The European Economic and Social Committee concludes its term of office

During an end-of-mandate ceremony, the EESC said goodbye to 135 of its current members during its September plenary session, the last of the 2015-2020 term

(In the picture above, the EESC Workers’ Group of the 2015-2020 term)

On 17 September, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) hosted its end-of-term ceremony during the last plenary session before the renewal of the institution in October. In October, a new five-year term will start under a new presidency and the partial renewal of the members.

Institutional support

The ceremony was marked by video messages by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, European Parliament President, David Sassoli, European Commission Vice-President, Maroš Šefčovič, and European Parliament Vice-President, Klara Dobrev. They thanked the Committee for its important contribution to the legislative process, highlighting its important role in connecting the EU institutions with the citizens’ every day concerns and the reality on the ground.

The Workers’ Group departing members

We would like to thank our 38 members who will not be part of the new EESC term of office, but whose important work has significantly marked the Committee’s last mandate. Among our departing members is Georges Dassis, former President of the Workers’ Group and former President of the EESC. Oliver Röpke, current President of the Workers’ Group, warmly thanked Georges, stressing that throughout the many years of his membership in the Committee, he had always been the political and moral compass for the EESC and the Workers’ Group.

The video below is a small tribute to their work, energy and dedication to a fairer, better Europe

https://youtu.be/iffDTW7lD4U

Isabel Caño Aguilar, Workers’ Group Member and EESC Vice-president responsible for Communication, took stock of the work done in communication during her mandate.

The Committee undertook important targeted communication activities to cover among others the European elections, the planned debate on the future of Europe, Brexit, the renewal of the Commission and the focus on the Green Deal. Ms Caño insisted on a modern communication, encouraging gender equality in all panels and events and focusing on a ‘green’ approach in line with the current climate concerns.

She stressed that her priority had been to work closely with the Committee’s three Groups, insisting also on the organization of cultural events that better reflected their activities and the EESC’s legislative work. Finally, Isabel Caño mentioned the necessary adaptations that had to be made in communication during the pandemic to maintain the contacts with the media; she highlighted the important contribution of the EESC’s members in communicating civil society’s activities in the fight against the pandemic and the preparation for the future.
Decent Minimum Wages across Europe

Oliver Röpke

Minimum wages are a key instrument in combating in-work poverty and raising living standards. However, they greatly vary from country to country. The current COVID crisis has highlighted the weaknesses of our economic and social systems, with the most precarious workers now rediscovered as ‘essential’ and carrying the weight of keeping our economies running.

To ensure that all workers in Europe, regardless of where they come from, or where they work, can have decent and living minimum wages, action at EU can bring added value by setting minimum thresholds to ensure a socially sustainable recovery. The Workers’ Group welcomes the proposal from the Commission, and supports an effort that, while respecting the role of the social partners, collective bargaining and social dialogue, can be a definitive step towards ensuring that all workers in the EU are protected by fair minimum wages allowing for a decent standard of living wherever they work.

Decent Minimum Wages across Europe - Press Release

The European Union is facing the worst recession in its history due to the COVID-19 outbreak, and we must ensure that it does not turn into a social emergency and that workers do not pay the price. The EESC opinion Decent minimum wages across Europe, requested by the European Parliament, evaluates the wage landscape and possible ways to guarantee that every worker in Europe benefits from a fair minimum wage.

Action at EU level could bring added value by ensuring that Member States cannot set their statutory minimum wages below a decency threshold set well above the poverty threshold, thus ensuring that it is not only a minimum wage, but also a living one. Safeguarding quality jobs, guaranteeing decent living wages - including minimum wages - and strengthening collective bargaining coverage must be part of the EU’s recovery strategy.

Many of the essential workers who kept our communities and economies going at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic are minimum wage earners and are often undervalued and underpaid. Decent minimum wages are a key instrument in tackling issues such as in-work poverty and social exclusion. The Workers’ Group firmly believes that the EU has a role to play, while fully respecting the autonomy and role of the social partners in wage setting and, safeguarding the systems in Member States where wages floors are set by collective bargaining. It, therefore, welcomes the European Commission’s commitment to presenting a legal initiative on fair minimum wages. Such action would be a key aspect of the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and would contribute to upward wage convergence in the EU, as well as halting a race to the bottom in wage competition among the Member States.

The COVID-19 situation has again highlighted many of the weaknesses in the European labour markets, particularly the insecurity faced by many workers. Rising unemployment, loss of union density and collective bargaining coverage, massive salary divergences within and among countries, as well as an increase in so-called new forms of work without adequate protections, are key aspects of this disturbing landscape. Too many workers, particularly the most vulnerable, do not have access to traditional social protection mechanisms, are forced into bogus self-employment and are not covered by collective bargaining. This opinion assesses the need for and the ways in which EU action on fair minimum wages and to support collective bargaining, would ensure improved living and working conditions for workers in Europe.

The Workers’ Group believes that the European Pillar of Social Rights and Articles 153 and 155 of the EU Treaty (TFEU) provide a background and legal basis for action at EU level. Surveys conducted by the EESC in the preparation of this opinion showed strong support from trade union and civil society organisations for such an initiative. In addition to minimum wages, the opinion also highlights the importance of a European framework for minimum income and for common minimum standards for unemployment insurance schemes – which are existing EESC recommendations - thus ensuring that the elimination of poverty in the European Union is pushed from all possible angles.

Welcoming the adoption of the opinion, the Workers’ Group President Oliver Röpke said ‘If Europe still wants to strive for a fairer future for all, the proposal for an initiative on minimum wages must be made a reality as a matter of urgency. This would also be an important signal regarding the future direction of Europe. We therefore expect that the European Commission's proposal, to be presented in October, will be a definitive step towards ensuring that all workers in the EU are protected by fair minimum wages allowing for a decent standard of living wherever they work. As the Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stated in her State of the European Union address "dignity of work must be sacred". Quality jobs, with fair wages – including decent minimum wages across Europe –along with strong and effective social dialogue and collective bargaining are essential for dealing with social, economic and labour market challenges, securing the recovery and a sustainable future for the EU”.

Opinions
The protection of unaccompanied migrant minors in Europe

Ozlem Yildirim

The protection of unaccompanied children, who underwent a migratory journey that often entails unbearable physical and mental suffering, is essential in order to prevent any violence against the most vulnerable migrant group. We urge the Member States to ensure that undocumented migrant children are protected first and foremost as children, under national child protection systems, and not as adult migrants. We should all adopt a general philosophy “higher good for a child” which takes precedence over all other national and international law.

The age determination is an important procedure, which ensures that unaccompanied children can be provided with information on their rights. Currently, there is no coherence and consistency between member states, and we call on them to address this issue and to stop bone maturity tests, used in many countries because it breaches children's privacy and causes potential health risks. In principle, children should be tested if they do not have any official documentation that proves their age. The expected rising number of unaccompanied children caused by COVID-19 can be an issue because of their fragile health. It is, therefore, necessary to ensure that health emergency will be guaranteed under the international treaties.

Universal access to housing that is decent, sustainable and affordable over the long term

Opinion - Raymond Hencks

Access to decent housing is a fundamental right. The increasing shortage of decent and affordable housing in many EU Member States is undeniably a cause of rising inequalities, indebtedness and social exclusion that is of great concern. We need a European action plan that will improve citizens’ living conditions by boosting the supply of decent and affordable accommodation in a sustainable way, focusing on energy-efficiency and the protection of their health. The Workers’ Group urges for the rapid implementation of the measures proposed in the opinion, as the situation will likely worsen due to the pandemic. The number of households that will no longer have the income needed to obtain decent housing on the property market will increase in proportion with rising unemployment and precarious employment.

The increasing shortage of decent and affordable housing in a large number of EU Member States is undeniably a cause of rising inequalities, indebtedness and social exclusion that is of great concern. It is not only the homeless or the poor who are suffering from this crisis anymore. The shortage of decent and affordable housing is affecting more and more middle-class citizens who cannot benefit from social housing. On the one hand, their income is too high for them to be entitled as a priority to one of those rare social accommodations and, on the other hand, it is too low for them to be able to afford to rent or acquire an accommodation on the private market.

As the numerous initiatives, aids and investments in the residential housing sector at EU, national, regional and local level have not helped solve this structural crisis, the EESC is proposing a European action plan for decent and affordable housing as part of the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the future Green Deal plan on “buildings”.

The proposed action plan should cover a comprehensive and understandable set of measures to help Member States, regions and cities in Europe to sustainably boost the supply of decent and affordable housing while improving the buildings’ performance from the aspects of health and energy.
Fair work in the platform economy
Carlos Trindade

Platform economy results in huge profits for companies. On the other hand, there is a huge and deep “black hole” in terms of labour rights, wages and working conditions for platform workers, who are faced with an extremely precarious situation. We need a minimum level of regulation and guaranteed rights for those workers who have come under even more pressure due to the pandemic and need to be considered as a priority. The key issue is the definition of the employment status of platform workers. Taxation in platform economy must also be urgently addressed, as most platforms do not pay taxes in the countries where they are active.

European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)
Amended proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council
Carlos Trindade

The EU’s economy, healthcare, social welfare and labour market have suffered enormously due to the COVID-19 crisis. There are many challenges that appeared during a pandemic, such as worsening of inequalities and rapid increase in poverty due to unemployment as well as the exclusion of vulnerable group in social dialogue. The ESF+ has a key role in the implementation of the social pillar and should be focused on social cohesion and guidance, and its funding incremented, not slashed. The main priority in post-COVID-19 recovery is to ensure coordination and consistency of funds allocation in order to prevent fragmentation in the Member States. We should ensure there is reliable and sufficient information on social development in the EU in order to monitor the situation in the European Semester.

Public procurement in cleaning and facility services
Nicola Konstantinou

It is high time to ensure decent working conditions for invisible and shadow workers in the cleaning sector, mainly women migrant workers, who are underpaid and work alone at night. Awarding public contracts to companies choosing quality over price, applying collective labour agreements and complying with social legislation is a step towards restoring the dignity of those undervalued workers.

The transparency between client and contractor must be the priority when we speak about the quality of the cleaning services provided, and the contract should specifically state frequency, time, occupational health and safety in order to ensure the standard of cleaning services across the EU. When we speak about the time of cleaning services, it is important to use daytime cleaning in all public procurement. In order to maintain sustainable development and support of the sector’s workforce, we should introduce additional services, for example, training courses and family support.
Sustainable supply chains and decent work in international trade
Tanja Buzek

COVID-19 has revealed risks in fragmented supply chains and exposed the vulnerability of the European workforce to them. We need to develop a European Action plan, which will keep workers and supply chains healthy in order to avoid negative impact during a crisis. The Plan’s implementation should notably explore and support European and national social dialogue in order to engage in discussions and negotiations.

A European due diligence standard constitutes a step forward to ensure the respect and enforcement of human rights and decent work in supply chains. Violations and negative social impacts are still too often present in companies’ supply chains across the world, and voluntary measures have not brought about the behavioural change needed. All actions must be consistent with international and European principles in order to achieve ‘policy’ and ‘genuine’ investment in sustainability. There should be a specific recognition of essential, different and complementary roles to implement a general framework for policy and legislation.

Due diligence requirements
Thomas Wagnsonner

An EU Legislative Initiative regarding mandatory corporate responsibility is urgently needed and should guarantee a broad coverage of the Human Rights and environmental rights definition including workers’ and trade union rights. It must also include a liability resulting in effective remedies for people who are affected by misconduct.

Due diligence obligations, notably with regard to global value chains, must guide management decisions that aim at sustainable companies, economically, ecologically and socially. The legislation should cover all companies in order to avoid unfair competition and an uneven playing field, as well as the public sector. It should require companies to abide by high standards of responsible business conduct but at the same time provide adequate measures in line with the respective risk of human rights violations.

EU and Africa
making an equal development partnership a reality based on sustainability and common values
Thomas Wagnsonner

Civil society, social partnerships, social market economies and welfare state systems should be successful models for supporting sustainable development in Africa, albeit tailored to the local culture and socioeconomic circumstances. Priorities for supporting African countries should not only account for trade and investment but also, and in particular, tax policy, migration, development, the environment, education, health, and working and living conditions. The focus must be on promoting a decent life and good prospects, creating a middle class and supporting equal partnerships, including by strengthening sustainable democratic structures in Africa in line with fundamental rights.

Secure 5G deployment – EU toolbox
Dumitru Fornea

Whilst recognizing the importance of technological progress, we need to focus on issues that are of direct concern to our citizens such as their health and safety, network security and high standards in all aspects of 5G networks. Citizens and stakeholders, who are directly concerned by technological progress, should be a fundamental part of a democratic decision-making process.
Digital mining in Europe: new solutions for the sustainable production of raw materials
Marian Krzaklewski

The high demand for sustainable access to raw materials is one of the key enablers for green, competitive and digital Europe. Moreover, digitalisation has been more than highlighted during times of COVID-19 when we could see quick digital transformation across the world.

Mining companies that adopted digitalisation started to see improvements in almost all areas, such as safety and sustainability. Social measures are crucial to minimise the negative impact that digital transformation will have on the mining workforce and to help mining communities transition their economies to prevent the deepening of existing social inequalities, including the involvement of social partners.

Combatting tax fraud, tax avoidance and money laundering
Javier Doz Orrit

We call for a European pact to effectively combat tax fraud, tax evasion and money laundering, actively involving civil society to create public feeling against tax crime and in favour of fair taxation. Urgent action against tax offences is needed more than ever to generate additional public finances to help fund pandemic recovery plans, the green and digital transformation of the economy and the construction of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Member States' commitment to putting an end to unfair and damaging forms of tax competition is essential.

Energy: women as equal players in the 21st century
Laure Batut

Women cannot be excluded from this dynamic sector of the economy that is energy, an important generator of jobs and innovation. Their talents matter. We need gender-specific data and indicators, strong and targeted policies on equality in energy professions, equal pay, appropriate training opportunities, a change in mentality with respect to traditional role models. For this, social dialogue and collective agreements throughout Europe on equality in companies in the energy sector will be important.

Between a trans-European super grid and local energy islands
the right mix of decentralised solutions and centralised structures for an economically, socially and ecologically sustainable energy transition
Thomas Kattnig

We call for a European pact to effectively combat tax fraud, tax evasion and money laundering, actively involving civil society to create public feeling against tax crime and in favour of fair taxation. Urgent action against tax offences is needed more than ever to generate additional public finances to help fund pandemic recovery plans, the green and digital transformation of the economy and the construction of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Member States' commitment to putting an end to unfair and damaging forms of tax competition is essential.
From farm to fork: a sustainable food strategy

Peter Schmidt

Europe needs a comprehensive food policy that provides for healthy diets from sustainable food systems, linking agriculture to nutrition and ecosystem services and ensuring supply chains that safeguard public health. The Commission’s farm to fork strategy is the right step towards responding to those concerns, but a lot needs to be done to get there.

The COVID-19 crisis has successfully tested the strength and resilience of the European agri-food system, and hence proven the security of food supply in the EU, but also shown that getting food “from farm to fork” cannot be taken for granted. It must be seized as an opportunity to reshape supply chain dynamics and deliver lasting improvements for producers, processors and retailers. We need a fairer supply chain which brings the focus more on workers’, farmers’ and consumers’ demands, not only on the big multinationals.

Towards an EU strategy on sustainable consumption

Peter Schmidt

The social issues of sustainable consumption are fundamental – the conditions of production and workers, the final destination of the product, and who is responsible for those products. These sustainable criteria include the working conditions, minimum wage, social protection, investment in public services, inclusive governance, and fair taxation, among others. Sustainable standards introduced in public procurement can have a huge impact on the market and can create a regulatory context for public authorities to promote sustainable consumption and prevent a race to the bottom.

There has to be a systemic change because the most sustainable consumption for citizens is often “the easiest choice”. For this, the EESC recommends incorporating educational institutions and encourage them to sustainable consumption into their school curricula, as well as other information-based instruments, such as product labelling and multi-level governance.

Digitalisation and Sustainability

status quo and need for action from a civil society perspective

Peter Schmidt

There is a need to adjust current competition and monopoly law in order to secure the neutrality of new digital platform markets because most digital giants are not from Europe. It is fundamental to work towards sustainable Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) - usage of renewable materials, extend warranty periods as well as reuse of functional devices - and ensure transparency in ICT production chains. Special attention should be paid, as well, to the relationship between digitalisation and its effects on employment, where we have to deal with a precarisation of jobs, which can lead to unstable employment conditions. The EESC calls for strengthening regulations that would build upon the GDPR in order to manage data protection in the workplace and for restricting online advertising because there is a rising trend in e-commerce platforms that cause unsustainable consumption. Therefore, the EESC supports ad-free spaces on the internet, especially on search platforms and social media.

Energy, transport, sustainable development and access to digital technology for all are concrete elements that improve citizens’ lives in the Western Balkans.

Taking into account these elements which are turning more and more into fundamental rights, will be paramount in the EU accession process. Moreover, the Green Deal can be an opportunity to work more closely on many issues including good governance, the rule of law and respect for human rights and security. Enhanced dialogue with the social partners and civil society organizations is important in this framework.

Contribution of civil society to the Green Agenda and the sustainable development of the Western Balkans as part of the EU accession process

Pierre Jean Coulon

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Evaluation of the role of civil society in the participation structures under the European Union/Colombia/Peru/Ecuador Agreement

Giuseppe Iuliano

The multi-trade agreement (MTA) may function well from an economic point of view, but not from the point of view of fundamental rights. For example, the resurgence of violence in Colombia is particularly worrying: civil society organizations believe that peace is at risk and are calling on the new government to account for the killings of 777 people in the country between 2016 and 2019 - trade unionists, social leaders and human rights defenders. In view of this situation, the current mechanisms for civil society participation in the MTA must be urgently strengthened.

Economic Governance Review 2020

Judith Vorbach

The activation of the general escape clause was an important measure to tackle the COVID-19 crisis. Instead of a return to normal, we need a turn towards prosperity focused economic governance, where people’s wellbeing is prioritized. This involves supporting sustainable and inclusive growth, ensuring sufficient revenues and a fair distribution of the tax burden, applying the golden rule for public investment to safeguard productivity and the social and ecological base for the well-being of future generations and strengthening democratic decision making in the EU and social partner involvement.

In a Statement adopted during the September plenary session, the EESC strongly condemned the continuous violations of human rights and the rule of law that have been taking place in Belarus since the presidential elections.

The Workers’ Group members expressed their full solidarity with the people of Belarus and called for the EU to defend the fundamental values and rights of the Belarusian society and for the mobilization of civil society organisations to promote democratization in the country.

Lucie Studničná stressed that it was about giving support to the people of Belarus and helping them live their lives with dignity. Starting with small actions such as the guarantee of university studies for students was the right way to help and trade unions and civil society organisations were already doing all they can. Yet, the EU needed to stand united to defend the Belarus people’s fundamental values.

Andrzej Adamczyk stated that Belarus was at a crossroads. There were not many changes since he had last been there in 1995, only that the politics had gotten worse and the regime had become more brutal. The priority should be to support the threatened civil society there and promote criteria such as democratization, modernization and economic progress in any kind of partnership envisaged with Belarus.
Enhancing sustainable economic growth across the EU

Philip von Brockdorff

The EU is at crossroads and facing yet another recession caused by COVID-19. The challenge is not just about economic recovery, it is primarily about re-building our economies to make them more resilient, more sustainable, and to put people at the centre of this re-building. The current crisis is an opportunity to do just that. From the Workers’ Group, for the EU to be a global leader and to improve the lives of its citizens it has to fully embrace sustainable economic growth by re-directing more economic activity towards green investment and digitalisation.

The Resolution was applauded by the plenary as an important contribution of the EESC to the debate on the recovery strategy after the pandemic.

Stefano Palmieri, the rapporteur representing the Workers’ Group, stressed that extraordinary measures were needed to address the unprecedented crisis caused by the pandemic and that business as usual was not an option: “We cannot continue in 2021 with the stability and growth pact. We need to guarantee both stability and growth. And we must push forward both digital and ecological transitions, in the most inclusive manner possible.”

The Workers’ Group welcomed the Resolution, particularly the emphasis placed on the need to stimulate employment and to put social recovery at the core of the recovery and reconstruction strategy.

Andrej Zorko summed up the Group’s concerns: “The quality of life and well-being of European workers and citizens is fundamental. Sufficient minimum wages and other tools will be needed to fight inequality and poverty and ensure social cohesion.”
Shaping Europe’s digital future
Jakob Krištof Počivavšek

Europe’s digital future has to be based on a human-centred approach and has to work for people. An enhanced framework that would prevent precarious working conditions and ensure workers’ rights online is one of the important aspects of a human-centred approach, and it is especially relevant for cross-border workers.

Europe’s digital future based on a human-centred approach will only be successful if people can have trust. Appropriate safeguards on privacy, safety and data governance, and transparency of AI algorithms would help gain that trust. Furthermore, the need for Europe to lead the just transition to a healthy planet and a new digital world requires that the challenges of green and digital transformation go hand-in-hand. Equally important are education and training that provide digital skills; they are the key to being prepared for a digital life.

Gender Equality Strategy
Guilia Barbucci

Evidence shows that progress in achieving gender equality in the EU is slow, with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating gender-related inequalities. The European Commission must therefore take urgent action to implement the Gender Equality Strategy. The Workers’ Group calls on the Commission to urgently proceed with the proposal to introduce binding measures on gender pay transparency. The preponderance of women segregation in low-paid sectors and precarious jobs has put them in the front line in terms of the risk of job loss and health problems, in particular during the COVID-19 crisis.

Gender balance in decision-making, in political, economic and social life, can also be pursued by a gender mainstreaming strategy, integrating gender perspective at all levels.

Fostering competitiveness, innovation, growth and job creation by reducing market distortion
Thomas Student

Unregulated globalisation brings increased inequality, downward pressure on companies, wages and labour conditions and weakened social security. European companies and jobs are under pressure by unfair trading practices from non-market economies without respecting international social and environmental agreements. Europe needs urgently a new project for internal integration, a common economic, social and environmental strategy and a coherent trade policy.
New industrial strategy for Europe
Dirk Bergrath

Industrial policy needs a strong social dimension, as quality jobs, social protection and well-functioning public services are the foundation of thriving industrial activity. The social pillar, social dialogue and the green deal are important drivers for an inclusive and sustainable economic growth and therefore a successful industry. Achieving the goal of a carbon neutral economy requires a strong financial framework within the EU budget and action by the European Investment Bank.

At the same time, due to the dramatic decline of industrial production because of the coronavirus crisis, emergency measures taken by governments to help companies and protect workers’ income have to be maintained. The combination of the Green Deal, the Recovery Plan and the new industrial strategy would provide a powerful and coherent toolbox for fighting the recession and preparing our common future.

Implementation of Free Trade Agreements
1 January 2018-31 December 2018
Tanja Buzek

The new EU trade strategy needs to go beyond old trade models and develop stronger instruments to deliver on a sustainable trade and investment agenda. Years after free trade agreement conclusions, we still witness a lack of progress in TSD (trade and sustainable development) compliance. Trade needs to contribute to a lasting economic recovery and learn important lessons from the crisis.

Global supply chains need to become more resilient, diversified and responsible. Trade policy needs to be consistent with the Green Deal and be equally ambitious in enforcing labour provisions.

White Paper on Artificial Intelligence
Catelijne Muller

The Workers’ Group welcomes the Commission’s strategy to encourage the use of AI technologies while ensuring their compliance with European ethical norms and social values. However, a much stronger stance is needed in favour of the human-in-command approach, making it clear that humans will always be in control of the machine and decide which AI is trustworthy or not.

The EU should also promote a new generation of AI systems that are knowledge-driven and reasoning-based rather than focus on mere data-driven AI, the scope of which is too narrow to make the EU a true leader in cutting-edge technology in this field. The European Commission should consider in more depth the impact of AI on fundamental rights and freedoms. For the Workers’ Group, early and close involvement of the social partners when introducing AI systems at workplaces is crucial to ensure that these systems align with workers’ needs and respect their autonomy.
Single Market enforcement action plan / Identifying and addressing barriers to the Single Market

Gerardo Larghi

The Single Market is the foundation for a truly integrated European Union. For too long, however, insufficient enforcement of EU rules has led to many cases of fraud and illegal activity. Yet the proper application of EU law is essential to increase consumer confidence and to ensure that the Single Market delivers its full potential for businesses, workers and consumers.

The crisis linked to the spread of Covid-19 has put the Single Market at risk, further increasing the differences between EU countries in terms of economic development, social guarantees and levels of prosperity. Therefore, ensuring the effective application of EU legislation is more urgent than ever and involving the relevant stakeholders, particularly the social partners in the process will help achieve this goal.

Taxation of the Collaborative Economy

Ester Vitale

While collaborative economy offers opportunities for growth, it needs to be regulated in order to protect consumers and safeguard workers’ rights, tax obligations and fair competition. The Workers’ Group calls for effective cooperation to prevent tax fraud and avoidance, ensuring data protection and simple and effective rules to ease compliance with European legislation.

Reporting obligations with regard to collecting, communicating to tax authorities and keeping information on transactions should be clear and harmonised across the Member States, but they should not constitute an excessive administrative burden for digital platforms. Introducing standard and simplified reporting obligations with reasonable compliance costs could be an incentive for digital platforms to comply with the rules.

Evaluating the European Energy Union

The social and societal dimension of the energy transition

Christophe Quarez

Energy poverty, the impact on jobs and the lack of civil society’s involvement in key decisions are social and societal aspects of the energy transition that urgently need to be resolved. Energy poverty is mainly the result of a combination of high energy prices, low household income and poor building quality, but, in general, it lacks common indicators that would allow to properly define it in order to be able to address these issues.

The energy transition is leading to new employment opportunities but it is also transforming existing jobs and destroying others. Anticipating and accompanying this transition through training for workers that is adapted to the growing demand for new skills, is key. Energy transition also means supporting regions that depend on coal. Equally important is ensuring the active involvement of civil society in informing key policy decisions that can help make Europe a more resilient, sustainable and fair society.
European Climate Pact
Peter Schmidt

At the time of the global health and impending economic crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU’s commitment to the transition to a sustainable, wellbeing economy must be put at the forefront of the recovery and reconstruction policy and accompanied by adequate funds. Climate change threatens us all, but, as with the pandemic, it has the most damaging effect on the most vulnerable. It is vital that the transition leaves no one behind. The Workers’ Group calls for the active participation of trade unions and all parts of society in political decision-making to ensure a fair transition to climate neutrality. The implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, in parallel with the Green Deal, will provide an opportunity to ensure a just transition focused on the objective of quality jobs for all.

Recovery plan for Europe and the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027
Petru Dandea

To fight the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, the introduction of an extraordinary financial recovery instrument as part of the EU multiannual financial framework and the decision to raise common debt, preventing the extraordinary financial burden from falling directly on the Member States are fundamental. To finance the proposed recovery measures, the Commission will borrow up to EUR 750 billion on the financial markets on behalf of the Union, for recovery measures over the period 2021-2024. Against this background, the Commission’s proposal for an EU budget that intends to introduce additional genuine own resources based on different taxes (revenues from the EU Emissions Trading System, digital taxation, large companies’ revenues) is equally crucial.

Responding to the European Commission’s new Pact for Migration and Asylum
Statement by José Antonio Moreno Díaz, rapporteur of the EESC opinion about EU New Pact on Migration & Asylum

“This is - at first sight - a great and profound disappointment”.

“The text of the Pact gives the impression that the EU is powerless and impotent to assume a realistic, orderly and effective common policy on migration and asylum that goes beyond the national interest of each member state”.

The Commission package includes 10 specific legislative and non-legislative initiatives that insist on a vision of migration as a PROBLEM. They reiterate the same past mistakes on external border control and return of people who are in an irregular situation and the so-called hotspots. These initiatives have been deeply criticised since 2015.

The risk is that this proposal strengthens the xenophobic positions of the extreme right-wing forces in the EU and weakens the integration policy that should focus on the NORMALITY of migrations and their adequate and normal management.

“The Commission proposal is another lost opportunity to have developed both legal, effective and secure channels of labour immigration to the EU and to confirm a true COMMON EUROPEAN ASYLUM SYSTEM. Solidarity means protecting those who have sought refuge in the EU, guaranteeing their rights and complying with international law and a decent life for them and their families.”
Peter Altmaier spoke of the enormous economic crisis following the COVID pandemic, emphasising the need for the EU to “stick together” to effectively address the enormous challenges ahead and to show solidarity towards the weaker. The proposed recovery plan was important in showing people that this was an issue of making help available as soon as possible. This is why for the German Presidency, dealing with this crisis and ensuring adoption of the EU budget to make available the financial means were key priorities, together with the Green Deal and the social and economic repercussions of the transition to climate neutrality.

The Workers’ Group members called upon the German Presidency to act as a locomotive to set the EU on the right path towards recovery. Ambitious measures and a special level of solidarity were needed with EU funds to match this ambition in order to bridge the widening inequalities. In this sense, it was more important than ever for leaders to reach an agreement in the upcoming EU Summit.

Oliver Röpke, President of the Workers’ Group, pointed out that solidarity meant including the element of grants in the recovery fund to ensure a proper reconstruction focusing on the green and social deal, digitalisation and fair transition, guaranteeing that workers had a voice in the process. Only gains could come out of such a solution, as it would be an investment in the future.

Christian Bäumler called for a European action plan to defend human rights in supply chains that would ensure also that imported goods came from countries respecting social rights, environmental rules and proper health conditions. He further urged the German Presidency to ensure that EU company law was not an impediment to workers’ participation.

Paolo Gentiloni stressed that the pandemic had shown the resilience of our common values, particularly the EU welfare state, which were our first line of defence against the virus. Now it was urgent to react to the widening of social inequalities and regional disparities as foreseen in economic forecasts. The aim of the proposed recovery plan was to allow for the necessary reforms and investments to achieve social and economic convergence. The decision to borrow money on the markets was an unprecedented step and stronger own resources were needed among others to repay this debt. In this framework, progress on the taxation of the digital economy and the guarantee of sustainable tax competition between Member States were crucial.

The Workers’ Group members particularly insisted on the need for a more harmonised and fair taxation, making sure that big international companies participate adequately in financing public investment, which is so necessary to overcome the economic consequences of the pandemic.

Anne Demelenne insisted that the EU and the Member States urgently needed the means to deal with the health, social and economic consequences of the pandemic and that measures to improve EU legislation with respect to fair tax competition between countries were vital. In this respect, she urged the Commission to develop a corporate tax directive and to set up the qualified majority vote in the EU Council.

Continues on the following page
Paolo Gentiloni

Carlos Trindade warned that poverty and unemployment would hit migrants particularly hard, who were at the frontlines of health and transport services. They also risked being victims of racism and xenophobia. To prevent this, a new EU pact on migration was urgently needed, inspired by a more humanitarian approach and solidarity. Exceptional integration measures should be implemented for the health and social integration of asylum seekers, with the involvement of social partners.

Adam Rogalewski stressed that migrants risked their lives in the crisis to keep our societies running, yet their working conditions were precarious and a new EU pact on migration and asylum should focus on fair working conditions. He also pleaded in favour of initiatives and legal instruments promoting diversity. The “Black Lives Matter” protests had revealed a problem of institutional racism also in the EU Member States and institutions. Yet, the European way was one that allowed all people to be treated equally and with dignity.

Margaritis Schinas

Commissioner Schinas explained that his responsibilities covered policies under the following umbrellas: “A Europe that protects” (security, health, migration) and “A Europe that empowers” (creating opportunities for mobility, education, culture and sport). As regards health, the pandemic had made evident the need for the strategic autonomy of Europe and the Commission was stepping up efforts in this direction including by securing the right funds. Focusing on migration, Mr Schinas explained that the Commission was about to present a new EU pact on migration bringing together a better system for the protection of external borders and solidarity among EU countries. In the field of education, he announced the creation of a European education area by 2025 promoting mobility through the strengthening of the Erasmus programme and European university alliances.

The members of the Workers’ Group drew particular attention to the plight of migrants who were particularly affected by the social and economic crisis triggered by the pandemic.