Commission sets out concrete actions for greater involvement of social partners at national and EU level

Brussels, 25 January 2023

Today, the Commission presents an initiative to further strengthen and promote social dialogue with concrete actions at national and EU level. It renews our strong commitment to social dialogue as a cornerstone of the EU social market economy and its competitiveness. The initiative empowers social dialogue to adapt to the changing world of work and new trends on the labour market, against the backdrop of the transitions to a digital and climate neutral economy and the emergence of new forms of employment.

The negotiations between organisations representing employers and workers (social partners) through social dialogue and collective bargaining help improve living and working conditions, such as pay, hours of work, annual leave, parental leave, training, and health and safety measures. They also have a crucial role to play in adapting to changing economic and social circumstances and achieving the productivity gains that are necessary to enhance the competitiveness of European businesses. All this helps to ensure social fairness and democracy at work, and boost Europe's prosperity and resilience.

Social partners also play a crucial role in times of crisis or change. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, they quickly helped to organise health and safety measures at work, and short time work schemes. Social partners are also helping to find balanced solutions to adapting the labour market to the digital age. The close cooperation between employers and employees is also essential to ensuring the efficient organisation of industrial production activities, and to equipping the work force with green and digital skills.

However, the degree and quality of the involvement of social partners varies considerably among countries. At the same time, union membership and the share of workers covered by collective agreements at national level is declining (from an EU average of about 66% in 2000 to about 56% in 2019). Newer forms of employment such as platform work and certain groups such as young people are also less likely to be represented, with some sectors like care seeing a near-total absence of collective bargaining.

In this context, the Commission proposes a Council Recommendation, which sets out how EU countries can further strengthen social dialogue and collective bargaining at national level. The Commission also presents a Communication on reinforcing and promoting social dialogue at EU level. Social partners were closely involved in preparing these initiatives.

Enabling social dialogue to thrive at national level

The Commission's proposal for a Council Recommendation recommends that Member States:

- **Ensure the consultation of social partners** on the design and implementation of economic, employment and social policies according to national practices.
- **Encourage social partners** to look at **new forms of work and atypical employment**, and to **communicate widely** about the benefits of social dialogue and on any collective agreements put in place.
- **Enable an increase in workers and employers' organisations' capacity**, for instance ensuring they have access to relevant information and ensuring support from national governments.

The proposed Council Recommendation fully respects national traditions as well as social partners' autonomy. It allows Member States to determine how to best achieve these objectives, taking into account their specific circumstances.

Promoting social partners' involvement at EU level

To further promote the role of social partners in EU policy making and reinforce sectoral social dialogue at EU level, the Commission proposes a set of measures to:
• **Reinforce European sectoral social dialogue by modernising its framework**, in close collaboration with EU social partners, through a possible revision of the current rules.

• **Continue to support social partner agreements**, notably through administrative support and legal advice.

• **Strengthen social partners' involvement in EU policymaking**, for instance by gathering the views of the European cross-industry social partners on EU policy priorities ahead of the Commission Work Programme.

• **Make the EU's technical and financial support for social partners more effective**. For instance, the Commission will set up, in cooperation with social partners, a research network for monitoring and promoting EU social dialogue.

In addition, the Commission calls on social partners to **negotiate and conclude more social partner agreements** and **improve the membership and representativeness** of both trade unions and employers' organisations.

The Commission will also continue to **promote social dialogue internationally** through regular cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and others. The Commission encourages Member States to continue to ratify and effectively implement ILO Conventions.

**Next steps**

The Commission will follow up, closely working with social partners, on the proposed actions at EU level listed in the **Communication**.

Member States will discuss the Commission **proposal for a Council Recommendation** with a view to its adoption by the Council. Once adopted, the proposal invites Member States to submit to the Commission a set of measures, which have been discussed with social partners, to implement this Recommendation. The implementation of the measures will be monitored in the context of the European Semester.

**Background**

Social dialogue and the involvement of workers is a key principle of the **European Pillar of Social Rights** and an integral part of the 2021 **Porto Social Commitment**. The Commission announced in the **European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan** that it would present an initiative to support social dialogue at EU and national level, as also underlined by Commission President **von der Leyen** at the **2022 Tripartite Social Summit**.

The Commission prepared this initiative with the close involvement of social partners and held exchanges with the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. The social dialogue initiative, also mentioned in the Commission Communication **"Conference on the Future of Europe, Putting Vision into Concrete Action"** of June 2022, makes a significant contribution to the follow-up to the Conference. The social dialogue initiative also contributes to the **2023 European Year of Skills** and the **Green Deal Industrial Plan** as social partners play a key role in supporting skilling, job transitions and EU competitiveness.

**For More Information**

- [Proposal for a Council Recommendation on strengthening social dialogue in the European Union](#)
- [Communication on strengthening social dialogue in the European Union—harnessing its full potential for managing transitions](#)
- [Questions and answers: strengthening social dialogue](#)
- [2023 European Year of Skills](#)

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**Quotes:**

Social dialogue is essential for our future economic growth and the resilience of our economies. It plays an important role in preserving and strengthening the competitiveness of European business, raising productivity, improving labour conditions and equipping workers with the skills needed to succeed in the green and digital transitions. There are also many examples where social dialogue has helped to improve the design of public policies. Today’s package will support social dialogue so that even more businesses and workers across the European Union can benefit from economic and social progress.

Valdis Dombrovskis, Executive Vice-President for an Economy that Works for People
Every day across Europe, representatives of employers and workers come together to agree on the essence of our working conditions such as pay, hours, and health and safety measures. Social dialogue is a core feature of our European social market economy, but trade union membership is in decline, and many sectors, like care or platform work, are missing out on collective bargaining. To make sure that Europe remains competitive and inclusive, we need strong social dialogue and strong social partners.

Nicolas Schmit, Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights

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