



Input of the European Economic and Social Committee to the ILO Global Coalition for Social Justice



**European Economic
and Social Committee**

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Introduction

The Global Coalition for Social Justice, an initiative of ILO Director-General Gilbert Hounbo, aims to step up collective efforts to urgently address social justice deficits and to speed up the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Decent Work Agenda. The overarching goal is to achieve a greater balance among the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, significantly reduce inequalities and poverty and address essential needs and opportunities worldwide.

The Coalition serves as a voluntary platform for governments, employers' and workers' organisations, international and regional organisations, financial institutions and development banks, enterprises, international non-governmental organisations and academia. All are committed to advancing social justice and to engaging in collaborative efforts to that end.

The EESC was among the **first partners to join the Coalition**, a decision that was officially presented at the World Day for Social Justice on 9 February 2024. The mission of the Global Coalition for Social Justice aligns with the core values of the EESC. This includes the EESC's commitment to, and its work on, labour rights, decent work, fair wages, social inclusion and the promotion of social and civil dialogue. By becoming a partner in the Coalition, the EESC aims to amplify the scale and impact of its actions, cooperating with a broader network of actors to advance social justice.

This document seeks to provide input, albeit not comprehensive, to the Global Coalition for Social Justice. It highlights key messages from EESC opinions on the **six priority areas identified by the International Labour Organization (ILO)** for immediate action:

1. Addressing inequality, discrimination and exclusion.
2. Realising labour rights as human rights, ensuring human dignity and meeting basic needs.
3. Expanding access to and capabilities for productive and freely chosen employment and sustainable enterprises.
4. Providing protection and building resilience.
5. Strengthening just transitions and the social dimension of sustainable development, trade and investment.
6. Reinforcing institutions of social dialogue.

The EESC looks forward to **cooperating** with the ILO and the broader network of partners of the Global Coalition on this important initiative, enhancing, together, our ambitions and actions to advance social justice and fostering sustainable development on a global scale.

1. Addressing inequality, discrimination and exclusion

Equality is a core value of the European Union. Article 8 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) empowers the EU to introduce measures eliminating inequalities and urges it to promote equality between men and women through all its policies. Article 153 TFEU underpins EU action in the area of equal opportunities and equal treatment in matters of employment and occupation and Article 157 TFEU recognises the principle that men and women should get equal pay for equal work or work of equal value. Article 19 TFEU grants the EU the competence to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Furthermore, chapter 3 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which was integrated into the EU treaty framework, is on equality. It also contains rights such as: equality before the law, non-discrimination, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, equality between women and men, the rights of the child, the rights of the elderly and integration of persons with disabilities.

The EESC is dedicated to fostering a society where **equality, inclusion and respect for diversity** are paramount. It put in place some dedicated internal structures, like the permanent groups on migration and integration, Roma and disability rights and an ad-hoc group on equality to promote a cross-cutting culture of equality within the EESC, including all aspects of this principle, particularly gender equality.

The Committee has supported and contributed to the adoption of five key **ongoing strategies** to create the conditions for everyone to live, thrive and lead regardless of differences based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation: the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025¹, the EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025², the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation 2020-2030³, the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025⁴, the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030⁵, the 2021-2027 action plan on integration and inclusion, regarding migrants and people with a migrant background⁶ and the 2021-2030 EU strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life⁷.

The Committee has also adopted more specific recommendations to bring the above-mentioned strategies to life. For example, in an opinion adopted in April 2023⁸, the EESC welcomed the flagship initiative of the European Commission on a European Disability Card, as it could facilitate the mutual recognition of disability status for card holders in the European Union and enable the right to free movement and residence across the EU for persons with disabilities. In addition, the EESC considers it crucial to complement the launch of the European Disability Card with measures, both at European and national level, aimed at improving the general accessibility of built environments, transport, services and goods.

¹ [SOC/633](#) opinion on a *Gender Equality Strategy*.

² [SOC/666](#) opinion on *A Union of Equality: EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025*.

³ [Contribution](#) from the EESC study group on Roma inclusion for the post-2020 Roma strategy; EESC [event](#).

⁴ [SOC/667](#) opinion on *A Union of Equality: LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025*.

⁵ [SOC/680](#) opinion on *Strategy on the rights of persons with disabilities*.

⁶ [SOC/668](#) opinion on *An Action plan on integration and inclusion 2021-2027*.

⁷ [SOC/704](#) opinion on *An EU strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life*.

⁸ [SOC/765](#) opinion on a *European Disability Card*.

Gender-based violence is one of the areas in which the EESC has been actively working, given that it is not only one of the most relentless forms of gender discrimination but also a human rights violation. The EESC stressed that violence against women is the ultimate expression of discrimination against women and it represents a control mechanism that stems from inequality between women and men while at the same time reinforcing and perpetuating this inequality.

Given the range and extent of the different forms of violence suffered by women, the policies that aim to counter them must not be neutral but must have a clear and unequivocal gender perspective, presented in such a way as to make it easier to understand their importance and effectiveness. The EESC welcomed the EU's directive on violence against women, aiming to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence and ensure a high level of security and the full enjoyment of fundamental rights, including the right to equal treatment and non-discrimination.

The EESC expressed its deep concern regarding the systematic denial of structural violence against women, i.e. violence suffered simply for being a woman. Not only does this denial undermine equal coexistence between men and women, it also constitutes an attack on the values and principles enshrined in Article 2 of the TEU⁹.

The EESC called for putting an end to gender-based violence, be it at home or work, while playing a key role together with civil society organisations (CSOs) to prevent violence against women and promote a gender-sensitive culture. The EESC marked its support for any international and European initiative aimed at eradicating violence against women, including ILO Convention 190 and the Istanbul Convention. Moreover, it called for measures to tackle gender-based violence online and called for the establishment of an emergency legal fund at EU level which would provide support to CSOs that challenge legislation that violates women's rights in court¹⁰.

The EESC is currently working on an own-initiative opinion on *Violence against women as a human rights issue*¹¹, to be adopted in December 2024.

2. Realising labour rights as human rights, ensuring human dignity and meeting basic needs

In the current context of labour shortages in many sectors, the EESC promotes a labour market for all¹², which offers equal opportunities to all and harnesses everybody's talent, creativity and productivity. The EESC believes that the European Union and Member States should take a more ambitious approach to active labour market policies while protecting workers' fundamental rights and ensuring a sustainable and competitive business environment for companies in the global economy. The EESC also considers that quality of work is one of the fundamental components of quality of life. The EESC therefore firmly believes that it should be given special attention in EU policies, as it must prevent the risks of inequality, poverty, social exclusion and unfair competition¹³.

One of the topics on which the Committee has focused is the development of **new and flexible forms of employment relationships and non-standard employment models**, which change the way in which the European labour market is structured. New forms of work, duly protected, can open up new opportunities for people to engage in entrepreneurship, to diversify incomes and to take up occupations

⁹ [SOC/726](#) opinion on *Combating violence against women*.

¹⁰ [SOC/633](#) opinion on *Gender Equality Strategy*.

¹¹ [SOC/798](#) opinion on *Violence against women as a human rights issue: state of play of measures across the EU*.

¹² Priority of the EESC Labour Market Observatory ([LMO](#)) for the 2023-2025 term of office.

¹³ [SOC/685](#) opinion on *Key components of sustainable quality work during and after recovery*.

and activities that were previously unavailable to them. On the other hand, new forms of work should provide a guarantee of access to social protection¹⁴.

The Committee has, for example, looked into **teleworking**, which, with the pandemic, has become established in the EU. It has noted the risks associated with teleworking, such as high periods of work, isolation, imbalance between working and family life and psychosocial risks¹⁵. The EESC also called attention to the risk of using teleworking as a possibility for women taking up the double burden of paid and unpaid work. Therefore, the EESC combats gender stereotypes and highlights the need for a cultural change and for removing any structural barriers in order to achieve more equal distribution of unpaid domestic work¹⁶. However, if properly managed and remunerated, teleworking could improve work-life balance and offers many opportunities for those further from the labour market, for example people with disabilities or those living in rural areas. In terms of regulation, the key issues are to ensure that teleworking is voluntary and reversible and that teleworkers have the same individual and collective rights as comparable workers in the companies that they work for; that the teleworking arrangements are set out in written form; and that specific measures are established, where necessary, to guarantee the effectiveness of teleworkers' rights, including health and safety conditions at work¹⁷.

Social partners can play a significant role in advancing teleworking in a way that contributes to gender equality, promoting well-being at work and productivity, e.g., through collective bargaining¹⁸.

Regarding **platform work**, the EESC welcomed the European Commission's initial proposal for a Directive on improving working conditions in platform work and acknowledged that the platform economy opens up opportunities for both businesses and workers. Companies can reach new markets, reduce costs and capitalise on innovations in digital technologies and access to global and local workforces to improve efficiency and enhance productivity. Workers have new income-generating and job opportunities, which are increasingly important and even critical for vulnerable groups such as young people, migrants and women. These opportunities have to be addressed in a socially sustainable way¹⁹.

The concerns expressed in relation to the working conditions in the platform economy include more limited access to social protection and social security coverage, health and safety risks, insecure work, fragmented working hours and inadequate levels of income and difficulties in ensuring the recognition of collective rights. According to the EESC, these concerns need to be addressed and balanced solutions need to be developed at appropriate levels – European, national and through collective bargaining involving platforms.

Another key issue concerns the impact of **artificial intelligence and algorithmic management** on working conditions. The EESC has recommended to ensure transparency and accountability in relation to algorithms for workers and businesses²⁰. In its opinion on the Artificial Intelligence Act²¹, the EESC reiterated its 'human-in-command' approach to AI, and strongly recommended that certain decisions should remain the prerogative of humans, particularly in domains where these decisions have a moral

¹⁴ [SOC/722](#) opinion on *Supporting labour market developments: how to maintain employability, boost productivity and develop skills, especially in SMEs*.

¹⁵ [SOC/777](#) opinion on the *Employment guidelines*.

¹⁶ [SOC/662](#) opinion on *Teleworking and gender equality*.

¹⁷ [SOC/777](#) opinion on the *Employment guidelines*.

¹⁸ [SOC/662](#) opinion on *Teleworking and gender equality*.

¹⁹ [SOC/709](#) opinion on *Working conditions package*.

²⁰ [SOC/709](#) opinion on *Working conditions package*.

²¹ [INT/940](#) opinion on *Regulation on artificial intelligence*.

component and legal implications or a societal impact such as in the judiciary, law enforcement, social services, healthcare, housing, financial services, labour relations and education.

The EESC welcomed the fact that the Commission proposal for the Artificial Intelligence Act raised the bar substantially as regards the quality, performance and trustworthiness of AI that the EU is willing to allow. The EESC particularly welcomes the fact that the Commission put health, safety and fundamental rights at the centre of the AIA.

Currently, the EESC is preparing two opinions on artificial intelligence in relation to labour: an opinion on *Fostering opportunities and managing risks from new technologies for public services, the organisation of work and more equal and inclusive societies*²², to be adopted in October 2024 and another opinion *For a pro-worker artificial intelligence: trade unions' role in preventing and minimising the negative impacts on the world of work*²³, to be adopted in December 2024.

Furthermore, as regards **strengthening sustainability and resilience in global value and supply chains**, the EESC considers it essential to level the playing field and fight against environmental, labour, social and human rights infringements. Necessary steps include **mandatory due diligence, a new UN treaty on business and human rights, the ILO convention on decent work in global supply chains and sustainability in public procurements**.

Regarding supply chains, it is imperative to establish a comprehensive framework focused on due diligence and accountability to address the pressing need for raising social and labour standards in third countries. EU policy decisions should include the following recommendations²⁴:

1. Implement binding corporate sustainability due diligence directives, ensuring adherence to international labour and environmental standards throughout the supply chain. This includes robust enforcement mechanisms to hold multinational corporations accountable for their actions, especially in regions where labour rights are at risk.
2. Foster collaboration between international organisations, governments and civil society to support capacity building and empowerment initiatives in third countries, aimed at promoting social dialogue, collective bargaining and equitable working conditions. Such efforts should prioritise enhancing the capabilities of local communities and workers to advocate for their rights within multinational supply chains.
3. Strengthen transparency and reporting requirements for companies operating in third countries, mandating the disclosure of their supply chain practices, including the identification of potential risks related to human rights abuses and environmental degradation. This transparency should extend to financial disclosures, with investors encouraged to prioritise ethical sourcing practices and sustainability criteria in their investment decisions.

The Committee also welcomes the EU's initiative to ban products made with forced labour and emphasises the role of civil society and social partners in combating forced labour. It supports providing clear guidelines to help SMEs identify and mitigate forced labour risks in their operations²⁵.

When it comes to child labour, while the proposed regulation mentions it, the EESC points to the need for a corresponding EU legislative initiative based on existing ILO conventions to combat all other forms of child labour. In particular, all EU Member States should ratify the 2014 Protocol to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Forced Labour Convention 1930²⁶.

²² [SOC/790](#).

²³ [SOC/803](#).

²⁴ [INT/1021](#) opinion on *For a resilient, sustainable and responsible European Union supply chain of critical raw materials*.

²⁵ [REX/565](#) opinion on *Forced labour products ban*.

²⁶ [REX/565](#) opinion on *Forced labour products ban*.

The Committee is aware of the difficulties that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) encounter in the application of due diligence practices. That is why we welcome the proposal to issue guidelines to assist companies with identifying, preventing, mitigating or ending risk of forced labour in their operations and value chains. We also call for an adequate support toolkit at European and national levels to further assist these enterprises, and we are convinced that due diligence is an ongoing, risk-based process that benefits from the involvement of trade unions and workers' representatives²⁷.

The EU Domestic Advisory Groups, established under the EU free trade agreements and managed by the EESC, also have a role to act as ambassadors and promote these recent EU autonomous instruments among trade partners in third countries.

3. Expanding access to and capabilities for productive and freely chosen employment and sustainable enterprises

In the European Union, the **acceleration of technological progress and sustainable smart growth, coupled with climate change, demographic change and ageing, migration and the digital and green transitions** bring about change and new challenges in our societies and on the labour market.

Such **transformations** require good understanding of the type of **skills** that are needed for the future, including in SMEs, in order to maintain sustainable employability, contribute to a high level of productivity and to reduce labour shortages²⁸.

According to the EESC, education is a human right throughout each individual's life. Therefore, the EESC calls for **rights to lifelong learning** (taking into account national industrial relations systems and educational and training practices), to provide all citizens with learning opportunities for personal and professional development²⁹. In particular in the context of the European Year of Skills, the EESC proposed the implementation of a skills guarantee to offer the right to access quality and inclusive training for all³⁰.

The EESC shares the view that **'the EU needs a skills revolution to ensure people can thrive'**³¹. We need forward-looking industrial strategies, including effective skills policies, to support upskilling and reskilling of the workforce.

Such policies include measures to modernise and improve the quality, attractiveness and flexibility of **vocational education and training (VET)**³². Also, the EESC points out the importance of **paid educational leave**, including in line with ILO Convention 140³³. **Training funds managed by social partners** are an effective way to provide training in response to needs identified at national and sectoral

²⁷ [REX/565](#) opinion on *Forced labour products ban*.

²⁸ [SOC/722](#) opinion on *Supporting labour market developments: how to maintain employability, boost productivity and develop skills, especially in SMEs*.

²⁹ [SOC/755](#) opinion on *Competence and skill development in a context of the green and digital transition*.

³⁰ [SOC/749](#) opinion on the *European Year of Skills 2023*.

³¹ European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, COM(2020) 274 final.

³² [SOC/689](#) opinion on *How to guarantee decent work for young people and ensure the inclusion of NEETs through the proper elaboration of National Recovery Plans* and [SOC/722](#) opinion on *Supporting labour market developments: how to maintain employability, boost productivity and develop skills, especially in SMEs*.

³³ [SOC/708](#) opinion on *Learning and employability package*.

level. **Individual learning accounts** are another approach considered by EU Member States and social partners³⁴.

Skills development and effective implementation of the right and access to lifelong learning must be an integral part of **broader economic growth strategies** and recovery and resilience plans³⁵.

Special attention needs to be given to socio-economically **disadvantaged groups of people** as regards accessing quality and inclusive training for re- and upskilling.

The EESC recognises that a just transition means ensuring that **everyone has access to opportunities to improve their basic digital skills** relating to daily tasks and to understand cybersecurity, digital communication, data security, personal data protection, privacy online and the dangers of disinformation³⁶.

The EESC notes that there are wide disparities when it comes to basic levels of digital skills, with disadvantaged groups and a high number of adults, especially older people, being particularly affected. The digital divide exists, and digital skills programming should therefore be more sensitive to the training of older people and other disadvantaged groups, including by adapting training to their needs where necessary, in order to ensure that no one is left behind in the dual digital and green transition. Special attention should be paid to the inclusion of women in such training, in view of the gender gap that exists in terms of access to training, in order to help women adapt to the digital and green transitions³⁷.

As regards **green skills**, the EESC supports the actions already undertaken at EU level to promote learning on environmental sustainability and the green transition in the EU and calls for practical solutions to be offered to EU citizens and businesses³⁸. To be successful, the green transition will require people with the right skills and workplaces with the right working environment and green production systems.

The EESC calls for the mobilisation of efforts and effective joint action by **institutions, businesses, social partners and stakeholders** under the Pact for Skills³⁹. **The social partners** are key actors in developing the human potential to achieve sustainable development and maintain employability skills. Their role in a sound and effective collective bargaining process is critical to bridge the gap between employees' aspirations towards their professional careers and companies' needs, as well as the recognition of skills, but also to improve the link between education systems, VET systems and employment services with policies on development of innovation, industry, trade and technology. Social dialogue and collective bargaining are powerful tools for achieving these goals.

³⁴ [SOC/708](#) opinion on *Learning and employability package*.

³⁵ [SOC/722](#) opinion on *Supporting labour market developments: how to maintain employability, boost productivity and develop skills, especially in SMEs*.

³⁶ [SOC/755](#) opinion on *Competence and skill development in a context of the green and digital transition*.

³⁷ [SOC/755](#) opinion on *Competence and skill development in a context of the green and digital transition*.

³⁸ [SOC/722](#) opinion on *Supporting labour market developments: how to maintain employability, boost productivity and develop skills, especially in SMEs* and [SOC/755](#) opinion on *Competence and skill development in a context of the green and digital transition*.

³⁹ [SOC/722](#) opinion on *Supporting labour market developments: how to maintain employability, boost productivity and develop skills, especially in SMEs*.

Civil society organisations are well placed to offer non-formal and informal learning environments as well as meaningful engagement for corporate volunteers to develop key competences. Respective civil society organisations also have an important role to play, especially those operating in the field of social entrepreneurship or with various vulnerable groups in society⁴⁰.

4. Providing protection and building resilience

The European Pillar of Social Rights states that ‘regardless of the type and duration of the employment relationship, workers have the right to fair and equal treatment regarding **working conditions and access to social protection**’⁴¹.

The right of every worker to **working conditions** that respect their health, safety and dignity, and workers’ right to information and consultation are enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The EESC considers that it is imperative to put in place fair and just working conditions and reduce precarious work⁴².

The EESC has also adopted an opinion on the *Adequate minimum wages directive* in 2021⁴³, in which it supported well-developed wage-setting systems and well-functioning social protection systems that provide safety nets for those in need, as well as other measures to prevent in-work poverty.

As regards **minimum income schemes**, the EESC considers that they should be part of national strategies to **combat poverty**. The Committee stresses the need for a rights-based approach for all to an adequate minimum income that leaves no one behind and insists on the necessity of keeping minimum incomes in line with inflation. The Committee recommends paying special attention to specific groups such as single-parent families, migrant families, young people, people with disabilities and Roma; it highlights the importance of minimum income schemes for self-employed people in Europe. The Committee also draws attention to the need for adequate pensions so that pensioners do not have to rely on minimum income support⁴⁴.

In recent years, the EESC has also focused on fighting **energy poverty** and called for the establishment of an EU strategy against energy poverty to reduce it to the minimum by 2030 and then eradicate it⁴⁵.

The Committee also recommended the **adoption of an EU homelessness strategy based on the ‘Housing First’ approach**⁴⁶, underpinned by Council recommendations, to eliminate homelessness by 2030.

Regarding social protection, the EESC highlights the need to reconcile **adequacy and sustainability of social protection systems**, to provide for robust safety nets, e.g. in case of unemployment and to safeguard peoples’ right to ageing in dignity. The Committee stresses the need to close the social security gap and encourages the Member States to properly implement the Council Recommendation on access to social protection⁴⁷ and to introduce a modern scheme to all forms of work that is capable

⁴⁰ [SOC/722](#) opinion on *Supporting labour market developments: how to maintain employability, boost productivity and develop skills, especially in SMEs*.

⁴¹ Principle 5 of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

⁴² [SOC/745](#) opinion on *Precarious work and mental health*.

⁴³ [SOC/664](#) opinion on an *Adequate minimum wages directive*.

⁴⁴ [SOC/744](#) opinion on *Recommendation on minimum income*.

⁴⁵ [SOC/717](#) opinion on *Tackling energy poverty and the EU’s resilience: challenges from an economic and social perspective*.

⁴⁶ [SOC/768](#) opinion on *For an EU framework for national homeless strategies based on the principle of ‘Housing First’*.

⁴⁷ [The Council Recommendation](#) of 8 November 2019 on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed

of ensuring the adequate income of future pensioners, especially those who are and will be subject to discontinuous working careers⁴⁸.

As regards **occupational safety and health (OSH)**⁴⁹, Directive 89/391/EEC ('Framework Directive'), lays down the main principles to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work. It guarantees minimum safety and health requirements throughout the European Union while Member States are allowed to maintain or establish more stringent measures. The Framework Directive is accompanied by **further directives focusing on specific aspects of safety and health at work**, like dangerous substances, physical hazards, ergonomics, psychosocial risks, etc. Together they form the fundamentals of European safety and health legislation.

The EESC identified **new challenges** in the field of OSH, brought by the digital and green transition and climate change.

It also stressed the **important role played by the social partners and civil society organisations**⁵⁰ in developing and implementing sustainable OSH policies. The EESC believes that social dialogue (**SD**) can help to anticipate and manage change, improve prevention of workplace accidents and work-related illnesses and to be prepared for any potential future health crises.

It pointed out that investments in OSH contribute not only to enhanced well-being for workers and entrepreneurs but also to high returns, particularly in terms of cost reduction, greater productivity and sustainability of social security systems.

The EESC called for more public and private investment in OSH and more financial incentives for companies investing in OSH, with a particular focus on SMEs⁵¹.

Standard working conditions provide the best prevention of psychosocial risks, while non-voluntary forms of precarious work have been shown to negatively affect the mental health of workers.

The EESC is concerned that access to OSH is not evenly distributed throughout the EU Member States. It is necessary to take into account dimensions such as gender, ethnicity, age and disability and link the OSH strategy to the debate on equality.

In the field of **mental health**⁵², the EESC also called for adoption of a legislative initiative on preventing psychosocial risks. An effective preventive approach requires action to be taken with regard to the working environment and working conditions rather than focusing solely on the mental health of the individual.

In the field of dangerous substances, the EESC asked for substances toxic to reproduction (reprotoxic) to be included in the application of the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive (CMD) and for more attention to be paid to occupational carcinogenic exposures affecting women⁵³.

The EESC considers it important for the Commission to improve upon a common methodology for the adoption of binding occupational exposure limit values (BOELs) in the CMD, in consultation with social partners, Member States and other stakeholders. It also recommended that a BOEL be adopted for formaldehyde.

⁴⁸ [SOC/689](#) opinion on *How to guarantee decent work for young people and ensure the inclusion of NEETs through the proper elaboration of National Recovery Plans*.

⁴⁹ [SOC/ 698](#) opinion on *Health & Safety at Work – EU Strategic Framework (2021-2027)*.

⁵⁰ [SOC/703](#) opinion on *Social dialogue as a tool to promote health and safety at work*.

⁵¹ [SOC/623](#) opinion on *Summary of the costs and benefits of Investments in occupational safety and health (OSH)*.

⁵² [SOC/745](#) opinion on *Precarious work and mental health*.

⁵³ [SOC/559](#) opinion on *Protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens or mutagens at work*.

The EESC considers it necessary to set up programmes to propose life-long health surveillance for all persons who have been exposed to workplace carcinogens in the framework of national social security or public health systems.

The EESC stresses that in order to improve the protection of workers, Member States should ensure that labour inspectorates have sufficient financial and human resources to carry out their duties.

Regarding asbestos, the EESC recommends⁵⁴ that the technical limit value for asbestos exposure be set at a lower level than the Commission's proposal and suggests a roadmap of complementary measures including financial support for businesses and regions that need it in order to meet the targets. The EESC also proposes a broad public information campaign on asbestos and its deadly risks and training for workers, as well as medical checks for workers at risk.

The EESC draws particular attention to ILO Convention 162 and the Rotterdam Convention. In the context of their discussion and implementation, the EU and its Member States should play an active and leading role in promoting better developments in all countries of the world and in international trade chains.

The EESC also calls on the EU and its Member States to actively promote an international ban on the use of asbestos and protection for workers dealing with existing asbestos.

5. Strengthening just transitions and the social dimension of sustainable development, trade and investment

The EESC is a longstanding supporter of incorporating **social considerations into the EU's trade policy**, calling for consistency with our broader values and policy objectives. We welcomed the 2022 Communication on Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD)⁵⁵, among other things, for its declared aim of mainstreaming both environmental and social sustainability across future trade and investment agreements⁵⁶.

The EESC calls for making ILO core conventions an essential element of all such agreements, just like what is happening for the Paris Agreement, in which the fundamental concept of a 'just transition' is enshrined. This concept requires a strong labour component, and the EESC has been advocating for the EU to be consistent with this approach across all its relevant initiatives⁵⁷.

In particular, the EESC identifies three dimensions along which the EU should consistently pursue and promote the social component of the just transition: internal, bilateral/plurilateral and multilateral.

For the internal dimension, the EU has recently expanded its policy toolbox with the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), deforestation regulations and adopted the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD). In addition, the ban on products made with forced labour is close to the final approval. The EESC stresses that it is crucial to streamline the just transition approach across all instruments for a coherent and mutually reinforcing effect.

Moving onto the bilateral and plurilateral dimension, the EESC has long called for sustainability to be one of the drivers for trade policy, given the crucial role trade must play in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As already mentioned, we welcomed the comprehensive approach taken

⁵⁴ [SOC/743](#) opinion on *Protection from exposure to asbestos at work*.

⁵⁵ [DG Trade communication on the TSD Review](#) (2022).

⁵⁶ [REX/561](#) opinion on *The power of trade partnerships: together for green and just economic growth*.

⁵⁷ [REX/561](#) opinion on *The power of trade partnerships: together for green and just economic growth*.

by the Commission on the TSD review, and the public consultation that led to it: this showed the crucial role that civil society can and should play in shaping such policies.

The EESC supports the Commission's ambition to mainstream sustainability across future trade agreements and to seek broader commitments from partner countries on TSD chapters. This needs to go hand in hand with the support of trade partners in achieving TSD goals through technical assistance, capacity building, incentives, financial assistance and the development of policy instruments⁵⁸.

The goal of mainstreaming environmental and social sustainability should not exclude public procurement. The TSD Communication correctly prioritises market access for environmental goods and services as well as raw materials and energy goods that are essential for the functioning of a carbon-neutral economy. However, we regret that too little attention is paid to the wider labour and human rights impacts of environmentally sustainable trade⁵⁹.

Concerning the multilateral dimension, the EESC has been consistently calling on the Commission to intensify the multilateral outreach and coordinate the advancement and implementation of the TSD strategy with partners where possible. The ILO should be an integral part of all such efforts as a partner and as a source of data and information on the ground⁶⁰.

We are aware of the difficulties encountered by the EU in advancing the labour dimension at the World Trade Organization (WTO) with significant pushback from several important developing countries and partners. However, we urge the Commission to remain vigilant and keep advocating and promoting the just transition approach in all relevant multilateral fora, including the WTO⁶¹.

6. Reinforcing institutions of social dialogue

The **European social dialogue** is a pillar of the European social model and of European democracy. It is enshrined in the Treaty, supported by EU legislation and recognised in the European Pillar of Social Rights and since 2023, social dialogue has been invigorated with very welcome steps such as the Commission Communication on Social Dialogue, reinforcing and promoting social dialogue at EU level, and the first ever Council Recommendation on Social Dialogue, providing guidance on reinforcing social dialogue and collective bargaining at national level.

In January 2024, 39 years after the first summit convened by Jacques Delors in 1985, the Belgian Presidency and the European Commission convened a **Social Partners Summit at Val Duchesse** which produced a Tripartite Declaration in which the social partners committed to adopt a **Pact for European Social Dialogue** by early 2025. Furthermore, in April 2024, the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union organised a high-level conference in La Hulpe dedicated to the European Pillar of Social Rights. The aim of the conference was to reflect with key European stakeholders on the future social agenda of the European Union. The event led to a declaration including a **reinforced commitment to upholding social dialogue**.

Social dialogue at national and European level plays a **key role in shaping economic, labour and social policies that promote the upward convergence** of living and working conditions across

⁵⁸ [REX/561](#) opinion on *The power of trade partnerships: together for green and just economic growth*.

⁵⁹ [REX/561](#) opinion on *The power of trade partnerships: together for green and just economic growth*.

⁶⁰ [REX/535](#) opinion on *Trade Policy Review – An Open, Sustainable and Assertive Trade Policy*.

⁶¹ [REX/535](#) opinion on *Trade Policy Review – An Open, Sustainable and Assertive Trade Policy*.

Member States. The EESC is fully aligned with the view that social dialogue can be a beneficial tool to drive economic and social resilience, competitiveness and sustainable and inclusive growth⁶².

Sound corporate governance based on social dialogue, collective bargaining and respect for workers' rights to information, consultation and participation can make it possible to achieve positive economic targets, together with social and environmental goals. Facilitating the taking of informed management decisions in matters of direct interest to workers contributes to a sustainable and fairer business model. This helps to promote the European social model, which is an engine for the competitiveness of European companies⁶³.

Collective bargaining is also a means through which employers, and their organisations and trade unions, can establish fair wages and working conditions, while also taking into account national economic and social interests. In this context, the EESC refers to ILO Convention 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise, which is also a fundamental right of both workers and employers, as is the right of non-association itself⁶⁴.

Mechanisms and legal instruments serving the purpose of **democracy at work** make companies more resilient, more economically successful and at the same time better able to deliver on employment and decent work. Democracy at work as a guiding concept should cover all workers and types of work as well as all workplaces, be they private, public or social in nature, irrespective of size, sector or other organisational aspects. The circumstances of SMEs should be considered. Empirical evidence shows that workers' voices offer the flexibility and room for manoeuvre necessary at workplace level in order to adapt to structural changes⁶⁵.

The EESC is of the view that **it is up to the social partners** to determine suitable structures for collective bargaining and, where appropriate, for tripartite and bipartite social dialogue. The EESC also recognises that governments play a key role in recognising the importance of collective bargaining by providing the enabling conditions to facilitate its undertaking, to protect against discriminatory practices and to prevent attempts at restricting workers from exercising their legal right to union participation⁶⁶.

The EESC encourages the Member States and the social partners to strengthen social dialogue at **national level**. It also recommends capitalising on the traditional content of social dialogue to include other, more strategic content oriented towards sustainability and solutions. This would be, for example, anticipating the future needs of companies and workers with certain competencies and skills, joint activities for training workers, ensuring a fair transition to the digital and green economies, regulating as well as developing balanced solutions for the work of platforms, and similar important development issues⁶⁷.

Effective social dialogue must include: representative and legitimate social partners with the knowledge, technical capacity and timely access to relevant information to participate; the political will

⁶² [SOC/764](#) opinion on *Strengthening social dialogue*.

⁶³ [SOC/644](#) opinion on *Social dialogue as an important pillar of economic sustainability and the resilience of economies taking into account the influence of lively public debate in the Member States*.

⁶⁴ [SOC/767](#) opinion on *Strengthening collective bargaining power across the European Union*.

⁶⁵ [SOC/746](#) opinion on *Democracy at work*.

⁶⁶ [SOC/767](#) opinion on *Strengthening collective bargaining power across the European Union*.

⁶⁷ [SOC/685](#) opinion on *Key components of sustainable quality work during and after recovery*.

and commitment to engage in social dialogue; respect for the fundamental rights of autonomy for the social partners, freedom of association and collective bargaining and an enabling legal and institutional framework to support social dialogue processes with well-functioning institutions⁶⁸.

It is important to **allocate sufficient time for consultations throughout the policymaking process**, ensure **adequate institutional frameworks** and ensure **access to the relevant information needed** in order to participate in social dialogue. Proper format and timing of such consultations is important to ensure quality input into upcoming policy initiatives.

Positive results of social dialogue should not, however, be taken for granted, as social dialogue cannot be simply taken as an instrument that can be implemented. The Commission should look at the **successful national, regional and sectoral models** and see why they became successful.

The EESC is concerned about the unclear situation as regards the implementation of social partner agreements through Council directives. Without clarity, transparency and predictability, the broad discretion of the European Commission in this matter is likely to have the unintended consequence of discouraging the social partners from negotiating these kinds of agreements. The EESC reiterates its call for the Commission to discuss this issue with the social partners⁶⁹.

According to the EESC, the specific role of social partner organisations should be fully recognised and respected in social dialogue structures and processes, while recognising that **civil dialogue**, involving a broader set of stakeholders on a wider range of topics, is a separate process⁷⁰.

Civil society organisations are fundamental to representing the general and specific interests of groups of citizens, encouraging participation in social life and defending the rights of the groups of citizens that they represent. Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union provides that ‘the institutions shall, by appropriate means, give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action’. It adds: ‘The institutions shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society.’ It includes within this framework the tradition of consultation (Article 11(3) TEU). At the same time, the provision calls for ‘an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society’ to be maintained. The EESC calls on the EU institutions to take the lead and develop a **strategy for civil society**, with a clear **Action Plan**⁷¹.

⁶⁸ [SOC/644](#) opinion on *Social dialogue as an important pillar of economic sustainability and the resilience of economies taking into account the influence of lively public debate in the Member States*.

⁶⁹ [SOC/764](#) opinion on *Strengthening social dialogue*.

⁷⁰ [SOC/764](#) opinion on *Strengthening social dialogue*.

⁷¹ [SOC/782](#) opinion on *Strengthening civil dialogue and participatory democracy in the EU: a path forward*.



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