

NEWSLETTER

WORKERS' GROUP

FEBRUARY 2019



34 1ST PLENARY SESSION

- Common Agricultural Policy debate with Commissioner Phil Hogan.
- Debates on the future of Europe
- Materials for the 2019 European Elections
- Minimum Income Framework Directive
- Equality between men and women report
- Workshop on closing the gender employment gap by Euractiv

The EESC adopts an opinion on a
European Framework Directive on a Minimum Income
Workers' Group Statement

22.5% EUROPEANS AT RISK OF
POVERTY. 9.5% WORKING
POOR. 19% YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT
RATE. 27% OF EUROPEAN CHILDREN LIVING IN
POVERTY AND EXCLUSION.

CAN WE AFFORD NOT
HAVING A MINIMUM INCOME SCHEME?

WORKERS' GROUP

After a long and controversial debate, the EESC adopted in plenary an opinion for the establishment of minimum income schemes across Europe. The Workers' Group welcomes this decision as an important step towards implementing the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights. It is a clear sign for the European Institutions, most notably the incoming new European Parliament, of how civil society in Europe envisions social protection. The European Union now needs to provide its citizens with answers to the questions of economic and social inequality - a framework directive on minimum income as proposed by the EESC would be a concrete step in that direction.

We need to aim for upwards convergence and avoid a race to the bottom with countries competing based on social rights. This proposal from the EESC contributes to this by addressing the unbalanced economic and social situation in Europe. Adequate and inclusive social protection in the form of a minimum income scheme will allow all Europeans to live a life in dignity. This would not only benefit those who are currently without sufficient protection, but also boost the European economy as a whole. As the rapporteur Georges Dassis, from the Workers' Group said: "A minimum income scheme will help the working and unemployed, and will give companies more and richer consumers."

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PLENARY DEBATE

COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY



The first debate of the February plenary session had the **Common Agricultural Policy at its centre, accompanied by Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Phil Hogan.** Commissioner Hogan remarked how the CAP's effects are often taken for granted, both the positive impact and the jobs created. Far from the truth, the CAP plays a key role in ensuring that people can have food every day and that it stays at its highest standards. Notwithstanding this, he highlighted the need for the CAP to evolve to tackle the challenges of climate change and ensure the viability of rural areas.

Bohumír Dufek, President of the Independent Trade Unions Association of the Czech Republic, assessed positively that no reduction of CAP's budget is foreseen, and added that maximum capping should be voluntary.





His main worry was available and quality jobs in rural areas, and the importance of collective bargaining in those areas: in many, agricultural enterprises are the only employers. Regarding food quality, he highlighted the high standards in Europe, the need for reduced mobility of food (and its carbon footprint), and demanded that similar standards in production and quality are asked from imported foodstuff.

Peter Schmidt, Head of international and European affairs of the Food, Beverages and Catering Union, spoke about the Sustainable Development Goals and their implementation in the food chain.

Many unfair practices take place during it, and regulation was welcomed. Alongside this, he highlighted the need for development in Africa, to create jobs and prevent mass migrations.



Law expert at the Trade Union of Agriculture, Forestry, Food and Water Supply Workers Piroska Kállay, acknowledged all said before on quality control and standards. However, she



highlighted how food scandals kept happening. In particular, she addressed the commissioner to make sure the work to end food discrimination in the EU is increased.

Wrapping up the debate, the Commissioner Hogan replied that the new proposals for the CAP rested upon 3 pillars: social, environmental, and economic sustainability, and urged the member states to make sure controls work. The Council, he added, should back the proposal made by the commission to ensure these pillars and simplify the procedures for the farmer and the administration.

A photograph of a vast agricultural field under a dramatic, sunset-colored sky. The field is filled with golden crops, possibly wheat or corn, stretching towards a line of trees in the distance. The sky is filled with soft, orange and pink clouds.

**COMMON
AGRICULTURAL POLICY**

**THE CAP AMOUNTS TO 38%
OF THE EU BUDGET.**

**WHAT SHOULD THE CAP LOOK LIKE
IN THE FUTURE?**

WORKERS' GROUP

DEBATE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

During the second day's debate, **Luca Visentini, ETUC General Secretary**, gave the bottom line for these elections: people no longer trust the system, because the social contract was broken during the economic crisis. Inequality, poverty, and social exclusion: the scars from that crisis are still felt far and wide.

Luca expressed the need for a new social contract, surpassing austerity, prioritising social needs not just corporate demands, with a strong pillar of social rights. This must be turned into a vision, one more convincing than the xenophobic and nationalistic extremists.



Only a European dimension will be able to tackle the challenges we face, in particular, active management of climate change, against which no country can do anything on its own. This is the real alternative, he remarked, the Europe that protects its people. This defence of democratic values and the political will to isolate the neofascist and other far right parties, must go hand in hand with better wages and collective bargaining, to ensure sustainable growth.



Drawing from the topic, **Luc Triangle, IndustriALL General Secretary**, wondered where was the upwards social convergence. Many workers, he added, see the single market as an engine for growth driven almost exclusively by financial and economic goals, as companies can relocate but social conditions are subject to social dumping. He put the example of Bulgaria, which after more than 10 years of EU membership still had salaries of 300 euro, causing massive emigration. Tackling inequalities and giving opportunities to those left behind by the economic changes, he concluded, was fundamental to reconnect with millions of workers across Europe.



Greta Thunberg, 16 year-old climate activist, addressed the politicians and members present to not listen to the dozens of thousands of young activists claiming for the environment, just to listen to science and scientists. Radical action was needed to

prevent an ecologic collapse, but so far all had they had done was say how everything would be alright and not doing anything afterwards. She insisted that the goals set by the EU were not enough to keep global warming below 1.5 °C.

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said that young people had all the right to be concerned with climate protection, and declared that every forth euro should be spent on that purpose. Luca



Jahier, EESC President, praised Juncker's labour in fostering investment and agreed on the need for ambition in facing climate change.



Workers' Group President Gabriele Bischoff encouraged young people to keep asking questions and pushing the issue of climate change, as Europe needed their engagement for the sake of democracy, and conveyed to Juncker the open and clear rejection of the attack campaign on him coming from Hungary's Viktor Orban's government.

The morning continued with the intervention of **Josef Středula, President of CKMOS**, who said that it was time for the truth, that we need to act against social dumping. He wondered how you could tell someone with a wage barely above poverty line, while his international company makes huge benefits, that we all share a common lifestyle. He said that same wages of the same work only applied to Members of the European parliament, and that without facing the truth and tackling social dumping and wage inequalities, people would not have ownership of the European project.



Katja Lehto-Komulainen, ETUC Deputy General Secretary, warned the audience that one of the biggest dangers was wise people's silence. The member states, she added, needed to



take responsibility to make the Pillar of Social Rights a tangible reality and to tackle inequality. Particularly, as the current economic growth is not benefiting everyone and inequalities keep growing despite employment figures. True solutions, she added, were needed for the rather complex problems faced.

In the final discussion, **Isabel Caño Aguilar, EESC Vice-President** for Communication, brought the importance of equality and inclusion to the debate: from 1979 to now, the number of female MEPs had gone from 20% to 36%, there was still a long way to go. Even more, young people are engaged, demonstrate, but we need to encourage them to vote, and reflect why so far only 27% of young people voted in the last elections. On top of this, she stressed how a million potential votes will not be casted in the elections, as they are not accessible enough to people with disabilities. For all this, she remarked, the question is not 'Europe yes or no', but 'how' Europe is going to deal with challenges.



Ο Oliver Röpke νέος πρόεδρος της ομάδας Εργαζομένων της ΕΟΚΕ

Νέος Πρόεδρος, της Ομάδας Εργαζομένων στην Ευρωπαϊκή Οικονομική και Κοινωνική Επιτροπή, ΕΟΚΕ εκλέγηκε σε πρόσφατη έκτακτη συνεδρία ο Oliver Röpke ο οποίος προέρχεται από τα Αυστριακά Συνδικάτα (ÖGB).

Η τέως πρόεδρος Gabriele Bischoff η οποία κατείχε τη θέση του Προέδρου από τον Σεπτέμβριο του 2015, αποχώρησε για να διεκδικήσει θέση Ευρωβουλευτή μέσα από το κόμμα της στη Γερμανία.

Στη ψηφοφορία που έγινε ο Oliver Röpke επικράτησε με συντριπτική πλειοψηφία έναντι του ανθυποψηφίου του.

Μετά την εκλογή του ο κ. Oliver αφού ευχαρίστησε την απελευθέρωσα Πρόεδρο για τις υπηρεσίες που πρόσφερε στην Ομάδα, δήλωσε ότι

θα συνεργαστεί με όλα τα μέλη της Ομάδας για να καταστεί η φωνή των εργαζομένων πιο δυνατή στην Ε.Ο.Κ.Ε και όχι μόνο.



Τόνισε την ανάγκη για συνέχιση της συνεργασίας με τη Συνομο-

σπονδία Ευρωπαϊκών Συνδικάτων (E.T.U.C) και την ανάγκη για συνέχιση του αγώνα για ενίσχυση της Δημοκρατίας, για μια αξιοπρεπή διαβίωση των εργαζομένων και για αξιοπρεπείς συνθήκες εργασίας για όλους τους εργαζόμενους στην Ευρώπη.

Σε παρέμβασή του ο Νίκος Επιστήθιου κάλεσε όλους να συνεχίσουν να εργάζονται για τη βελτίωση των μισθών και ωφελημάτων των εργαζομένων με στόχο τη συνεχή αναβάθμιση του βιοτικού τους επιπέδου.

Οι εργαζόμενοι πρόσθεσε μπορούν να προβάλουν θέσεις και αιτήματά μέσω των συνδικάτων και όχι από μόνοι τους, αφού σε τέτοια περίπτωση αποδυναμώνεται η προσπάθειά τους.

Article published in Cypriot newspaper "Ergatiki Foni" (Workers' voice)

OLIVER RÖPKE , NEW PRESIDENT OF THE WORKERS' GROUP OF THE EESC

Oliver Röpke from the Austrian Trade Union Federation ÖGB was elected new President of the Workers' Group of the European Economic and Social Committee during a recent extraordinary meeting.

Former President Gabriele Bischoff, who had been leading the Workers' Group since September 2015, resigned in order to run for candidate at the coming EP elections with her party. Mr Röpke was elected by clear majority.

After his election, Oliver Röpke thanked the outgoing President for the work she did for the Group and stated that he would cooperate with all the members of the Group to better voice workers' concerns in the EESC and elsewhere. He stressed the need to continue cooperation with the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and to keep on fighting to strengthen democracy and to guarantee decent living and working conditions for all workers in Europe.

During his intervention, Nikos Epistithiou called upon all members to continue to work for the improvement of workers' wages and benefits in order to ensure a continuous upgrade of their living standards. He added that workers could express their positions and demands better through trade unions because when doing it on their own, their positions were weakened.

OPINIONS

Annual Growth Survey



The emphasis on investment focused on education and training is welcomed, as well as on strengthening the EU's social dimension and the social pillar to respond to inequalities inside and between regions and in terms of access to education. However, it remains to be specified how these will be translated into policies, while an

evaluation of past policies is also necessary, in the light of mixed results to date, including the slow pace of economic recovery and the increase in precarious employment. It should also be made clearer how the funds for the implementation of the social pillar will be made available. Moreover, progress has been slow in some key areas where new policies have been proposed, such as fair taxation, the banking union and the euro area, whereas in others, such as climate change, measures are still insufficient.

The Workers' Group will continue to closely follow developments in the different fields followed by the annual growth survey.

[LEARN MORE](#)

**ANNE
DEMELENNE**

**INCREASING NUMBERS
OF PART TIME
WORKERS**



**LACK OF
EURO AREA
COMMON BUDGET**



**INCREASING
NUMBERS
OF IN-WORK POVERTY**



WORKERS' GROUP

Promoting Healthy and Sustainable Diet

Evidence about diet's impact on health, environment, society and economy is growing. Poor diets are Europe's main causes of premature death and disease which in turn weigh on national health systems. Diet is an indicator of social inequalities as people on low income tend to eat worse and more restricted diets. Moreover, agriculture and food production and consumption have a major impact on the environment in terms of the resources they use. Given these challenges, the EESC and the Workers' Group call for the development of new sustainable dietary guidelines as one of the main pillars of a holistic EU food policy that is not only related to consumer behavior but addresses the whole supply chain. These guidelines would be crucial to the implementation of the sustainable development goals and the Paris climate agreement.



**PETER
SCHMIDT**

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Ensuring Basic Road Freight Connectivity After Brexit



**RAYMOND
HENCKS**

Free movement of goods is one of the fundamental freedoms of the EU. European legislation guarantees this by allowing for unrestricted access to the transport of goods by road throughout the Union based on a Community license. If the UK leaves the EU without a withdrawal agreement, the licenses of British road carriers will no longer be valid and they will no longer be entitled to

this free access (and vice-versa). In order to avoid such barriers that will seriously affect trade, employment and economic growth, the Workers' Group supports the Commission's proposal to put in place temporary regulations that ensure connectivity.

[LEARN MORE](#)

**WHAT HAPPENS
WITH NO-DEAL BREXIT?**

+21 MILLION MT EXPORTED
TO THE EU IN 2015



**MORE THAN 4.4 MILLION
TRUCKS A YEAR BETWEEN THE EU AND THE UK**

+26 MILLION MT EXPORTED
TO THE UK IN 2015

WORKERS' GROUP

BETTER WORK LIFE BALANCE: CLOSING THE GENDER

EMPLOYMENT GAP

EURACTIV WORKSHOP

Workers' Group member Erika Koller, rapporteur of the EESC's opinion on **Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carertakers**, took part in a Euractiv workshop on 'Better Work-Life Balance: Closing the Gender Employment Gap', where participants discussed the new Work-Life Balance Directive and the benefits it will bring for working families, as well as remaining challenges.

Other discussants included Agnes Jongerius MEP, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament Committee for Employment and Social Affairs, Katarina Ivanković Knežević, Director for Social Affairs in its Employment, Social affairs and Inclusion department (DG EMPL) and Michelle Maynard, Chief People Officer at Aviva France.



Erika outlined the discussions in the EESC during the preparation the opinion setting out the priorities of the Workers' Group, notably getting paid paternity and parental leave and more flexibility for working families, and also the concerns raised by the Employers' Group regarding additional burdens on SMEs. She said that the directive was a positive step forward which "can improve gender equality in the long-term and have a positive economic impact as women will be better positioned to take part in the labour market". Participants also discussed related issues such as further measures needed to address the gender pay gap and the importance of monitoring take up the new rights to see if workers, particularly fathers, are able to take advantage of them and ensure that they do not suffer detrimental treatment as a result.

[LEARN MORE](#)

2019 REPORT ON EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

[The report shows](#) some progress in gender equality, but women still continue to face inequalities in many areas:



- **The EU employment rate for women reached an all-time high of 66.4 %** in 2017, but the situation differs across Member States. Last year, eight Member States received recommendations under the European Semester framework to improve female participation in the labour market (Austria, Czechia, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Italy, Poland, and Slovakia).
- **Women are more at risk of poverty**, with salaries on average 16% lower than for men. This translates in the pension gap, which stood at 35.7 % in 2017. In some countries, more than 10 % of older women cannot afford necessary health care.

- **Women remain largely under-represented in Parliaments and government.** Only 6 of the 28 national parliaments across the EU are led by a woman and seven out of ten members of national parliaments in the EU are men. While the current level of 30.5 % female senior Ministers is the highest since data were first available for all EU Member States in 2004, there is still evidence suggesting that women tend to be allocated portfolios considered to have lower political priority.
- **The glass-ceiling remains a reality in the business world** with only 6.3 % of CEO positions in major publicly listed companies in the EU held by women.

Other pieces of information:

- [Public consultation on equal pay](#) – open until 5 April 2019
- [Call for proposals to prevent and combat gender-based violence and violence against children, youth people and women](#) – open until 13 June 2019
- [Statement by the European Commission on the occasion of International Women's Day 2019.](#)
- Also today, as part of the [Women in Digital programme](#), the Commission is organising the [second Women in Cyber](#) event to raise awareness about the need of women in cybersecurity.
- Eurostat data on the gender employment gap is available [here](#), on women in managerial positions [here](#), and statistics on women in national parliaments and governments [here](#).
- Today or tomorrow, the European Commission will launch a public consultation on the gender strategy – in order to take stock of the Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016 -2019 and to evaluate priorities for the next gender strategy to be adopted under the new Commission.
- The Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU and EIGE are organising an event entitled "Born to be LEADERS", 7th of March 2019.
- [EP inter parliamentary conference with national MPs](#) - 7 March

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS - 23 - 26 MAY 2019

Ahead of the 2019 European elections, the European Parliament has undertaken several communication actions to make EU citizens aware of “What Europe does for them” in their everyday lives.

The EP campaign is centred around the “thistimeimvoting.eu” initiative, by which they are trying to get the grassroots (individuals) to persuade others – friends, family, colleagues, etc – to go out and vote: <https://www.thistimeimvoting.eu/>

For your campaigning at national level, there is an interactive site which allows people to find out about the impact the EU has had in their region and in their lives <https://www.what-europe-does-for-me.eu>

The EP has also just launched a website explaining how to vote in every member state: <https://www.european-elections.eu/>

Below is the link to the EESC’s webpage connecting with the European Parliament’s campaign: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/Focuson2019EUelections>

The ETUC has launched a campaign to vote for parties that defend a fairer Europe for workers. Full program can be found at <https://www.etuc.org/en/publication/etuc-programme-eu-elections-2019>

Please use these links to encourage people to vote and spread the word!



[facebook.com/EESCWorkersGroup](https://www.facebook.com/EESCWorkersGroup)



[@WorkersEESC](https://twitter.com/WorkersEESC)



[Workers' Group](https://www.youtube.com/WorkersGroup)

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/members-groups/groups/workers-group>

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