

ETUC Executive discusses equality action plan, digitalisation, trade, atypical work, youth employment, economic governance



Workers are not robots EPSU GS at ETUC Executive Committee June 2016

Europe's union leaders meet several times a year, where we discuss social, economic and political developments across Europe. We learn from each other and take account of problems workers face in different countries and sectors. We agree our priorities and campaigns to move Europe in another direction. Decisions are taken on how we mobilise and how we promote our policies with the European commission, parliament, member states and employers. We approve our responses to proposals from employers and EU institutions. During this June's Executive Committee meeting of the ETUC we agreed the work plan for the next two years, in which a strong focus will be the need for a pay increase for European workers.

On the second day of its meeting the Executive met EU Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, Marianne Thyssen. Commissioner Thyssen has proposed a [New Skills Agenda](#) for Europe, which aims to assist people from an early age to develop broad set of skills and cope with transitions in working life. ETUC has

set out its [demands](#) for the new Agenda and will [analyse and respond](#) to the proposals in due course.

Another pressing topic concerned the opposition of 11 member states to the Commission's proposed changes to the Posted Workers Directive. The ETUC has welcomed the Commission's proposal whilst drawing attention to concerns about some parts of it, especially regarding the recognition and the lack of respect for all collective agreements. BusinessEurope, the lobby group of corporate Europe, has launched a zealous and ideological attack against the proposal as it prevents companies from exploiting wage and social protection differences in the EU. The Central and Eastern European, mostly conservative, governments support these business interests: it seems they would prefer their citizens to be exploited rather than support the unions' demands for fair and equal treatment. The Commissioner indicated she would defend the Commission's proposal.

And last but not least our discussion with Commissioner Thyssen focused on the Commission's proposal for a Pillar of Social Rights, which aims to add a social dimension to the integration of the Eurozone. The Commissioner strongly encouraged trade unions to be engaged and contribute. Gloria Mills, chair of the ETUC Women's Committee and the EPSU Women and Gender Equality Committee, called on the Commissioner to fully support the achievement of equal pay between men and women as a key outcome of this process. To support this goal, and in order to ensure that women and men have equal access to the labour market, [quality and affordable childcare facilities](#) with trained staff must be developed. This requires the freeing up of public investment and a reversal of the austerity policies that prevent this from happening.

Leaders of Europe's unions also discussed:

- *Orientations for the European Pillar of Social Rights.* The European Union needs a project that restores confidence that European cooperation and integration brings social progress for workers and our families. Eurosceptics, the extreme-right, liberals and employers are not offering this. Issues for such a Social Pillar are the strengthening of our collective bargaining systems, achieving equality at work and addressing inequalities in society, quality of work, the importance of decent wages and better social protection. EPSU stresses the need for access to quality public services such as child and health care. For this an increase in public spending is needed, as well as an end to the

tax dodging practices of multinational corporations and the rich. We also call on employers, governments and the European commission to ensure that the transitions at work caused by digitalisation, restructuring and the move to a greener economy, for example, take place in a fair and just manner.

- [*Positions on Refugees and Migration*](#). We demand quality public services, investment in social housing for all and adequate measures to assist the inclusion of refugees in the labour market.
- *European semester and the role of the social partners*. Many workers and communities continue to suffer from austerity. The structural reforms proposed by the Member States and Commission are one-sided in their promotion of more labour market flexibility and a weaker role for unions. They do not benefit workers and this policy has to end. Trade unions recognise that the latest Annual Growth Survey and [*Country-Specific Recommendations*](#) have a stronger focus on social and employment policies. ETUC argues for an increase in wages and investment to boost the European recovery. We also adopted a position on the [*flexibilities within the Stability and Growth Pact*](#). We underline that the problem in the EU is a lack of investment. It is restrained by the rules of the SGP.
- The [*ETUC action programme on Gender Equality 2016-2019*](#) was adopted. This contains proposals to legislate on improved maternity leave, on addressing the persistent gender pay gap and on improving family-related leave and working time arrangements. It also addresses improving the representation of women in trade unions.
- [*Digitalisation: Towards fair digital work*](#) is an important [*policy statement*](#) adopted by the ETUC Executive. We decided a number of key demands such as the importance of a gender perspective in digitalisation policies, a legal initiative for privacy at work, upskilling workers, just transition, an EU framework on crowdworkers, building inclusive and accessible digital public services and more. EPSU raised the issue of the impact of digitalisation and digital services on taxation. Companies must pay taxes where they create wealth, not use new technologies to shift it to low tax countries.
- *Roadmap on atypical work*. Over the next two years ETUC and members will increase their work to address atypical work. The aim is to explore the possibility of a European framework that addresses all forms of a-typical work including the self-employed and free lancers. Organising, representing and defending these workers rights will be key.
- ETUC adopted a [*critical position*](#) on the *International Court System* (ICS) for

bilateral trade deals. This mechanism was proposed by the European commission following pressure from ETUC and many others, who disagreed with the inclusion of the Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) procedures in CETA and TTIP. We recognize that the Commission has tried to respond to those concerns, however ICS still involves special protection for investors that is unwarranted, unnecessary and threatens the democratic functioning of our societies. ETUC rejects the inclusion of this proposed system in CETA and TTIP and [Europe's trade union movement rejects the proposed text of the free trade agreement between EU and Canada \(CETA\)](#). It does not meet our demands. We remain open to discussing fair trade.

- Youth Unemployment is a scourge in Europe. It remains extremely high in some member states where up to one in every two young people is unemployed. Those young people that are in employment are often in precarious work. One of the measures to assist young people getting a job has been the [European Youth Guarantee](#), in which young people must receive a good quality offer of employment, education or training within 4 months of leaving school. ETUC continues to campaign to make this a right, and we want guarantees that these are quality offers. ETUC adopted a plan of actions to make this happen.
- Increasing numbers of multinational companies are agreeing to [Transnational Company Agreements](#) (TCAs) with the European Federations, and EPSU has been party to several such agreements. The TCAs have raised questions of their legal status, enforceability and how disputes can be solved. The European Commission has proposed an Optional Legal Framework, though what this entails is not yet clear. ETUC has developed proposals on how this framework can be developed. It will continue discussions with the Federations and Confederations to address how such an instrument could contribute to the protection of workers' interests.

The ETUC Executive Committee took place on 8-9 June 2016 in Brussels. EPSU's Vice-President, Francoise Geng, and General Secretary, Jan Willem Goudriaan, took part on behalf of EPSU.

- [Log in](#) to post comments
- [Printer-friendly version](#)

Policies

[Digitalisation](#)

[Economic Policy](#)

[Equality](#)

[Migration](#)

[Trade](#)

Sectors

[Executive Committee](#)

Networks

[Women & Gender Equality](#)

[Youth](#)

Other organizations

[ETUC](#)