

# THE 2015-2017 WORK PROGRAMME OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL PARTNERS

‘Partnership for inclusive  
growth and employment’



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# Introduction

**T**he European Union is at a crossroads. There have been timid signs of recovery in the last years in some countries, in particular those most affected by the crisis, but the recovery in many Member States lacks momentum with some Member States in deflation. The financial crisis that struck the EU in 2008 – and which subsequently turned into an economic and social one – continues to have severe effects, with 23.8 million unemployed people in the EU in February 2015 – of whom around 4.85 million were young people under the age of 25 – and many companies, including SMEs are still closing down. Much more effort will be needed to reach the EU unemployment levels prior to the crisis, i.e. 16.2 million people in 2008.

A number of important policy challenges need to be overcome for Europe to fully seize its growth and jobs potential: boost public and private investment, growth and more and better job creation; set a renewed industrial ambition for Europe; invest in high performing public services; aim at the stability of public finances and balanced public budgets; increase the active workforce to meet the demographic change challenge; boost productivity and achieve better working conditions; ensure the sustainability and accessibility of social protection systems for all citizens; invest in research and development and in education and training to tackle school drop-out; make education systems – also at the highest levels – accessible without

discrimination; achieve better learning outcomes and more innovative enterprises; and recognise the fact that social dialogue fosters growth and employment.

The ‘Val Duchesse process’ initiated in 1985 by the European Commission led to the emergence of EU cross-industry social dialogue. The agreement, reached by the European social partners in 1991, and incorporated in the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, called for a much stronger role for the social partners in formulating and implementing Community social and employment policy. Following this, the European social partners also developed a more autonomous dialogue, diversifying their instruments. Social dialogue is one of the main pillars of the EU social model.

Today, the European social dialogue needs to further develop in order to reflect and respond to the needs of more diverse economic and social situations in the enlarged European Union. The EU, Member States and social partners should prioritise actions to achieve tangible progress on fostering Europe’s global competitiveness, and inclusive growth and employment in Europe. The economic governance and the recently announced continuous involvement of the European and national social partners in it – implying the consultation of the partners at key moments of the process – also constitute an important challenge for social partners at national and European level.

# Introduction

This is the fifth bipartite work programme of the European social partners.

The social partners have an important role, amongst other things, to improve the functioning of the labour markets. Social dialogue, in some countries, is under strain. This fifth work programme also aims at strengthening it at all appropriate levels.

Social dialogue is now particularly relevant to achieving solutions that are fair, responsible and effective, contributing to economic recovery, building up social cohesion. To achieve results, there needs to be an ownership and an understanding between the social partners of common goals of creating inclusive growth and employment but also strengthening Europe's position in the global economy while fostering prosperity and social cohesion within Europe.

In this context, our approach is to:

- Address the above mentioned challenges by contributing autonomously to policies affecting directly or indirectly employment and labour markets.
- Foster and strengthen the development of autonomous social dialogue across European countries at inter-professional, sectoral levels and/or within enterprises in line with national industrial relations practices.
- Also continue to act at bipartite and tripartite levels, taking possible European Commission upcoming proposals and initiatives – inter alia resulting from the Commission's work programmes – as their basis.

- Develop our role in the process of the European semester, which requires a closer and more intense interaction between the European and national levels of the social partners, including in the context of the Social Dialogue Committee.

The European social partners may decide to tackle other issues than those contained in this work programme and consider other means of actions following European Commission consultations in accordance with articles 154-155 of the Treaty on the European Union.

# 1. Fostering active ageing and an inter-generational approach

In response to demographic and active ageing challenges, measures need to be implemented, where necessary at national, sectoral and company levels, to make it easier for older workers to actively participate and stay in the labour market, and at the same time make sure that measures are taken in order to ease inter-generational transitions in the context of high youth unemployment.

The ability of older workers to stay longer in the labour market, healthy and active as long as possible should be significantly improved.

The European social partners also take into account the context of the employment objectives contained in the Europe 2020 strategy.

The European social partners looked into the issue notably in the context of the European Year for Active Ageing in 2012 and building on their framework of actions on youth employment negotiated in 2013. As part of this programme, they will further discuss the practices and measures needed to address, amongst others, the following key issues:

- **Active ageing:** Considering measures and working conditions aiming to encourage and enable older workers to remain longer in or come back to the labour market, for example: flexible working hours, gradual transitions into retirement, skills upgrading/updating, and/or preventive health and safety regulations and measures such as workplace physical and organisational adaptations aiming to lengthen work ability. All this should be done in line with social security and social protection provisions and information and consultation processes;

- **Management of older worker replacement:** Managing the labour market consequences of growing cohorts going into retirement, notably in terms of recruitment of new hires, opportunities for young people's integration into the labour market and the need for more effective activation of the unemployed;
- **Tutoring:** Promoting adequate processes of human resources management to welcome, inform and integrate newcomers in enterprises, for example by assigning a person of reference / mentor, to ease the integration process in the enterprise and in the job and by anticipating skills needs;
- **Skills transfer:** Developing training, lifelong learning measures aiming to transfer skills between older and younger workers in sectors and companies, with the objective, for example, of addressing skills mismatches, in particular in areas and sectors with high vacancy rates.

Longer careers would contribute to maintaining sustainability and adequacy of pensions, social inclusion and cohesion and inter-generational solidarity in Europe.

The European social partners will negotiate an autonomous framework agreement.

They will organise a joint fact-finding seminar at the beginning of the negotiations. By doing so, they intend to ensure that the various labour market situations across Europe are duly taken into account and to reinforce the ownership of national social partners.

## 2. Promoting better reconciliation of work, private and family life and gender equality to reduce the gender pay gap

Achieving better work-life balance is an important policy challenge for the EU, for Member States, social partners and society in general. While the availability, quality and accessibility of adequate social care services and infrastructures remains crucial, an integrated and ambitious approach to reconciliation policies is needed to:

- 1) Increase women's participation in the labour market and reduce the gender pay gap. The gender pay gap is a multifaceted phenomenon explained by multiple reasons including horizontal and vertical labour market segregation, the lack of childcare facilities, an unequal burden of family and domestic responsibilities, discrimination and gender stereotypes at the work place.
- 2) Enable families to better reconcile work, private and family life.

The European social partners have already engaged actively in this debate, inter alia in the context of their joint agreement on parental leave, their framework of actions on gender equality, including the launch in 2014 of a web-based

gender toolkit and their joint letter on childcare. At national level, many new actions have been taken over the last years to promote a better work-life balance but several challenges remain.

In the context of this work programme, they will:

- Build on the third priority of their framework of actions on gender equality of 2005 on supporting work-life balance: The European social partners will organise a fact-finding seminar to identify and promote leave, working arrangements and care facilities that benefit both employers and workers.
- Organise an exchange of national social partner practices and existing legislation aiming to improve the knowledge base regarding equal pay for the work of equal value between men and women addressing the factors which contribute to gender neutral pay systems.

They will agree on joint conclusions, which could include guidance and other follow-up initiatives, and, where appropriate, recommendations to public authorities.

## 3. Mobility and migration

The EU should do more to facilitate worker mobility across Europe and to improve its political acceptance by addressing loopholes and enforcement issues in European and national rules leading to abuses. The European social partners will continue to contribute to this debate and will consider joint actions going beyond their regular participation in the Commission's advisory committees linked to free movement of workers.

The European social partners stand ready to contribute to Commission's and Council's efforts to develop a mobility package and renew the EU policy on legal immigration in a way that is mutually beneficial to employers and workers and will also consider joint actions going beyond this initiative.

## 4. Investment package and strengthening the industrial base in Europe

Total investment went down by around 18% in the EU during the crisis, hampering the recovery, job creation and the Europe 2020 targets. Today more public and private investments are urgently needed and they have to be more complementary than substitutes. Indeed, according to the Commission's own estimate, the yearly investment deficit in the EU, in recent years, has ranged from €230 to €370 billion in the last years. Therefore the European investment plan of €315 billion over three years is a necessary first step as it may kick start a self-reinforcing growth process. New and effective instruments have to be envisaged.

The Commission's initiative puts the emphasis on well targeted investments in R&D, growth-enhancing infrastructures such as renewable energy and energy efficiency, transport, broadband and education and training. The Commission

intends to channel a significant amount of investment towards projects that can help get younger generation back to work in decent jobs.

The European Union has, in parallel, set the course for an industrial renaissance in Europe, whereby at least 20% of GDP in 2020 would be generated by manufacturing activities, including SMEs. The investment package should thus fully contribute to reviving the European industrial base, especially in some sectors and value-chains. In the years leading up to 2020, the greening of the economy may also have a positive effect on job creation if appropriate policies are established to maximise the opportunities of a low-carbon economy or saving energy resources, while minimising the risk for businesses. The goal is to ensure that labour markets challenges deriving from new energy and climate policies are taken into account.

The EU plan must prioritise investment and contribute to a better investment climate creating rapidly the conditions for job creation and quality goods and services. Removing barriers to investment in Europe means ensuring regulations that provide legal certainty; foster growth and employment, especially in the countries mostly affected by the crisis; reduce unnecessary bureaucracy; and allow better access to finance and complete the Single Market in areas such as digital economy and energy union.

Ambitious investment will also be necessary in, for example, social infrastructures, particularly health and social services. Investment in care facilities in particular is essential for promoting better work-life balance. The European social fund and other dedicated EU financial programmes, such as the Youth Employment Initiative or Erasmus +, are

important vehicles for EU financial support to necessary social investments.

Adequate, independent and transparent governance of the European Fund for Strategic Investment – EFSI – is important as well as, where appropriate, the involvement of social partners. In order to ensure that the plan delivers on the expected high leverage, the selection of projects must support the strategic goals of growth and jobs.

The EU social partners, who have elaborated on an investment package separately, will continue to contribute actively, including in a bi- and or tripartite format to the rolling out of the investment plan, most notably to ensure optimal results in terms of growth and job creation.

## 5. Skills needs in digital economies

Social partners will exchange views on how to achieve a better educated, trained and skilled workforce, including better outcomes in terms of basic competences, in line with today's and tomorrow's labour markets challenges. In order to fill in the skills mismatch, it is important to make sure, amongst other things, that appropriate resources for lifelong learning are available on a cost-sharing basis.

The recognition of informal and non-formal learning is also key. Appropriate guidance for young people in education and training aiming to foster smooth transitions in the labour market are also key in order to address mismatches.

Social partners will exchange views on the specific issue of digital skills, including the role of

digital and distance learning, open educational resources, e-services. The exchange should include training and qualification pathways and best practices.

The overarching context for this work is the 2002 framework of actions on the lifelong development of skills and competencies. Bipartite exchanges between national social partners on these issues will be organised where appropriate in the context of the Social Dialogue Committee in view of promoting mutual learning. Further analytical work on lifelong learning will also be considered in 2016 as part of the next cycle of integrated projects.



## 6. Active labour market policies

One aspect of assuring higher employability is putting into place effective active labour market policies that ensure the necessary support for job seekers and effective incentives to employment.

In today's labour markets, it is also more than ever necessary to make sure people possess the necessary skills and capacities to adapt to changes, to enter, remain and progress on the labour market, and active labour market policies should also contribute to this objective.

Active labour market policies (ALMPs) involve a variety of instruments and measures such as public and private employment services, in-work incentives, incentives to start up a business, job-sharing, job rotation, training, or special assistance for disadvantaged groups in the labour market. ALMPs are designed and implemented to integrate unemployed and inactive persons within the working population and support labour

market mobility. Given the diversity of individual needs, individual accompanying services and personalised professional insertion pathways are necessary to achieve positive results. In order to ensure the existence of effective ALMPs it is necessary that well targeted resources are made available.

These are all key measures to facilitate the active search of jobs in order to better match labour supply and demand, in particular for long-term unemployed and for youth, also in the context of the ongoing implementation of youth guarantee systems.

Against this background, the European social partners will exchange views, inter alia in the context of the Social Dialogue Committee, on the effectiveness and quality of ALMPs in order to facilitate transitions from unemployment to employment and towards more and better jobs.

## 7. Fostering apprenticeships to increase youth employment

In 2013, the European social partners adopted a framework of actions on youth employment, which will be followed up at national level until actions have been undertaken.

Since then, they have engaged into activities on apprenticeships as part of the 2014-2016 integrated projects. This work will be conducted

separately at first before being followed up on at a joint conference in 2016. On this basis, they will explore the possibility of further joint activities, including with a view to achieving higher levels of mobility of apprentices across Europe.

## 8. Committing to promote capacity building and better implementation outcomes

More than ten years after the adoption of the first autonomous framework agreement, and with an EU which has enlarged to 28 Member States, implementation processes have highlighted some challenges that need to be overcome.

European social partners will further develop their common understanding of the EU social dialogue instruments and how they can have a positive impact at the various levels of social dialogue in order to build, develop and reinforce it. Strong, independent and representative social partners are a key factor of this process.

They recognise that greater efforts are needed to ensure an effective and efficient implementation of the commitments taken through the negotiation process of autonomous agreements in all the Member States, in accordance with the procedures and practices specific to management and labour in the Member States.

The European social partners will create a subgroup (with a geographical balance) mandated to look into follow-up and implementation of autonomous social dialogue instruments. It will meet in the context of each Social Dialogue Committee meeting and report regularly to it and propose supportive actions in order to achieve better implementation outcomes aiming at coverage in all Member States.

In addition, the European social partners will launch and coordinate, in accordance with their respective internal governance, the development of orientations aiming to achieve better implementation outcomes in the countries where progress is needed, including through exchanging national practices.

Also in the context of their integrated projects, the European social partners have agreed to step up their efforts in order to improve the implementation of their autonomous agreements, with an approach covering all 28 Member States but focused on the 8-10 Member States where a lack of or insufficient implementation have been observed in the past. This will include:

- an overview on the state of play of implementation of autonomous agreements in the 28 Member States;
- a new approach targeted at the 8-10 countries where a lack of or insufficient implementation has been observed, including up to 5 country visits to some of these countries, which we hope will contribute to real progress.

Finally, if after 2 years of the work of this subgroup it appears that the framework agreements have not been implemented in a satisfactory manner, social partners will examine further supportive actions to improve implementation outcomes.

# Who we are

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## **BUSINESSEUROPE**

[www.businessseurope.eu](http://www.businessseurope.eu)

BUSINESSEUROPE represents small, medium and large companies. Active in European affairs since 1958, BUSINESSEUROPE's members are 40 leading industrial and employers' federations from 34 European countries, working together to achieve growth and competitiveness in Europe.

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## **European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)**

[www.etuc.org](http://www.etuc.org)

The European Trade Union Confederation was founded in 1973, it now represents 90 trade union organisations in 39 European countries, plus 10 European Trade Union Federations. It works for a Europe with a strong social dimension and social justice, focusing on workers' interests and well-being.

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## **The European Centre of Employers and Enterprises providing Public services (CEEP)**

[www.ceep.eu](http://www.ceep.eu)

CEEP was established in 1961 and gathers enterprises and authorities from across Europe, both public and private, at national, regional and local level, which are public employers or providers of services of general interest.

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## **European Association of Craft, Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (UEAPME)**

[www.ueapme.com](http://www.ueapme.com)

UEAPME is the employers' organisation representing crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level, created in 1981. UEAPME has over 80 member organisations.



**ETUC**

**European Trade  
Union Confederation**

Boulevard du Roi Albert II, 5  
B - 1210 Brussels  
BELGIUM  
Tel +32 (0)2 224 04 11  
E-mail [etuc@etuc.org](mailto:etuc@etuc.org)  
[www.etuc.org](http://www.etuc.org)



**BUSINESSEUROPE**

Avenue de Cortenbergh 168  
B - 1000 Brussels  
BELGIUM  
Tel +32 (0)2 237 65 11  
E-mail [main@businessseurope.eu](mailto:main@businessseurope.eu)  
[www.businessseurope.eu](http://www.businessseurope.eu)



**CEEP**

Rue des Deux Eglises, 26 boîte 5  
B - 1000 Brussels  
BELGIUM  
Tel +32 (0)2 219 27 98  
E-mail [ceep@ceep.eu](mailto:ceep@ceep.eu)  
[www.ceep.eu](http://www.ceep.eu)



**UEAPME**

Rue Jacques de Lalaing 4  
B - 1040 Brussels  
BELGIUM  
Tel +32 (0)2 230 75 99  
E-mail [info@ueapme.com](mailto:info@ueapme.com)  
[www.ueapme.com](http://www.ueapme.com)