



TOGETHER FOR A FAIR DEAL FOR WORKERS

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Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European
Commission

[Letter sent by e-mail]

Delivering quality jobs for all must be at the centre of the Commission Work Programme 2026

Dear President von der Leyen,

I am contacting you on foot of the leaked reports on the 2026 Commission Work Programme and to urge the European Commission to put quality jobs at the centre of the Work Programme.

The Commission Work Programme must reinforce Europe's social model - which is not a burden but our greatest economic advantage. Undermining it, failing to invest now in our workforce, cutting back rights and public services only weakens our resilience and overall competitiveness.

The Quality Jobs Act and the investments for an industrial policy for every region and every sector must be a top priority.

The Work Programme must meet the urgency of the situation facing working people who cannot be asked to settle for half measures after years of falling real wages and rising precarity at work.

In view of the Commission Work Programme 2026, we call on the European Commission to take action in the following areas:

Quality Jobs Act: Workers won't settle for half measures

Workers need a pay rise and decent working conditions underpinned by collective agreements, secure contracts, safe workplaces, quality training and real prospects. The State of the Union address has acknowledged "how hard times have been for so many families" as a result of the rocketing cost-of-living and that it is a "matter of basic social justice" to bring forward legislation to meet the needs of working people.

The Quality Jobs Act must be introduced earlier and must include Directives to:

- Ensure **just transition** and anticipation and management of change
- Regulate **AI in the workplace** on the basis of the "human-in-control" principle
- Prevent **psychosocial risks** and tackle the epidemic of stress at work
- Tackle abuses in **subcontracting and labour intermediation**

We note with concern the absence of reference to a proposal for a Directive on the right to disconnect and on telework. Following the end of the two-stage consultation of social partners, **we call on the Commission to bring forward without delay a proposal for a Directive on the right to disconnect and on telework before the end of 2025.**

Collective bargaining coverage across the EU has fallen significantly in the last twenty years, weakening workers' share of productivity gains and fuelling insecurity and inequality. Almost one in ten workers are at risk of poverty. Young workers across Europe face worsening economic insecurity. Nearly 50% of minimum-wage earners under 35 cannot afford to live independently.

Stronger **EU-level measures are needed to promote collective bargaining** to reach the level of 80 collective bargaining coverage in all Member States and to ensure pay rises and adequate minimum wages.





The ETUC welcomes the announcement that there will be **measures to ensure fair labour mobility** to be presented in 2026. It should include proposals to strengthen enforcement and workers' protections and to tackle abuses, including a revision of the European Labour Authority Regulation and the introduction of digital enforcement tools such as the European Social Security Pass. It is also necessary to ensure dedicated EU funding for capacity-building and specialised counselling services provided by trade unions for mobile and migrant workers in order to promote a fair and inclusive labour market.

The ETUC insists on the importance of the revision of the Regulations on the coordination of **social security** systems, and calls on the Commission to intensify its efforts to conclude in full a fair deal for working people without delay.

Using public money for the public good

We welcome the announcement by the Commission of the intention to **revise the public procurement Directives**. The ETUC calls on the Commission to ensure that the revision guarantees 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.

It is also essential, including in the framework of the next Multiannual Financial Framework, that **social conditionalities** are included in all EU funding, state aid and support to companies to ensure quality jobs and promote collective bargaining.

Protecting jobs and production in Europe

Increasing global trade tensions, coupled with the EU-US framework trade agreement and rising competition from China, have put a strain on Europe's industries and economy. Europe has lost almost four million jobs in the manufacturing sector since 2000, and there have been recent announcements of major job-shedding measures in strategic industries.

The decisions recently taken by the European Commission's to introduce permanent safeguard measures for steel imports represent a step forward in ensuring fairer trade conditions and defending quality industrial jobs in the steel sector. This must be part of a broader, ambitious industrial strategy.

We urge the Commission to take action to deliver:

- A strong **industrial policy** to protect and create quality jobs in every sector and in every region and to deliver genuinely just transformations
- **Permanent crisis response measures** to protect jobs and production in Europe from shocks
- **Suspension of the EU fiscal rules** to enable national investment in industrial, social and economic resilience
- A **permanent EU investment instrument** with strong social conditionalities to protect vulnerable sectors, to deliver innovation objectives and to support the creation of quality jobs
- A **joint foresight with social partners** with focus on jobs, economic sectors and regions to anticipate changes and guide policy

Rejecting deregulation and attacks against workers' rights

The EU must not return to failed models of deregulation and compression of wages and workers' rights.

We have noted with concern that the State of the Union Address and the leaked document included - once more - the reference to the proposal for a **28th Company Regime**. Trade unions reiterate their opposition on this proposal. We call on the Commission to confirm that the 28th Company Regime will not touch employment standards and labour law. Any attempt to sidestep national protections or collective agreements is unacceptable and would lead to social dumping and undermine workers' protection, the EU social acquis Communautaire, national labour law and collective agreements.

We ask the Commission to:

- Publicly confirm that labour law will be excluded from the 28th Company Regime
- Reaffirm the full respect for the autonomy of social partners, the right to collective bargaining and national labour systems



The right to adequate, decent and affordable housing

We welcome the Commission announcement of the upcoming **European Affordable Housing Plan**, confirmed in the State of the Union Address.

The ETUC calls on the Commission to fully involve social partners in the development of the plan and to take action on the following areas - amongst others:

- Promoting necessary wage increases through support for collective bargaining and higher statutory minimum wages, that take into consideration all housing-related costs for working people
- Ensuring higher wages and better working conditions in the construction sector
- Actions to tackle speculation, increasing taxes on profits and wealth, ensuring fair and more progressive taxation for real estate, and enforcing and strengthening EU regulation on short-term rentals
- Increasing investments in non-for-profit / limited profit / public / social affordable and adequate housing, including through EU investment tools, flexibility in the application of the economic governance rules
- Public funding, including state aid, for housing projects (including support by the EIB) should be linked with social conditionalities
- Tackling the injustice of “shantytowns” in Europe and ensuring that people residing in those informal settlements have access to decent accommodation with minimum quality standards
- Guaranteeing that the revision of the state aid rules provide stronger support and investments in non-for-profit / limited profit / public / social affordable and adequate housing

President von der Leyen,

Workers have carried Europe through crisis after crisis. Now it is the time to deliver real solution for them, including investments and legislation for quality jobs that must be part of the Commission Work Programme.

The EU must reject deregulation and rollbacks. It must resist internal and external pressures to weaken hard-won rights and standards.

The EU must stop recommending austerity approaches that target workers’ rights and incomes and public services, and must instead pursue and demand fairer taxation on extreme wealth and corporations. Sustainable social progress requires a just fiscal approach, not more cuts to those who keep Europe going.

The EU has the capacity and the responsibility to ensure that all jobs in Europe are quality jobs - offering fair pay, security, and respect - and to create opportunities for all workers across every region and sector. This is the road to pursue to ensure the EU long-term success. This is the road that the Commission Work Programme must indicate.

Yours sincerely,

Esther Lynch,
General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation