



## Commission sets out strategy to promote decent work worldwide and prepares instrument for ban on forced labour products

Brussels, 23 February 2022

Today, the Commission presents its [Communication on Decent Work Worldwide](#) that reaffirms the EU's commitment to champion decent work both at home and around the world. The elimination of child labour and forced labour is at the heart of this endeavour.

The latest figures show that decent work is still not a reality for many people around the world and more remains to be done: 160 million children – one in ten worldwide – are in child labour, and 25 million people are in a situation of forced labour.

The EU promotes decent work across all sectors and policy areas in line with a comprehensive approach that addresses workers in domestic markets, in third countries and in global supply chains. The Communication adopted today sets out the internal and external policies the EU uses to implement decent work worldwide, putting this objective at the heart of an inclusive, sustainable and resilient recovery from the pandemic.

As part of this comprehensive approach, the Commission is preparing a new legislative instrument to effectively ban products made by forced labour from entering the EU market, as announced by President **von der Leyen** in her [State of the Union address](#) 2021. This instrument will cover goods produced inside and outside the EU, combining a ban with a robust enforcement framework. It will build on international standards and complement existing horizontal and sectoral EU initiatives, in particular the due diligence and transparency obligations.

### Decent work: the EU as responsible global leader

The EU has already taken strong action to promote decent work worldwide, contributing to the improvement in the lives of people all over the globe. The world has also seen a significant reduction over the past decades of the number of children in child labour (from 245.5 million in 2000 to 151.6 million in 2016). However, the number of children in child labour has increased by more than 8 million between 2016 and 2020, inverting the previous positive trend. At the same time, the global COVID-19 pandemic and transformations in the world of work, including through technological advances, the climate crisis, demographic changes and globalisation, can have an impact on labour standards and workers' protection.

Against this background, the EU is committed to build on its existing engagement and further strengthen its role as responsible leader in the world of work by using all the instruments at hand and developing them further. Consumers are increasingly demanding goods, which are produced in a sustainable and fair way that ensures decent work of those that produce them. As reflected in debates in the Conference on the Future of Europe, European citizens expect the EU to take a leading role in promoting the highest standards around the globe.

The EU will reinforce its actions, guided by the four elements of the [universal concept of decent work](#) as developed by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and reflected in the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals. These elements include: (1) promoting employment; (2) standards and rights at work, including the elimination of forced labour and child labour; (3) social protection; (4) social dialogue and tripartism. Gender equality and non-discrimination are crosscutting issues in these objectives.

### Key tools for decent work worldwide

The Communication sets out upcoming and existing EU tools in four areas:

- **EU policies and initiatives with outreach beyond the EU.** Key tools include:
  - EU policies setting standards that are global frontrunners for corporate responsibility and transparency, such as the proposal for a directive on corporate sustainability due diligence and the forthcoming legislative proposal on forced labour.
  - EU guidance and legal provisions on socially sustainable public procurement will help the

public sector lead by example.

- EU sectoral policies, for instance on food, minerals and textiles, strengthen respect for international labour standards.
- **EU bilateral and regional relations:** Key tools include:
  - EU trade policy, which promotes international labour standards.
  - Respect for labour rights in third countries is an essential part of EU human rights policies.
  - EU enlargement and neighbourhood policy, which promotes decent work in neighbouring countries.
- **The EU in international and multilateral fora:** Key tools include:
  - EU support for the implementation of UN instruments on decent work, and the EU's active contribution to setting labour standards through the ILO.
  - EU support for the reform of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to integrate the social dimension of globalisation.
  - In the G20 and G7 formats, the EU works with other global economic powers to promote decent work.
- **Engagement with stakeholders and in global partnerships:** Key tools include:
  - EU support for social partners to ensure respect of labour rights in supply chains.
  - EU engagement with civil society actors to promote safe and enabling environments for civil society.
  - EU support for global partnerships and multi-stakeholder initiatives on decent work, in areas such as occupational safety and health.

As part of its “Just and sustainable economy package”, the Commission today also tables a [proposal for a Directive on corporate sustainability due diligence](#). The proposal aims to foster sustainable and responsible corporate behaviour throughout global value chains.

### Members of the College said

President Ursula **von der Leyen** said: *“Europe sends a strong signal that business can never be done at the expense of people's dignity and freedom. We don't want the goods people are forced to produce on the shelves of our shops in Europe. This is why we are working on a ban of goods made with forced labour.”*

Executive Vice-President for an Economy that Works for People, Valdis **Dombrovskis**, said: *“The EU economy is connected to millions of workers around the world through global supply chains. Decent work is in the interest of workers, businesses and consumers everywhere: they all have the right to fair and appropriate conditions. There is no place for lowering basic labour standards as a means to gain competitive advantage. We will continue to promote decent labour standards worldwide, making sure of a key role for social dialogue as we work for a fair and strong recovery.”*

Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, Nicolas **Schmit**, said: *“Decent work is the foundation of a decent life. Many workers worldwide still see their labour and social rights threatened on a daily basis. The EU will continue to play a leading role in promoting decent work that puts people at the centre, making sure their rights and their dignity are respected.”*

### Next steps

The Commission invites the European Parliament and the Council to endorse the approach set out in this Communication and to work together to implement its actions. The Commission will regularly report on the implementation of this Communication.

### Background

President **von der Leyen** highlighted the Commission's zero-tolerance policy on child labour in her [Political Guidelines](#). In her 2021 [State of the Union address](#), she stressed that business and global trade “can never be done at the expense of people's dignity and freedom” and that “human rights are not for sale”.

The [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#) announced a “Communication on Decent Work Worldwide” to provide a comprehensive overview of relevant EU instruments and a blueprint for an EU strategy on taking forward the social dimension in international action.

### For More Information

[Communication: Decent Work Worldwide](#)

[Press release: proposal for a Directive on corporate sustainability due diligence](#)

[European Pillar of Social Rights website](#)

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