

## A new EU adaptation to climate change strategy for the world of work

ETUC Resolution adopted at the Executive Committee Meeting of 28-29 October 2020

### Summary of key messages

The aim of this resolution is to outline ETUC's recommendations ahead of the adoption of the European Commission's new EU Adaptation Strategy, which is part of the European Green Deal. ETUC's key messages are the following:

- **The new EU Adaptation Strategy should be legally binding and include a strong social dimension with a people-centred approach.** The world of work and the impact that climate change will have on working conditions and employment have until now not been sufficiently addressed in adaptation policies. The new Adaptation Strategy should fill that existing gap.
- **The new EU Adaptation Strategy should provide for a strong and inclusive governance approach where workers and trade unions are involved.** Workers are best placed to identify the challenges and risks that climate change consequences pose to their work. They should therefore be involved in the design and implementation of adaptation policies at all levels. Specific attention should also be given to ensure gender equality both in governance and policy measures as well as to support other vulnerable communities.
- **The new EU Adaptation Strategy should include concrete policy measures that maintain jobs and protect workers' health and safety.** New legislative initiative and policy frameworks should be introduced to protect workers from exposure to high temperature, natural UV radiations and other health and safety hazard brought by climate change and other adaptation measures. The strategy should also include active labour market policies as well as reskilling and trainings to prevent job losses.
- **The new EU Adaptation Strategy should guarantee sufficient investments in public services and infrastructures as well as functioning and inclusive social protection systems.** Emergency workers and social protection mechanisms will be key to deal with future crises and increase the resilience of our societies, they should be properly financed. These investments should come along new resources to protect the environment, biodiversity and vulnerable geographical areas.
- **The new EU Adaptation Strategy should increase the ambition of the EU in terms of cooperation with emerging countries to finance and develop adaptation solutions.** By using its full diplomatic leverage, the EU should pave the way in international negotiations to both step up global climate ambition and advance on adaptation.
- **The new EU Adaptation Strategy should provide a clear mapping of the impact that climate change will have on industrial supply chains as well as on energy production.**

## **Avoid the unmanageable and manage the unavoidable**

Climate change is happening and its consequences are getting real for citizens and workers. The past decade has been the warmest in the modern record<sup>1</sup>. These increases in temperature are accompanied by extreme weather events such as floods, storms, droughts and wildfires that are getting more intense and more frequent over time.

Data from the European Environment Agency shows that between 1980 and 2017, around 90 000 people in the EU died due to climate and weather events and that the damages caused by these events resulted in almost €430 billion economic losses<sup>2</sup>. If no action is taken, these numbers are expected to skyrocket in the coming decades as a direct consequence of climate change.

To limit those damages in the future and avoid irreversible and disastrous outcomes for our society, the first thing to do is to keep global warming below 1,5 to 2°C and therefore drastically reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. For that reason, mitigation measures are, and will remain, a top priority for the trade union movement. ETUC is committed to continue its work to ensure a just transition to a circular and climate neutral economy<sup>3</sup>.

Nevertheless, in spite of these mitigation efforts, we also need to make sure that our societies can anticipate those changes as well as adapt to the negative effects that will happen anyway. In any case, both mitigation and adaptation measures should always be complementary and in line with UN Sustainable Development Goals.

In this context and as part of the European Green Deal, the European Commission should soon adopt a new EU Adaptation Strategy to promote and reinforce adaptation action among its Member States.

## **The social dimension of adaptation to climate change**

If we want this new Adaptation Strategy to increase the resilience of our societies and improve the well-being of EU citizens, it will be crucial that it includes a strong social dimension with a people-centred approach. The strategy should dedicate sufficient attention to workers and the world of work both in its governance and in its policy measures.

So far, most adaptation measures promoted by the previous EU adaptation strategy and developed by Member States have focused on technical solutions to e.g. protect lands, avoid coastal erosion, manage water supply, develop new types of crops, etc. However, very few of these policy measures and related scientific research have looked at the social dimension of the problem and at the effects that climate change will have on people, workers and communities. The world of work and the impact that climate change will have on working conditions and employment have often been left aside in these debates. The “Blueprint for a new, more ambitious EU adaptation strategy”<sup>4</sup>, published by the European Commission in June 2020, unfortunately confirms this trend.

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<sup>1</sup> Earth Observatory, NASA, 2018, <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/144510/2018-was-the-fourth-warmest-yearcontinuing-long-warming-trend>

<sup>2</sup> EEA, 2019, Munich Re Data, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/indicators/direct-losses-from-weather-disasters-3/assessment-2>

<sup>3</sup> See ETUC, 2019, Position for an inclusive European Green Deal, <https://www.etuc.org/en/document/etuc-position-inclusive-european-green-deal> and ETUC, 2020, resolution on European Green Deal initiatives,

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, 2020, Adaptation to Climate Change Blueprint for a new, more ambitious EU strategy, [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/sites/clima/files/consultations/docs/0037/blueprint\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/sites/clima/files/consultations/docs/0037/blueprint_en.pdf)

This is particularly worrying as workers' lives will be very affected by the changes ahead. Indeed, the increase exposure to high temperature at the workplace will exacerbate the risks of heat strokes, fatigue, lack of concentration and complications of chronic diseases. Meanwhile, intensification of extreme weather events such as storms, floods or wildfire will lead to more physical injuries. Work-related diseases linked to biological agents are also affected by climate change, such as the influence of increasing temperatures on geographical distribution of the vectors (ticks, mosquitoes) of biological agents, thereby facilitating the spread of diseases that are new to a region. Climate change is also increasing the risk of dehydration, skin cancer, dust exposure and mental health. Outdoor workers are particularly exposed to these risks. All these elements increase the occupational health and safety risks of workers in many sectors.

In parallel to these considerations on health and safety, climate change will also affect many sectors in terms of organisation of work, skills need, investment capacity and employment. Changes in seasonal temperature and extreme weather events will, for example, severely affect the productivity and jobs availability in sectors such as agriculture, forestry, construction and tourism. Water scarcity, extreme weather events and increased temperatures might also cause challenges for sectors such as energy utilities, industry and transport in terms of damages to infrastructures or supply chain. According to a study commissioned by DG CLIMA, 410 000 jobs could be at risk in the EU by 2050 if no adaptation measures are taken<sup>5</sup>. ILO's projections based on a global temperature rise of 1.5°C by the end of this century suggest that "in 2030, 2.2 per cent of total working hours worldwide will be lost because of higher temperatures, a loss equivalent to 80 million full-time jobs. This is equivalent to global economic losses of US\$2,400 billion"<sup>6</sup>.

### **ETUC recommendations for a worker's friendly adaptation strategy :**

With these elements in mind, ETUC urges the European Commission to include a specific chapter dedicated to the world of work and the social dimension in its new EU Adaptation Strategy. The sections below highlight a few recommendations that could answer some of the challenges highlighted above. These recommendations build upon the recent project that ETUC conducted on climate change and the world of work<sup>7</sup>.

#### **1. An inclusive governance that involves workers and trade unions**

When it comes to adaptation, there is rarely a one size fits all solution. Even though some solutions and common minimum standards can be set at EU level, the changes brought by climate change vary greatly from one region to another and the adaptation needs depend very much on the sectoral and geographical reality. This requires a bottom up approach and the engagement of all stakeholders to find adequate answers. Therefore, a key element of the new EU adaptation Strategy should be to propose a strong and inclusive governance at national, regional, local and company level to ensure that all parties and communities are involved in the design and implementation of adaptation policies.

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<sup>5</sup> Triple E Consulting, 2014, *Assessing the Implications of Climate Change Adaptation on Employment in the EU*, <https://trinomics.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Climate-Change-Adaptation-and-Employment.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> ILO, 2019, *Working on a warmer planet; The impact of heat stress on labour productivity and decent work*, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_711919.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_711919.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> ETUC, 2020, *A guide for trade unions; adaptation to climate change and the world of work*, <https://www.etuc.org/en/adaptation-climate-change>

In that regard, ETUC believes that the new strategy should promote and monitor the involvement of trade unions and workers' representatives at all stages of the process in the different sectors at EU level and in all EU countries. Workers are indeed best placed to identify the challenges and risks that climate change poses to their work and working conditions. Trade unions are committed to work on this important topic and to find adaptation solutions. They should therefore be actively engaged in the development of future adaptation plans and measures.

At European, national, regional and sectoral level, the new EU Adaptation Strategy should guarantee a strong and stable bipartite or tripartite social dialogue and promote this tool to allow employers and workers to discuss adaptation needs, identify workers' concerns and develop on the ground solutions.

The European Commission should also strongly encourage companies to discuss adaptation plans and strategies with their workers for example through European works council, works council, health and safety committee and workers' health and safety representatives or shop stewards<sup>8</sup>. Such dialogue is key to prevent negative socio-economic consequences and to prevent health and safety risks for workers. The sectorial social dialogue committees play an important role in monitoring the implementation and enforcement of the existing OSH legislative framework as well as to promote new instruments to respond to the OSH challenges in different sectors. The recent ETUC project on adaptation has shown that there exists concrete examples of collective agreements between workers and employers that contribute to increase our resilience to climate change.

By ensuring the proper consultation and involvement of workers and trade unions, the Commission would also contribute to raise awareness among workers on this important topic as well as to ensure the proper implementation of adaptation measures. In that regard, the new EU adaptation Strategy should further support capacity building among social partners at all level (EU, national, regional, sectoral and company level).

Finally, ETUC stresses the need for the new EU Adaptation Strategy to be a legally binding initiative. Indeed, the evaluation of the previous EU Strategy on adaptation to climate change conducted by the European Commission in 2018 clearly states that "there is margin to improve implementation and monitoring" and that "progress in the adoption of local adaptation strategies has been slower than expected"<sup>9</sup>. A legally binding strategy would enable the European Commission to oblige Member States to develop their national adaptation plans and strategies. It would also allow a better supervision and monitoring of the implementation of adaptation measures. To that end, the EU Adaptation Strategy should define clear evaluation criteria and indicators.

## **2. Policy measures that maintain jobs and protect workers' health and safety**

In parallel to these considerations on governance, the new EU Adaptation strategy should also include strong policy recommendations to ensure that workers' health and safety is protected and to avoid job losses in most affected sectors. To do so, ETUC recommends the following measures:

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<sup>8</sup> This could be done e.g. by formally putting the topic of adaptation to climate change at the social dialogue agenda or by formally designing a worker's representative or delegate dedicated to climate and environment related topics within companies works councils and health and safety committees.

<sup>9</sup> European Commission, 2018, Evaluation of the EU Adaptation Strategy, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/swd\\_evaluation-of-eu-adaptation-strategy\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/swd_evaluation-of-eu-adaptation-strategy_en.pdf)

First of all, in order to close the existing gap in research on the socio-economic dimension of adaptation, the new strategy should encourage Member States to develop studies to look at the impact of climate change on the world of work. While R&D in new adaptive and green technologies are important, there is also a crucial need for more detailed research to assess more thoroughly the impact that climate change consequences will have on employment and on working conditions. Such research should be conducted with a high level of granularity and look at the different regions and sectors of the EU economy. Recent heat waves and droughts have already temporarily but severely hampered industrial operations or energy production in many European regions. The adaptation strategy should provide a clear mapping of the disruptive impacts that climate change consequences might have on industrial supply chains, within and beyond Europe. In the same way, it should investigate the impact on energy production (hydro electricity) and on related maintenance operations (cooling of power plants). This research should also look into the gender dimension of adaptation policies and explore the extent to which vulnerable communities are affected by the changes. The European Agency on Occupational Safety and Health can play a key role in producing such research. Digitalisation and the use of aggregated data can also play a role to better study and anticipate the effects of climate change on workers.

The new EU adaptation strategy should also propose new legislative initiatives to protect workers' health and safety from the negative effects of climate change and ask Member States to do the same at national level. Such an initiative is particularly urgent when it comes to workers' exposure to high temperatures. The protection that workers currently enjoy across Europe vary greatly. In some countries, temperature limits were collectively bargained, while in some others, these limits are statutory. In some cases, they are a combination of both. In some parts of Europe, though, such limits do not exist. ETUC calls upon the European Commission to introduce a legislative instrument that recognises the increased risk to workers brought about by extreme temperatures and provides a framework for protecting workers<sup>10</sup>. Weather conditions do not respect national borders and so European action is required. Natural UV-Radiation should be included as a risk factor in the framework of the Directive on minimum health and safety requirements regarding the exposure of workers to risks arising from physical agents. Social partners should be supported in their efforts to protect workers against UV radiation. These aspects should also be reflected in the new EU Strategy on Health and Safety at Work being developed by the European Commission. There should be a clear link between both strategies.

Enforcement of EU OSH regulation is crucial to protect workers' lives and health and to guarantee that EU law related to OSH is applied throughout the EU. Labour inspectorates need more support and proper funding, all the more in the light of the challenges to health and safety risks brought by climate change. The frequency and quality of the inspections also need to be improved. In this regard, the EU should take ambitious steps to reach the ILO objective of a minimum of one health and safety inspector for every 10.000 workers.

In parallel, the COVID19 crisis has shown that when facing big challenges and disruptions, the use of digital technologies and telework can significantly increase the resilience of companies and societies. However, these adaptation measures can have profound effects on the organisation of work, workload and working conditions.

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<sup>10</sup> ETUC, 2018, *Resolution on the Need for EU Action to Protect Workers from High Temperatures*, <https://www.etuc.org/en/document/etuc-resolution-need-eu-action-protect-workers-high-temperatures>

Adaptation policies should therefore include a broader reflection on these new elements. These aspects should be tackled in future policy frameworks to avoid that workers have to adapt in a way that could be detrimental for their health and safety, for their level of stress and for their work-life balance.

Besides these health and safety considerations, climate change consequences and adaptation needs will also affect jobs and employment. These new challenges will require active labour market policies that are oriented to a greener and more resilient productive system. It will also require new skills and trainings for workers as well as new investments in infrastructures and equipment. The new adaptation strategy should include these aspects.

The new EU adaptation strategy should also pay specific attention to gender equality. Indeed, climate change adaptation policies, like any other policies, are not gender neutral. As climate change consequences will have different effects on men and women, it is important that adaptation policies recognise these differences and take them into account. To ensure the effectiveness of adaptation measures and to make sure they help reduce inequalities and other adverse effects on women, it is essential that these measures are proof-checked through a gender equality approach. To this end, ETUC calls for a gender responsive approach in the development and implementation process of new adaptation policies at all levels<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, already existing adaptation policies should be gender screened and adapted accordingly. To prevent inequalities and develop inclusive solutions, women's participation in decision-making process and labour market should be ensured. Similar verifications and inclusive process should be done to protect other vulnerable communities (such as migrant workers or seasonal workers) or to prevent other types of bias or discriminations (based on culture, religion, race, ethnicity, disabilities, etc.).

The new adaptation strategy should also insist on the key role that public services fulfil to adapt to climate change. Indeed, public administration will be key when it comes to translating adaptation plans into concrete action at local level. In parallel, emergency workers such as firefighters, medical staff and civil protection are at the forefront in the fight against climate change. They already suffer heavily from the intensification of extreme weather events. These workers are facing higher health and safety risks, increased stress and increased workload due to climate change. The new EU adaptation strategy should therefore ensure the proper financing and staffing of public services as well as the public infrastructures in all Member States. This need for increased financing of public services should be reflected across all EU policies and recommendations.

In parallel to public services, the new strategy should reinforce social protection systems to protect workers and their communities against negative consequences of climate change (e.g. unemployment benefits, public healthcare systems, wage guarantee,...). The COVID19 crisis has shown that in times of urgency, social protection systems such as temporary unemployment schemes and healthcare insurance are key to increase the resilience of our society and to protect most vulnerable communities. Here again, specific attention should be given to the gender dimension as well as to minorities. When facing extreme weather events, workers should not be expected to have the same productivity than in normal conditions. Their workload and work intensity should therefore be adapted

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<sup>11</sup> In this regard, ETUC calls the EU institutions and Member States to work towards the realisation of the strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action on Women and the Environment, as well as to systematically include a women's rights and gender equality perspective in the definition, implementation and monitoring of environmental/climate policies at all levels

accordingly to avoid burnouts and unsustainable working time as well as to preserve work-life balance, especially in the most affected sectors. Such adaptation could take the form of temporary unemployment benefits in case of bad weather condition or similar mechanism. Workers should not be the adjustment variable and should not have flexible working time imposed on them without prior discussion with trade unions.

ETUC also calls on the European Commission to further develop existing solidarity mechanisms between EU Member States and regions to enhance coordination when facing climate emergencies or developing adaptation solutions. Climate change will affect some regions more than others and European solidarity should ensure that the costs of dealing with these changes will be fairly distributed.

ETUC asks the Commission to tackle the issue of energy and water poverty in its adaptation strategy. Access to water, sanitation and energy is a human right. These rights must be recognised in the future adaptation framework. This is particularly relevant as water and energy supplies will be more and more threatened by climate change. A ban on disconnection should be imposed and the proper insulation of buildings should be a key priority, especially for low income households.

Overall, adaptation measures are expected to have positive effects on the economy and on employment. Indeed, such measures contribute to preserving existing jobs by maintaining the viability and resilience of existing businesses. Furthermore, many adaptation measures will require substantial investments which can, in turn, stimulate the demand for labour. These investments can also stimulate the demand for new types of goods and services and thus create new market opportunities and increase innovation. It will be important to make sure that the new jobs created are quality jobs and that they satisfy the highest social standards. Adaptation should therefore go hand in hand with an ambitious social agenda that enforces the European Pillars of Social Rights and an inclusive governance.

### **3. Finance adaptation through fair taxation**

Both for mitigation and adaptation, it is clear that the economic costs of inaction far outweigh the costs of taking appropriate measures now. It is therefore crucial that the EU and its Member States can rely on sufficient funding to cover the costs related to climate action and just transition.

ETUC believes that such discussions on the funding of climate action should be closely linked with discussions on fair taxation. The introduction of a Financial Transaction Tax, a European Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base, a common corporate tax rate of 25% and a digital tax would significantly contribute to finance climate action while fairly redistributing the gains and costs of the transition. The EU budget also has a significant role to play in this regard. Other types of revenue generating environmental taxation and mechanisms could also contribute to finance adaptation.

### **4. An EU adaptation strategy that goes beyond Europe**

Even though the new EU adaptation Strategy will be a European framework, one should keep in mind that negative consequences of climate change will be even more pronounced outside Europe. Other continents will indeed be much more affected by the changes ahead while they often have much less capacity to adapt. The parts of the world

that are the most vulnerable are also less responsible of climate change than industrialized countries as they emit lesser GHG emissions.

In this context, the new EU Adaptation Strategy should aim at increasing the ambition of the EU in terms of cooperation with emerging countries to finance and develop adaptation solutions. By using its full diplomatic leverage, the EU should pave the way in international negotiations to step up global climate ambition and advance on adaptation. The new strategy should plan such diplomatic activities and propose concrete measures.

## **Conclusion**

Climate change is real. It is here and now. Its consequences are increasingly impacting workers from all sectors. The new EU Adaptation Strategy should put a strong emphasis on the social dimension of this problem and include concrete proposals to deal with challenges related to the world of work.

To answer workers' concerns, the strategy should establish an inclusive governance where trade unions have their say. It should also include concrete policy measures and recommendations to Member States to protect workers health and safety as well as to maintain quality employment in most affected sectors and regions. The new strategy should also provide more details on the financing of adaptation and be closely linked to discussions on fair taxation. Finally, the strategy should detail an action plan to step up EU climate diplomacy and enhance support to most affected developing countries.

To make sure that worker's perspective is properly taken into account, ETUC will continue working on this topic with its affiliates and will encourage all trade unions organisations to get involved in the design and implementation of future national adaptation plans. ETUC members are committed to work on this important issue.

For more detailed information about the impact of climate change on the world of work and for more recommendations, please refer to ETUC guide on adaptation to climate change and the world<sup>12</sup>.

## **Annex I – Recommendations for trade unions organisations – Internal**

In parallel to the policy recommendations expressed in this position, ETUC also believes that it is important that the trade union movement gets more active to promote the topic of adaptation in its internal structures. A recent internal survey, conducted by Syndex in the framework of the ETUC adaptation project, has indeed indicated that adaptation to climate change remains relatively unknown for many European trade union organisations and that significant work is needed to further develop knowledge on the topic as well as raise awareness among trade union members. Drawing on the project conclusions, ETUC would like to propose the following recommendations for the attention of its affiliated members. Please note that more information and good practice example can be found in the ETUC guide "Adaptation to climate change and the world of work"<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> ETUC, 2020, *A guide for trade unions ; adaptation to climate change and the world of work*, <https://www.etuc.org/en/adaptation-climate-change>

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

### **At European level:**

- Continue to raise awareness among ETUC members (both national confederations and sectoral federations) about the importance of adaptation to climate change.
- Continue to build knowledge on the impact of climate change on workers as well as recommendations for adaptation measures.
- Lobby EU institutions to consider the impact of climate change on workers when designing and monitoring EU adaptation policies.
- Try to bring this topic at the agenda of European Works Council.

### **At national level:**

- Try to get your organisation involved in the design and implementation of the national adaptation plans and strategies.
- In order to raise awareness, organise events and publications to discuss the issue of adaptation to climate change and its impact on workers at events.
- To promote action at company level, include adaptation to climate change in the training programme of trade union delegates.

### **At sectoral/regional levels:**

- Try to map and assess the negative impact that climate change may have on your sector/region, both in terms of employment and working conditions.
- Call upon employer organisations to foster collective bargaining and negotiate sectoral collective agreements aiming at protecting workers (e.g. on maximum working temperature).
- Disseminate ETUC's guide on adaptation to climate change and the world of work and raise awareness and inform workers about the specific risks to their health brought about by climate change in your specific sector. Inform them about the necessary protection measures.

### **At company level:**

- Establish dialogue with management aiming at identifying the risk faced by workers and informing them of it.
- Use trade unions and/or works council's information and consultation rights as well as Health and Safety Committees and workers' health and safety representatives to collect information and discuss this issue. Works council should also discuss the needs in terms of training to ensure adequate skills and competences of workers to adapt to climate change.
- Call upon employers to negotiate and sign company collective agreements that adapt working conditions and health and safety procedures.

At all level, it is important that trade union organisations pay attention to the gender dimension of the consequences of climate change and adaptation. They should promote a gender inclusive and responsive approach when developing and implementing adaptation measures.