WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

The ETUC calls the EU institutions to:

• establish rules providing a common legal framework for self-employed workers;
• remove the barriers to collective bargaining for the self-employed; and
• take action to improve the situation of the self-employed.

Trade unions in Europe call their national government to:

• ensure equal rights between employees and the self-employed, particularly on access to social protection;
• combat bogus self-employment; and
• promote collective bargaining for the self-employed.

National unions are committed to:

• organise the self-employed; and
• work to extend collective bargaining to them.

About the ETUC report

The ETUC report examines some of the key challenges unions face in responding to self-employment, and it includes the results of a survey with responses from 23 European states.

The report is available at https://www.etuc.org/en/publications

About the ETUC

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) speaks with a single voice on behalf of European workers and to give them a stronger say in EU decision-making.

The ETUC defends fundamental social values such as solidarity, equality, democracy, social justice and cohesion.

It fights for:

• pay rises and wage convergence in Europe for workers;
• full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights;
• high quality jobs for all;
• a high level of social protection;
• gender equality and fair pay;
• good health and safety at work;
• fair mobility for European workers, and an end to social dumping;
• high quality public services accessible to all;
• a European framework to raise the standard of national social legislation;
• action to combat climate change while promoting a Just Transition for workers;
• promotion of these European social values in other parts of the world.

The ETUC is committed to boosting the capacity of unions to better organise, defend, protect and empower self-employed workers and atypical workers in Europe.

www.etuc.org
UNIONS ARE ACTING FOR SELF-EMPLOYED WORKERS!

Unions are already supporting their self-employed members:

• first of all, where they can, they negotiate to improve their wages and working conditions through collective agreements (unions have negotiated collective agreements or similar arrangements for the self-employed in at least 12 countries across the EU).

But whether collective bargaining is possible or not, unions are also providing:

• guidance on fees to charge or rates to apply;
• advice on the wording of contract and model contracts;
• legal advice specifically tailored to the concerns of the individual;
• reimbursement of legal costs incurred as a result of self-employment;
• help with payments and debt collection;
• advice on taxation;
• education and courses;
• information about industry developments;
• cheaper rates for products and services;
• opportunities to share experiences with other self-employed workers;
• specific services to the occupations involved, like directories of professionals.

Unions have also challenged competition laws limiting collective bargaining rights and and they have successfully taken legal action against bogus self-employment.

The ETUC report sets out what unions have done, as well as examining the obstacles they have faced.

FACTS AND FIGURES ABOUT SELF-EMPLOYED WORKERS

• 22 million workers in the EU (10% of the total) are self-employed and have no employees.
• Almost half (44%) work in agriculture, construction and retail, but one in eight (13%) work in professional and technical activities and almost one in 10 (9%) in education and health.
• One third of them are women.
• There are big differences between European countries: more than one in five (22%) of all workers in Greece are self-employed, but only one in 20 (5%) in Denmark.
• Over the last five years, the number of self-employed has fallen in agriculture and retail, but it has grown in professional services, health, arts and entertainment. Excluding agriculture, the number of self-employed has increased by increased by 5% across the EU 28, and by much more in France, the Netherlands and the UK.

WHY SELF-EMPLOYED WORKERS NEED MORE RIGHTS?

Across Europe, self-employed workers often have fewer rights than employees:

• in some countries they have no right to join a trade union and to benefit from union protection and support;
• in many countries unions cannot sign collective agreements on behalf of the self-employed, and even when they can, competition law is used, or misused, to limit the extent of bargaining;
• in almost all countries, self-employed workers lack adequate social protection. Rights to protections like sick leave, unemployment benefits or parental/maternity leave often depend on the self-employed making additional contributions and are sometimes not possible at all; and
• in industries and services across Europe, there are examples where workers are forced into bogus self-employment, losing their rights in the process.

HOW UNIONS ORGANISE SELF-EMPLOYED WORKERS?

Unions recruit and organise self-employed workers in a variety of different ways.

• Occupational unions, which cover groups such as journalists, actors, musicians, technicians, translators and interpreters, architects and some medical professions;
• Unions for precarious workers, which recruit and organise the self-employed along with others on non-standard contracts, such as agency workers and temporary workers;
• Self-employed unions, which only cover the self-employed; and
• Mainstream unions, which have responded to changes in the labour market by extending their coverage to self-employed.

The ETUC report looks at the main unions involved, and indicates how the picture varies between countries.

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