

Belgrade Declaration

ETUC Mid-Term Conference 2025



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Representing over 45 million working people in 41 countries across the continent, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) is the voice of workers in Europe.

Meeting in Belgrade, Serbia, in May 2025, the leaders of trade unions from across Europe discussed the concerns and priorities of workers, their families and their communities.

The challenges facing working people and their trade unions in Europe have increased since the ETUC Congress in 2023, including badly managed restructuring processes and threats of job losses in Europe, increased cost-ofliving crisis, new global and geopolitical challenges, extra tariffs imposed by the US administration and its attacks against working people, the continuation of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the rise of the far-right, new attacks against workers and trade union rights by employers and billionaires, increased pushes for deregulation and austerity. Challenges to quality jobs remain, some groups have experienced worsening of job security and conditions while extreme exploitation and wage theft have been on the increase.

In front of these challenges, trade union leaders – affiliates from both within and outside the European Union – stand united to win a fair deal for workers across our continent, to build solidarity with workers in Europe and around the world, and to reinforce our common work in solidarity to withstand any attacks against working people and their rights.

The goals and priorities included in the ETUC Berlin Manifesto are more urgent than ever.

Working people and their trade unions insist that our European future, well-being and security depend upon strong democracy, individual and collective rights, equality, and social progress and cohesion, as well as economic security that provides quality jobs, fair wages, incomes and pensions capable of sustaining full and happy lives: a fairer, more equal society. The fight against social dumping, job insecurity, and inequality must be strengthened.

Strong binding social minimum standards at EU-level, social dialogue and collective bargaining, trade union and workers' rights, information, consultation and participation, health and safety at work, as well as robust social protections and long term care, universal access to high-quality public services, are key to achieve these objectives.

The EU must deliver upon its promise to create upward social convergence. Working people and their trade unions therefore insist for the full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, including through new EU legislative measures. Collective bargaining must be reinforced, including through the effective implementation of the Minimum Wage Directive, and making full use of the national action plans to progressively reach 80% collective bargaining coverage, to better protect workers.

We will always defend trade union rights and respond to trade union busting and attacks against the right to strike. We will promote democracy and equality at work as a horizontal demand in the public and private sectors. Strengthening information, consultation and participation rights of trade unions and workers' representatives in all relevant areas and sectors remains a key priority.

We must also protect future generations and give them hope, especially by addressing the causes and effects of climate change, while creating quality jobs, ensuring affordable and adequate housing for all, and reinforcing European economic and industrial capability – ensuring just transition and anticipation and management of change.

Recent political developments in Europe and across the globe are warnings that peace, social justice and security are impossible without a fair economy that values wage and wealth equality and redistribution, and which provides good living standards for workers, pensioners, families and communities, without a more integrated Europe that protects the rule of law, and without a strong multilateral system based on international law and human rights.

A strong economy, firmly built on quality jobs and our social model, can deliver the foundation for the economic and social success of Europe. That's why large-scale investment with social conditionalities is urgently needed to boost social, economic and territorial cohesion, industrial policy, infrastructure, public services, a just green and digital transition, and knowledge – from education and vocational training to research and innovation. EU fiscal rules should be immediately suspended to allow rapid investment in these and other crucial areas, permanent common investment tools should be developed, and a fairer taxation system guaranteed, including financial transaction tax and windfall taxes.

And there can be no blank cheques to our investments. Europe must get more for our money. Better public procurement rules and social conditionalities are necessary to ensure public money is used to ensure quality jobs, covered by a collective agreement, and not for CEO bonuses or share buybacks.

A deregulated, neoliberal, low-rights, low-pay economy will not address Europe's competitiveness challenges and will create more problems than it solves.

The employers' narrative presenting EU legislation as burdensome is reductionist and represents a threat to the European project. This EU bashing undermines trust in institutions, feeding Euroscepticism and the far right. A deregulatory approach to competitiveness has no place in a Europe. We will never accept that workers' rights, pay and conditions are undermined or damaged by deregulation and simplification. The so-called "Omnibus I" constitutes a dangerous deregulatory initiative, and the corporate sustainability due diligence directive must be safeguarded.

Our social model, investments and quality jobs, as well as an ambitious industrial policy with strategic autonomy and initiatives to ensure affordable, reliable and clean energy at its core, will deliver the foundation for sustainable competitiveness and the economic and social success of the European project – not failed austerity or deregulation approaches. As the stated in the EU-treaties the goal must be build "a highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress".

Defending and reinforcing democracy and its institutions is key to the future of Europe. Democracy at work is essential. Our democracy must encompass a respected voice for workers; a voice strong enough to guarantee control over the decisions that affect their lives – including in their workplaces.

In light of the threats of the far-right and of authoritarianism, Europe must reaffirm – and not be bullied out of – its values of strong social model, peace, democracy, prosperity, equality, unity, cohesion, and inclusion. This includes the commitment to ensure gender equality, including by eliminating the gender pay and pension gaps and violence and harassment at the workplace.

Europe must remain a global actor and a strong driver for social justice, peace and human rights in the world, and for openness and solidarity. This should include renewed efforts to secure a just and lasting peace to be delivered together with Ukraine and to promote peace in other conflict areas, including the Middle-East, Democratic Republic of Congo. The ETUC condemns the 'fortress Europe' approach, where personal freedoms and collective rights are compromised, borders are shut tight, and migration policies ignore human rights. The enlargement process should ensure full respect of trade union and workers rights, support for social dialogue and collective bargaining and full alignment to the EU social acquis.

The ETUC and its affiliates will strengthen our efforts and initiatives, including by mobilising working people, working with others to deliver a Europe based on cooperation and solidarity that is fairer for workers and citizens of today and tomorrow.

A Europe where all people – no matter what they do, where they are from, whom they love – are fully respected and experience the benefit of the European values we espouse.

A Europe where our collective efforts, voice and intelligence are mobilised to create a fair, sustainable, safe and inclusive economy that delivers for working people – and where workers benefit, and are not the victims, of technological change.

A Europe that addresses social and security concerns by creating a society and economy fit for our people today and tomorrow – a safe, peaceful, prosperous, fair, sustainable, respectful and inclusive Europe that all its people feel proud to support and be part of.

The ETUC and its affiliates continue to mobilise for a fair deal for workers!

For a fair Europe with quality jobs, higher wages, reinforced social protection, excellent public services, equality for all, democratic ideals, strong workers' rights based, collective bargaining and social dialogue.

Let's build a Europe that we can be proud to pass on to future generations.



