong involvement of social partners and other civil society organisations in the enlargement process. We therefore welcome the EU's determination to strengthen its cooperation with the region and the commitment of the Western Balkan partners to implement the necessary reforms in a thorough and decisive way.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!RV73qg>

TEN/732 - Revision of the TEN-E Regulation guidelines

Philippe Charry

The revision of the TEN-E regulation, which dates from 2013, is essential for the Union to be in line with the objectives of the Green Deal. The EESC reiterates its desire to work towards a decarbonised, affordable and secure energy supply. However, the proposal lacks ambition at a time when energy security is far from being guaranteed for some Member States and the interconnection objectives set for 2020 have not been met for more than a third of the Member States. We call for the regulation to take better account of the need to provide energy supplies to all populations in a secure and affordable way in order to combat energy poverty. With this in mind, natural gas network projects must not be excluded from the regulation, as the Commission proposes. Furthermore, priority must be given to innovative projects such as ITER (a project based on hydrogen fusion) and to the design of networks that reduce transport-related energy losses. The EESC fully supports the Commission's stated intention to move towards fully integrated energy networks and therefore calls for an end to the policy of unbundling/break-up of operators. To ensure that the overall balance of the system is managed, a study should be carried out into the creation of a trans-European operator of extra-high-voltage transnational electricity transmission networks.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!Vw74cx>

CCMI/177 - Critical Raw Materials Resilience: Charting a Path towards greater Security and Sustainability

Dumitru Fornea

We welcome the Commission's approach, as supply of critical raw materials is essential for the industrial and technological base in the EU and for implementing the ambitious objectives of the EU Green Deal while ensuring new jobs and, at the same time, a fair transition in communities affected by industrial change. We support in particular the financing of green exploration, the streamlining of authorisations for mining activities, the development of recycling in order to separate raw materials from waste and reuse it, instead of exporting waste, the strengthening of scientific education and of industrial and research capacity in order to explore alternative raw/input materials for the EU industry, and the international cooperation with a view to ensure a global level playing field and conditions which would facilitate EU joint ventures in third, resource-rich countries, especially from Africa and South America. The Workers' Group emphasizes the importance of defining appropriate criteria to check if the global supply chains of these types of raw materials comply with ethical principles.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!KN86Vn>

CCMI/178 - Sustainability requirements for batteries in the EU

Franck Uhlig

Battery production should take place with the lowest possible environmental impact, with materials obtained in full respect of human rights as well as safety, social and ecological standards. We support the efforts to strengthen governance and transparency in the battery value chain and consider the promotion of eco-design and battery recycling as well as funding of corresponding training a priority. We also call for the rapid introduction of maximum carbon footprint thresholds for battery manufacturing and upstream material supply logistics, and for better labelling in order to inform about hazardous substances.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!Bn98ry>

April

SOC/667 - Union of Equality: LGBTIQ equality strategy 2020-2025

Maria del Carmen Barrera Chamorro

The EESC welcomes the Commission communication that aims to reduce discrimination and ensure the safety and fundamental rights of LGBTIQ people throughout the EU. Europe takes a big step with a strategy that recognizes, above all, the right to freedom, dignity and equality of LGTBIQ people. Recognizing the identity of trans people dignifies the entire Union, is a historical debt to them, and positions the Union at the forefront of defending the rights of those who need it most. We ask for a strong implementing and monitoring mechanism for this strategy and consider it urgent to combat discrimination in the workplace and in terms of access to the labour market, and to extend the Equal Treatment directive accordingly. The EU must support Member States in banning so-called conversion practices and adapt legislation in the field of asylum and migration in order to better include the needs of LGTBIQ people. The EESC has drawn up an opinion that urges the Commission to strengthen its commitment to human rights and to make Europe a world benchmark in the defense of civil rights and public freedoms.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!BW43rC>

SOC/663 - Promoting skills for a more just, cohesive, sustainable, digital and resilient society

Tatjana Babrauskienė

The EESC underlines the importance of making efficient use of the Recovery and Resilience Facility by improving the quality and inclusiveness of education and training in order to respond to the needs of learners of all ages and learning stages. It recommends setting achievable long-term goals and establishing a constant monitoring system within the European Education Area (EEA) for each Member State and considers social dialogue an essential tool for successful policy development and implementation at EU and national level. It also recommends an update of indicators in order to fully reflect the impact of the COVID-19 crisis as to make sure that benchmarks and targets in the Action Plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights and other initiatives are met. Education policies should contribute to equal access to quality education and training, reskilling and upskilling of workers for a just transition in the labour market, providing support to help low-skilled adults to find employment and to obtain entrepreneurship skills, and helping businesses to catch up with global innovation and competitiveness. The implementation of the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-27 needs to ensure effective social dialogue and consultation with stakeholders, respect and enforcement of labour rights, and worker information, consultation and participation in digital skills and entrepreneurship skills development, in particular in VET, adult learning and employee training to reduce the skills gaps companies face.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!Ud77dt>

INT/925 - The role of social economy in the creation of jobs and in the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights

Cinzia Del Rio

We support the initiative of the Commission to define an Action Plan for the social economy, in the framework of the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The various bodies making up the social economy are strategic partners in implementing the Pillar and their broad involvement in the national recovery and resilience plans is key. We also want clear criteria for the recognition of social economy organisations and enterprises, which require that social objectives of general interest take precedence as well as their democratic governance. When the role of the social economy in creating and maintaining employment involves disadvantaged workers and disadvantaged areas, appropriate support policies are needed that give proper recognition to the general-interest role of these organisations. Facilitating worker buy-outs by a dedicated European investment fund, providing specific forms of consultation and worker participation, encouraging volunteering and facilitating the transition from volunteering to stable forms of paid employment are also important goals to pursue.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!Xm44fP>

INT/930 - Communication on cybersecurity strategy

Philip von Brockdorff

The proposed Cybersecurity Strategy aims at safeguarding the online environment, providing the highest possible freedom and security for EU citizens, businesses and governments against cyber threats. Specific activities are proposed at EU level to ensure robust and effective protection whilst safeguarding citizens' rights. We call for additional funding resources to enable investments in cybersecurity infrastructure, and welcome the proposal on setting-up a network for cybersecurity. In order to overcome skills gaps in cybersecurity, the opinion recommends an EU-wide Cyber Security Career Pathways Tool. It further recommends the following:

- fighting disinformation should be part of any strategy on cybersecurity,
- foreign investment in strategic sectors should be monitored,
- to move towards quantum-resistant or post-quantum cryptography.

Finally, it highlights the importance of social dialogue in the design of cybersecurity policies that effectively protect individuals in the case of remote working and online activity in general.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!BB94DP>

INT/931 - e-CODEX

Ozlem Yildirim

The e-CODEX (e-Justice Communication via On-line Data Exchange) system, today in the stage of a pilot project of some Member States, aims to promote the digitalisation of cross-border judicial proceedings and to facilitate communication between Member States' judicial authorities. The Commission proposes a regulation to establish the e-CODEX system at EU level, and entrusting the European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (eu-LISA) with the system's operational management.

The EESC welcomes the proposed regulatory initiative as a way to simplify and speed up cross-border judicial procedures and cooperation thus contributing to a better functioning of the single market, but also as part of the EU's overarching digital strategy. In anticipation of the future, the EESC recommends including a provision to open up the possibility of other uses by other public administrations, including for example the transfer of e-health records.

The EESC underlines the need for transparent decision-making within the agency entrusted with the system (euLisa) and for a high degree of data security as well as the need of ensuring the principle of independence of the judiciary in the permanent operation and further development of e-CODEX. It also stresses that the development of digital justice must aim at ensuring that all citizens in the EU have secure, safe, reliable and easy access to justice.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!yf47fG>

TEN/729 - Strategy for sustainable and smart mobility

Tanja Buzek

The Commission proposes a new strategy to achieve the objectives of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in transport by 55 % in 2030 and 90 % by 2050, as agreed in the Green Deal. It also sets out a roadmap to digitalise and develop automation and AI in the transport sector. In the light of the COVID-19 experience, the strategy makes resilience against future crises a key objective of the EU transport policy.

While we welcome the fact that social issues and the single market are considered as key aspects in this strategy, we note that identified shortcomings are not sufficiently addressed. A more comprehensive strategy to boost rail freight and short sea shipping is missing. Past transport policies with a focus on the single market didn't prevent worsening working conditions in all transport modes. It is urgent to apply the same level of ambition to a socially sustainable transport system. The EESC sees a need to establish a social taskforce for transport, including all relevant Directorates-General. In addition, a future crisis contingency plan must seek to prevent negative effects for transport workers, be based on a serious organised civil society and social dialogue and be in agreement with the social partners.

Social dumping and unfair practices in one sector create distortions in other sectors. Precarious working conditions and the lack of enforcement of social legislation distort pricing signals and choices for a transport service. The EESC sees the need for an initiative to include labour costs as part of a fair pricing policy for sustainable transport services, in addition to the internalisation of all external costs. Fair free market pricing for a transport service must include a living wage, the same pay for the same work at the same place, health care and social security coverage.

To avoid transport poverty, access to affordable quality public transport is essential as a sustainable alternative to individual transport modes and is of particular importance for rural areas. In achieving sustainable urban mobility, more emphasis should be given to public transport as the backbone of that transition and an important source of social inclusion and local quality employment.

More info at <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/strategy-sustainable-and-smart-mobility>

NAT/8o6 - Evaluation on the CAP's impact on territorial development of rural areas

Piroska Kállay

The EESC considers that CAP funding had, all together, a positive impact. The most efficient instruments were LEADER and the fund for community-led local development (CLLD), which contributed to diversifying the economy of rural areas, creating new governance mechanisms, preserving historical and cultural heritage and supporting entrepreneurship, although CLLD needs more funding and a stronger involvement of local actors.

As regards the employment and social inclusion of vulnerable groups in agricultural activities, the impact of the CAP did not match expectations, but the main obstacles for rural development remain insufficient investment in infrastructure (transport, digital), (vocational) training and SGIs.

Investments should be enhanced and subsidies made conditional not only on environmental and health standards, but also on human and labour rights (social conditionality on decent working conditions). The CAP should also focus more on job creation by contributing to a more diversified rural economy in rural areas, with a stronger role for civil society organisations to ensure that local needs are properly taken into consideration.

More info at <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/information-reports/evaluation-caps-impact-territorial-development-rural-areas-information-report>

NAT/8o7 - Chemicals strategy for sustainability towards a toxic-free environment

Maria Nikolopoulou

The chemicals strategy for a toxic-free environment is a big step towards protecting people who are in contact with hazardous substances, either by working with them or by using products that contain them. Protecting people and the environment has to be our number one priority.

For the strategy to be a success, all stakeholders need to be involved in its definition and implementation. We welcome the Commission's decision to establish a High-Level Round Table for this purpose. We need a definition of what uses of chemicals are "essential" as well as a clearly outlined methodology for how to make chemicals "safe and sustainable by design". The EU should be a strategically autonomous global frontrunner in the production and use of safe and sustainable chemicals. We call for proper and consistent labelling to be mandatory, with enforcement for the whole supply chain.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!pc49hV>

NAT/809 - How to implement harmonisation of market entry for food supplements in the EU

Veselin Mitov

Food supplements are more and more popular but the European directive has not changed in 20 years. This leads to a distortion of the market inside the EU and uncertainties about the safety of the products. The EESC advocates revising the legislation to have a harmonized approach regarding the safety of the ingredients and the products, to prevent unfair competition with an optimized market surveillance and to ensure a better information to the consumer.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!dt46TH>

ECO/543 - VAT – new implementing powers for the Commission

Christophe Lefèvre

The general objective pursued by the Commission proposal in the interest of ensuring legal certainty and predictability with regard to the VAT Directive is to be supported. More uniform rules will enhance the Single Market and make it easier for SMEs to engage in cross-border activities. But the EESC considers that tough opposition from some Member States is to be expected and that the Commission should look for alternatives, like strengthening the existing advisory Committee on VAT and its decision-making process; tracing heterogeneous applications and implementations of agreed VAT rules at national level in order to make the existing differences transparent and thus improve uniformity under the current regulatory framework; and publishing impact assessments of any differences in the implementation or interpretation of agreed VAT rules in any Member State (“peer pressure”).

Furthermore, the “implementing powers” conferred to the Commission by its new proposal could raise fears that they might lead to actual modifications of the directive, which risks further to raise opposition from the Member States.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!ux66uK>

ECO/546 - Administrative cooperation in the field of excise duties – electronic registers

Szilárd Podruzsik

The Commission proposal amends Council Regulation (EU) No 389/2012, which lays down the legal basis for administrative cooperation between Member States in the field of excise duties with regard to the content of national electronic registers.

The EESC supports improving the administrative cooperation between national tax authorities and the use of IT and technologically enhanced systems to improve tax collection and tackle fraud. It has become necessary to adapt national registers after the approval of Directive 2020/262. The EESC encourages the Member States to carefully consider and monitor the resulting implementation costs but adequate extra investments in IT and cybersecurity of the registers should be promptly carried out if necessary in order to protect the privacy of European businesses and people.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!Jq76kq>

June

SOC/678 – Binding pay transparency measures

Pekka Ristelä

Equal pay for men and women for equal work or work of equal value is one of the fundamental rights and principles of both the EU and international and European human rights instruments. The proposal aims to make it easier for **workers to enforce the principle of equal pay where they consider that they have been the victims of pay discrimination, to contribute to greater transparency in pay structures and to strengthen the role of national bodies in enforcing this principle**. The Workers' Group welcomes the fact that the proposed Directive is wide in scope, applying to all workers in both public and private sectors, and that it recognises intersectional aspects of discrimination. However, the proposal should be strengthened in various respects, particularly regarding the criteria to be used to determine the value of work, the coverage of some of the key transparency obligations, and the role of the social partners and collective bargaining in the implementation of the principle of equal pay. Finally, measures should be taken to promote collective bargaining on equal pay and other measures aimed at closing the gender pay gap, without prejudice to the autonomy of the social partners.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!FJ73Fb>

SOC/671 - New strategy for the implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights

Christian Bäumler

The proposal contains clear commitments and places a firm emphasis on application and implementation issues. This is a direction that the Committee has consistently advocated. Major social, economic and political developments have complicated fundamental rights protection and brought new challenges for the current frameworks, including for the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The current pandemic significantly increases risks to the health, safety and welfare of millions of people across the continent. Unfortunately, after ten years of implementation of the Charter, there is still a limited knowledge among Europeans of its existence or role. **All EU institutions have to stand firm and give strong support to all those civil society organisations, human rights activists and journalists** who face physical and verbal attacks, intimidation and harassment, including abusive lawsuits, violence and online and offline hate speech. The Workers' Group stands ready to assist in developing a more comprehensive and detailed plan in this respect, especially through its Fundamental Rights and Rule of Law Group. The opinion also suggests including the EU anti-racism action plan in the comprehensive planning process, as well as the EU Disability and LGBTIQ Strategies. **Finally, the Workers' Group stresses that the Charter of Fundamental Rights must also include social rights. The implementation thereof is of considerable importance for people's lives, while social dialogue should be enhanced and refocused on the fundamental rights set out in the Charter.**

More info at <https://europa.eu/!Xr99gu>

SOC/672 - European Democracy Action Plan

Carlos Manuel Trindade

The European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP), sets out an enhanced EU policy framework and specific measures organised into three pillars: **promoting free and fair elections and strong democratic participation; supporting free and independent media; and countering disinformation.** However, the European Commission should take political action regarding the Member States that attempt to take advantage of the challenging situation created by COVID-19 in order to weaken the rule of law. Moreover, the EC must create a specific pillar in the EDAP for the involvement of civil society and social partners and the promotion of labour democracy. Furthermore, the Workers' Group is disappointed that the EDAP has failed to address the important role of the social contract in reducing inequalities and encouraging Europeans to embrace democratic ideals and does not include any measures to strengthen this role. Likewise, social dialogue and collective bargaining are not recognised or supported in the plan, and nor has the contribution of these areas to the stability of European democracies been made visible.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!wH84mc>

SOC/673 - Strengthening of Europol's mandate

Philip Von Brockdorff

In response to rising security threats, particularly those posed by criminal organisations, the EESC welcomes the Commission's proposal on strengthening Europol's mandate insofar as it improves data protection safeguards and research capabilities. This will help boost the fight against organised crime and terrorist activity and reinforce operational police cooperation in the EU Member States to protect our citizens. The proposal aims to support crime prevention authorities to find innovative solutions to counter international crime and keep up with the evolving landscape, while it encourages cooperation with third countries. Strengthening Europol's capacity should involve **prioritising cross-border investigations, particularly with regard to serious attacks against whistleblowers and investigative journalists who play an essential role in exposing corruption, fraud, mismanagement and other wrongdoing** in the public and private sectors.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!MT63qt>

INT/903 – No Green Deal without a Social Deal

Norbert Kluge

The effects of the pandemic on jobs and companies are unprecedented, affecting health and safety, work organisation and companies' economic and financial conditions. States, companies and citizens together have to tackle rapidly evolving and fundamental challenges and ensure that no one is left behind. The transition towards greener and more sustainable economic paradigms will trigger high economic costs carrying the risk of increasing social inequality and the erosion of social cohesion. **There will be no "Green Deal" without an integrated "Social Deal"**. A social deal certainly should not be related only to "work". It is about income, social security and fiscal support for all who need it, including those without any access to work at all. Companies have to contribute to the Green/Social Deal, and social dialogue will be key for a just transition. Including workers in companies' procedures will improve risk management and compliance control. This is also reflected in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, and constitutes the central notion of **workers' voice**: information, consultation and participation of workers at the workplace, which plays a key role in shaping the economic transition and fostering workplace innovation.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!hU98bw>

INT/902 – Towards circular procurement to provide high quality goods and services (OIO)

Ferre Wyckmans

Governments constitute Europe's biggest consumers and their expenditure is determined by public procurement. A transparent, digital and competitive Circular Public Procurement (CPP) instrument, with Green Public Procurement (GPP), falls under policies to promote development of the single market, to deliver high-quality goods and services to citizens and consumers, and to develop an innovative, smart, sustainable and socially responsible European public procurement culture. **For the Workers' Group, the CPP is important as it can allow administrations to move beyond the lowest price criterion at the time of purchase and to evaluate the quality and circularity aspects of tenders and the quality of work.** The opinion stresses as well that the quality of employment must be reflected in the requirement to enter into public contracts with companies that apply collective agreements guaranteeing that all workers are covered by the national ones in force.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!kU97hP>

INT/937 - European partnership/Metrology

Philip Von Brockdorff

Metrology deals with the scientific study of measurements with respect to industry standards. Measurements are essential for innovation as they not only impact quality but also influence different technical parameters. Measurement techniques are constantly evolving and this together with rapid technological advancement is supplementing the demand for accurate and reliable metrology products. **The Workers' Group supports the proposal as this will boost research and innovation in advanced communication technologies such as 5G, the internet of things (IoT), the smart grid and smart homes and others.** The Workers' Group is also considering the proposal as a step towards a European economy that aims to be at the forefront of industry, technology and digitalisation. Advance metrology can play a supporting role in some of Europe's biggest challenges, from healthcare to climate change, while it can also help reduce energy consumption.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!rN63uC>

INT/953 – NRMM Emissions / Covid Effects

Christophe Lefèvre

In the light of the COVID-19 crisis, which has caused a major disruption of supply chains for manufacturers of non-road mobile machinery (NRMM), the EESC has looked into the proposal for a regulation, which it deems to be an appropriate and proportionate response to the economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. The six-month extension for the manufacture of non-road mobile machinery fitted with "transition engines" and the nine-month extension for the placing on the market, instead of 12 months for both in 2020, are therefore warranted and balanced. **While the Workers' Group reiterates the need to contribute to meeting the EU's air quality targets, it also believes that the proposal guarantees the smooth operation of the market, while ensuring both economic balance for the parties concerned and a high level of public health and environmental protection.**

More info at <https://europa.eu/!hP89QK>

TEN/728 – opinion on the Evaluation – 2011

Pierre Jean Coulon

The evaluation offers an opportunity to highlight the technical, political and social progress, and in particular the road transport regulation part of the mobility package adopted in 2020, while pointing out the goals that have not been met. The evaluations must take the form of regular and dedicated progress reports at intervals enabling a real assessment to be made of progress, delays and their causes. The Workers' Group supports the greening of transport, but stresses that **the energy transition must be fair** and provide viable and realistic alternatives that take account of the specific economic and social territorial features. An open, continuous and transparent exchange of views on the implementation of the White Paper between civil society, the Commission and other relevant players should be established. Finally, the European Commission must put in place the necessary measures to ensure the harmonisation of social standards for intra-EU traffic.

More info at <https://europa.eu/!XG76xt>

July

SOC/679 – Action plan on the implementation of the EPSR

Carlos Manuel Trindade

As the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted every aspect of human life, worsening pre-existing social issues, and put tremendous pressure on state institutions, communities, organisations and businesses, **the Action Plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights comes at the right moment.** As it is stated in the Porto Declaration the implementation of **the EPSR will strengthen the Union's drive towards a digital, green and fair transition and contribute to achieving upward social and economic convergence and addressing the demographic challenges.** The social dimension, social dialogue and the active involvement of social partners have always been at the core of a highly competitive social market economy. Moreover, the Action Plan should be based on concreteness and tangibility, with actions that are measurable and accompanied by monitoring frameworks. In conclusion, **guaranteeing minimum social standards for every person living in the EU is of the utmost importance for building a fair and inclusive society.**

More info at <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/action-plan-implementation-european-pillar-social-rights>

SOC/682 - EU strategy on the rights of the child/Child Guarantee

Maria del Carmen Barrera Chamorro

The unacceptable figure of one in four children across the EU growing up at risk of poverty and social exclusion requires a coordinated European approach. There must be an ambitious target aiming to lift all children out of poverty by 2030 and not only five million children. The Workers' Group supports national action plans on the Child Guarantee that include a set of two- and multi-generation measures to develop supports for both children and their parents. **Parents and carers must be supported through a mix of actions: adequate income, work-life balance, the take-up of adequately paid maternity, paternity and parental leave, carer's leave, flexible work arrangements and family-friendly workplaces.** A stronger Europe-wide policy framework on children's rights is needed and has been called for by many stakeholders. The EESC Workers' Group recommends that the EU grants free access to early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities and healthcare or grant these services free of charge.

More info at <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/eu-strategy-rights-childchild-guarantee>

SOC/684 - Adult learning

Tatjana Babrauskienė

The rapid invention and spread of new technologies need to be accompanied by effective upskilling and reskilling. The Workers' Group underlines that the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on Europe's society and economy further highlighted the importance of effective education and training policies and high-quality jobs in supporting a sustainable and just social and economic recovery and resilience. **Adult Learning is essential for helping adults improve and acquire citizenship skills and take an active role in society. Lifelong learning should become a lifestyle for all to overcome disparities and inequalities in society and it should also become a reality at the workplace.** In this respect, the use of "skills" is more than important in its broader meaning and understanding concerning the workplace with social and personal life as a holistic perception of the skills development process.

More info at <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/adult-learning-0>

INT/943 – Digitalisation for all

Philip Von Brockdorff

European societies are moving online and the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the need for society to digitalise. The Workers' Group calls for the **swift adoption of an inclusive EU digital government policy**. In pursuing this inclusivity, governments must ensure the interoperability, quality, human-centricity, transparency, security, safety and the accessibility of digital public services and products, as well as optimal access to health, education and economic and cultural opportunities. Finally, work practices such as remote working be implemented with full consideration for **work-life balance. Social dialogue, support to SMEs and social economy enterprises, and respect for workers' rights, including collective bargaining, are paramount to ensuring a smooth transition.**

More info at <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/upgrading-inclusive-secure-and-trustworthy-digitalisation-all>

INT/934 – Review of the Roaming Regulation

Christophe Lefèvre

The proposal adjusts maximum wholesale charges to guarantee **the sustainable provision of retail roaming services at national prices**. It also introduces new measures to increase transparency and **ensure a genuine "roam-like-at-home" experience with regard to quality of service and access to emergency services while roaming**. Where the problem is poor local infrastructure, the EESC Workers' Group, recommends increasing investment in this infrastructure, particularly to improve coverage of "white spots", but also introducing minimum requirements to be progressively met by operators in order to enable consumers to make full use of these services. While the regulation **refers to "fair use" to describe roaming usage, the Workers' Group regrets that it completely fails to define its limits**, nor does it address fair use policy rules for unlimited tariff plans, or the pricing of international calls, irrespective of whether the customer is roaming or not.

More info at <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/review-roaming-regulation>

REX/539 –An open, sustainable and assertive Trade Policy

Christophe Quarez

In addition to the global pandemic, there are opportunities and risks related to world trade and the European economy. It is the right time to rethink global and EU trade rules. Therefore, the EESC Workers' Group welcomes the new **EU Trade Policy Strategy**. We need to support the principle of promoting an "Open, Strategic and Assertive" trade policy as a way of improving market access and levelling the playing field. In practice, it must drive sustainable growth, competitiveness, **decent jobs and better consumer choices in Europe. Modernising the World Trade Organization (WTO) is the top priority**, given its central role in delivering an effective multilateral matrix for a modern trade agenda with environmental and social issues. Finally, the Workers' Group regrets **the lack of reference to the crucial role of civil society in trade**, and stresses the need to boost cooperation with civil society from shaping to monitoring trade tools and agreements.

More info at <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/trade-policy-review-open-sustainable-and-assertive-trade-policy>

CCMI/179 – Action Plan on Synergies between civil, defence and space industries

Manuel García Salgado

Together with civil aeronautics, space, defence and security form a high-tech ecosystem of strategic importance for Europe. Many companies within this ecosystem undertake both defence and civil activities and are part of complex cross-border supply chains, which include numerous mid-caps and SMEs. The emergence of new technologies offers huge potential for future synergies. **The Workers' Group believes that the initiative to promote synergies between EU-funded instruments, while also facilitating cross-fertilisation between civil, defence and space industries, can enhance European strategic autonomy and technological sovereignty, improve the security of citizens, further develop the single market, and boost competitiveness, economic growth and employment.** A key priority of the Action Plan should also be the uptake of new digital and other emerging technologies in defence and security, as well as to foster social inclusion and gender equality in a still male-dominated environment.

More info at <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/action-plan-synergies-between-civil-defence-and-space-industries>

ECO/548 –NextGenerationEU funding strategy

Judith Vorbach

NextGenerationEU (NGEU) will inject up to EUR 806 into the EU economy in the form of grants and loans. On behalf of the EU, the Commission will borrow these amounts through funding operations on international capital markets. **The NGEU funding will step up the volume of EU safe assets and enhance the international role of the euro. A well-functioning funding strategy is key for the smooth implementation of NGEU. Sound funding, solid risk management, low borrowing costs and sustainable financing are in the interests of civil society.** The NGEU's funding needs require a sophisticated strategy to ensure that the EU can meet payment pledges in a timely manner and under favourable market conditions. The Workers' Group stresses how important it is that the Commission manage the funding strategy directly and it welcomes the Commission's increase in its human resources in this domain. However, this should be done in a gender-balanced way.

More info at <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/nextgenerationeu-funding-strategy>

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