

A project of hope that provides security: quality jobs and fair pay for all!

Dear Deputy Prime Minister Dermagne,

Dear Minister Vandenbrouke,

Dear Commissioner Schmit,

Dear colleagues,

Today workers in Europe face a social justice emergency.

December's Eurobarometer shows 73% of people think their standard of living will decrease in the next year. Almost half of respondents (47%) say their standard of living has already fallen. Over a third of Europeans (37%) experience difficulties paying bills and they expect this to still be the case over the next year. A majority of respondents expect the national economic situation to get worse in one year's time.

In spite of advances delivered in this term by the European institutions, there is today a social justice emergency in Europe. Insecurity and precariousness is the everyday reality of many working people.

The background note for today's discussion rightly stresses that in 2022 the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion had increased by 3 million compared to 2019 and reached 95,3 million people. The number of children in poverty has increased by 2 million since 2019, to reach a high of 20 million.

Despite reported labour shortages, workers are scared of losing their jobs and fear their children will not be able to secure quality jobs.

Attention should be paid by all policymakers to the quality of jobs. Above 10% of workers in Europe are at risk of poverty. One fifth of part-time workers are working part time because they could not find a full-time position. Over half of workers with temporary contracts work under such contracts because they could not find an open-ended contract.

Meanwhile, the past two years have seen record profits that have resulted in record shareholder payouts. The benefits of the single market have not been shared equally, the wealthiest have seen their income increase while those on low and middle incomes have seen their real pay decrease. At the same time, new business models threaten employment rights and increase the imbalance of power away from workers and their trade unions.

There must be a fundamental change. The purpose of the social market economy must be to provide quality jobs, the improvement of living and working conditions and the achievement of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Solving the lack of 'quality jobs' problem needs to be a central theme of the upcoming mandate.

We must set the compass for the next institutional term towards a Europe that delivers the European Pillar of Social Rights in practice. A Europe that truly supports workers to have a say in their workplace, collective bargaining and social dialogue. A Europe based on a fair days pay for a fair days work, employment security, advancement, respect and equality for all workers regardless of where they are from or the work that they do.

We cannot fall into the trap of a backwards looking approach that focuses on deregulation, on absence of initiatives to improve people lives, on competition uniquely based on costs of companies ignoring the essential role played by quality public services, housing, childcare, transport in creating a genuinely competitive economy that delivers the European Pillar of Social Rights.

We must do better for Europe: **we cannot go back, we must go forward.**

We need a project of hope that delivers security and safety to workers, improved pay and working conditions, improved living conditions.

The European Trade Union Confederation commends the Belgian government for its work and efforts to put the European Pillar of Social Rights at the core of the EU Agenda 2024-2029 and to promote a discussion and the definition of a roadmap to advance in the full implementation of the EPSR.

This means learning the lessons of what has worked:

Europe must remain on the path of progress and solidarity we saw in its response to the Covid-19 crisis, and support working people and their communities across the continent.

This means that we need EU institutions and Member States to put forward the necessary legislative initiatives and the necessary investments and funding, including social conditionalities, to make sure that progress in living and working conditions is ensured.

Legislation and money: these are the most effective and key tools for the EU to continue to use to advance towards the full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and to respond to the insecurity and precarious conditions workers in Europe are today experiencing.

In the next term, we must continue to deliver the European Pillar of Social Rights through **ambitious legislative initiatives**, building on the Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages and the Directive on Gender Pay Transparency. We would like to thank and commend Commissioner Schmit for the very important work he had delivered in the past years in this area. And there is still important work to do before the end of the term. The EU institutions must finalise the **Directive to improve working conditions in platform work**. We warn that any last minute amendments that would deny workers the proper categorisation as an employee should be rejected as contrary to the original objectives of the Directive. We urge the Commission to come forward now with a proposal for a **Directive on telework and the right to disconnect**.

We must avoid at any cost a **reject a return to austerity policies and promote a new economic model centred redistribution through fair and progressive taxation**. In this framework, we need effective EU tools and resources to support Member States in achieving EU social and environmental objectives: the instruments of SURE and of the Next Generation EU should become permanent tools of the European Union ; there is also the urgent need for a strong European green industrial policy with significant and effective public and private investment that underpins quality jobs and social progress.

Security for workers means quality jobs.

In this term the EU has introduced for the first time social conditionalities, for example in the Common Agricultural Policy and in the Financial Regulation. We must build upon this “value for money” approach: we need carrots as well as sticks.

We need strong **social conditionalities** linked to all forms of public funding, state aid and support to business to ensure that public money create quality jobs. At the same time, we must **revise the EU public procurement Directives** to ensure that public money goes to organisations that respect workers’ and trade union rights, that negotiate with trade unions and whose workers are covered by collective agreements. Employers who recognise trade unions, ensure security for their workers and provide quality jobs should be rewarded, not be hindered or undercut by those that don’t.

The EU must **end precarious work by guaranteeing legal rights to permanent contracts and full-time work, and a ban on unpaid internships**.

It is important also to take initiative to increase workers’ control over working time flexibility and **reduce working time**, while maintaining full pay and compensatory recruitment.

Security for workers means **respect and equality at work** for all working people, no matter who they are, where they come from, men and women in all our diversity.

Security for workers means **managing the transitions** to ensure fair conditions and security for working people.

It is of key importance to introduce a **directive for just transition in the world of work through anticipation and management of change**, based on the principles of trade union involvement and collective bargaining.

It is equally important to ensure the effective regulation of **AI in the workplace**, by enshrining the **“human in control” principle in EU legislation**. This includes among others the full respect of workers and trade union rights, as well as the full involvement of trade unions and collective bargaining at every step (design, implementation, re-valuation etc.) of the lifecycle of an AI system, as well as to strengthen the information, consultation and participation of trade unions and workers' representatives in the implementation of these applications in the workplace.

Security for workers means having the right to train with paid time off and without costs.

With regard to training, we must recognise that actions have until now not brought sufficient improvements. **We must take action at EU level ensure the right for all to training without cost to the worker and during working time.**

Security for workers means not to risk to die or be made ill at work or because of work.

Security also means committing to achieving zero deaths, injuries or illness at the workplace and because of work. Preventing psychosocial risks and online harassment and shaming at work through a European Directive. Additionally, it is crucial to adapt the European legislative framework concerning occupational safety and health to safeguard workers from the emerging risks associated with climate change and to introduce EU legislation that establishes temperature limits for work, outdoor and indoor.

Security for workers means protection against abuses and defence of trade union rights.

It is key to regulate the role of labour intermediaries and introduce an EU general legal framework limiting subcontracting and ensuring joint and several liability through the subcontracting chain. Improve the enforcement of labour mobility

rules by a more effective European Labour Authority (ELA).

The EU must defend and strengthen trade union and workers' rights, including the universal right to organise, union access to workplaces, the right to bargain collectively, and the right to strike. Attacks on trade unions must be prevented: union busting must be punishable as a crime!

Dear colleagues,

Today too many people in Europe have too little! This while a few that have a lot do not pay their share!

We must address this social justice emergency with a project of hope that provides security for workers: quality jobs and fair pay.