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DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND INCLUSION

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DEDICATED HEARING WITH SOCIAL PARTNERS ON A QUALITY JOBS ROADMAP

BACKGROUND NOTE

In her political guidelines for 2024-2029, President von der Leyen announced a comprehensive **Quality Jobs Roadmap** aimed at supporting fair wages, high standards for health and safety, good working conditions, and fair job transitions for both workers and the self-employed, notably by increasing collective bargaining coverage. The initiative is included in the Commission Work Programme 2025 and announced for the fourth quarter of 2025. Executive Vice-President Minzatu was mandated to develop this Roadmap **in consultation with the social partners**.

Enshrined in the Treaty, **social dialogue** is an essential part of the European social model. Social dialogue, including collective bargaining, is a crucial and beneficial tool for a well-functioning social market economy, driving economic and social resilience, competitiveness, stability and sustainable and inclusive growth and development. The European Pillar of Social Rights (Principle 8) states that the social partners are to be consulted on the design and implementation of economic, employment and social policies according to national practices, and underlines that support to increase the capacity of the social partners to promote social dialogue is to be encouraged.

Social dialogue also plays an important role in managing change and shaping the future of work, taking into account the impact of particular trends in the organisation of work on a global scale through supply chains, technology and innovation, demography and climate change, and in shaping and implementing EU policies towards sustainable competitiveness, inclusive growth and employment and social fairness.

In the recently signed **Pact for European Social Dialogue**, the European Commission and the European cross-industry social partners committed to further strengthening the role of social dialogue in a way that supports the management of change, delivers a fair, sustainable and resilient economy, and provides quality jobs. The Pact acknowledges that the EU's future long-term competitiveness needs to go hand in hand with quality jobs and a workforce that is equipped with the right skills.

Social partners will therefore play a central role in the development of the Quality Jobs Roadmap.

1. CONTEXT

In recent years, the European Union has been facing an unprecedented series of crises and challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the rapidly unfolding climate crisis and environmental degradation, the repercussions of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Together with the rapid changes in the geopolitical context, the growing global competition and the related erosion of the EU industrial basis, the sharp rise in inflation and the subsequent cost of living crisis. Well-functioning labour markets, a competitive business environment that enhances resilient businesses and attracts new companies and investors, robust health systems, inclusive social protection systems and access to affordable and quality public services and services of general interest played an essential role in mitigating the impact of these crises, by protecting millions of people, businesses and jobs, and by reinforcing the resilience of our economy, allowing for a fast recovery.

The Commission has put forward some initiatives with the aim to address some of these issues, among others, with the Competitiveness Compass, the Union of Skills, the Clean Industrial Deal, and the Pact for European Social Dialogue, as well as the forthcoming new EU Action Plan on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The EU has made considerable progress in recent years, although challenges persist, including employment growth, competitiveness, raising job quality through better working conditions, the use of available skills and acquisition of new skills, raising productivity, the welfare of working people, rising stress levels associated with 'job strain' and other environmental and psychosocial risks, the impact of the transitions and demographic shifts in our labour markets and job conditions, etc.

As a starting point, ensuring conditions that allow companies to create quality jobs in Europe is key for the wellbeing and motivation of workers, employment and economic growth and improved working conditions, productivity growth, enhanced innovation and strong competitiveness.

Labour shortages are expected to continue rising over the coming decades, predominantly due to demographic change and the increase in the demand for workers with specific skills, for instance required for the digital and green transitions, as well as the competitiveness and the EU's security and open strategic autonomy. Unless mitigated, these shortages risk reducing the EU's capacity for innovation and attractiveness for investments, weakening its competitiveness and hampering its growth potential and the financing of its social welfare model.

The EU witness a robust employment, growth, but labour productivity growth remains structurally low, and risks undermining the EU's global competitiveness and its performance in terms of future growth potential, job creation, and living standards. Gaps in the EU's high-tech specialisation, innovation, and investment, the fragmentation of the Single Market and regulatory complexity are factors to be taken into account in this respect. The lack of (necessary) skills is only a part of the problem, which the Union of Skills aims to address. There is also the risk of growing inequalities and people falling behind the fast pace of change. Poor working conditions in certain occupations and sectors, including above average job strain and low wages, can make it difficult to fill vacancies and/or retain workers.

Our economies and societies seem to experience persistent, and in many cases increasing, poverty trends. While the EU is on track to meet its 2030 target for the overall employment rate and the complementary target on the share of young people neither in employment nor in education or training, economic growth went hand in hand with an increase in the EU's material footprint since 2017. In-work poverty declined slightly in the EU in 2023, but still

affected one in twelve workers, and was significantly higher for non-standard forms of work. Real wages are not yet back to their level of 2019 and many lower and middle-income households still feel the effects of the cost-of-living crisis. It is essential to continue work to safeguarding the purchasing power of those with low wages as well as preventing and fighting poverty risks among the employed, while reinforcing incentives to work.

For some groups, especially the young and high-skilled, non-permanent jobs and part-time employment can facilitate labour market entry and skills development, while providing greater flexibility and helping to work-life balance. However, in some cases, persistent gaps in job security and working conditions between workers (often coupled with low social security contributions and the ensuing impact for the public finance and investments, and for the individual, in terms of access to social protection) create divides that can result in increased inequalities. The precariousness that can ensue from involuntary temporary or part-time contracts also contributes to less favourable working conditions in certain sectors and occupations with high and persistent labour shortages.

The impact of digitalization on the world of work is massive. Rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and other digital technologies, including data analytics, virtual worlds, cybersecurity, quantum, cloud and edge computing, are driving profound transformations in the labour market. AI can bring increase in workers' productivity, help workers manage their working time, increase safety and security at work. At the same time, risk emerge especially linked to algorithmic management, such as increased work pressure, bias and discrimination, loss of autonomy, opacity and exposure to data breaches. Digital labour platforms represent an increasingly important part of the EU economy, providing job opportunities but also posing specific challenges, notably related to the workers' employment status. Telework offers opportunities like more autonomy and flexibility. At the same time, the new work model based on hybrid work arrangements may also foster an 'always-on' culture, which may result in frequent additional and unpredictable working hours that can be detrimental to workers' work-life balance, health and well-being.

The drivers of change are numerous and complex, and their impact varies from one sector to another, but they also offer great opportunities. The way change affects businesses and workers depends largely on the capacity to anticipate and prepare for the change. Adapting too late or too little can result in poorly managed restructuring, large-scale downsizing and or mass job losses. Opportunities ahead include the potential of new job creation (for what we need to develop the right skills), restructuring, etc. Industrial change represents an opportunity – and it must be anticipated, prepared for and managed well, notably by taking into account the quality of jobs.

2. EXISTING FRAMEWORK AND ONGOING WORK

The Quality Jobs Roadmap will build on a solid foundation. During the last term, President von der Leyen placed social justice, equal opportunities, fair working conditions and social protection at the core of the EU's post-crisis recovery and long-term transformation. The Commission made notable strides in strengthening the European social model, in many ways, enhancing social resilience and cohesion, while addressing the challenges imposed by the impact of the pandemic and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, and the geopolitical, technological, demographic and climate change shifts.

The Commission is working on the following strands:

European Pillar of Social Rights action plan	Through the first Action Plan, the EU set out specific EU-level headline targets to be reached by 2030 on employment, training, and poverty reduction, and Member States defined national targets in line with the EU-level ambitions. A new Action Plan will be set forth by the end of 2025 to help Europe achieve its targets.
Platform Work Directive	The Directive ensures that people working through digital labour platforms are granted the legal employment status that corresponds to their actual work arrangements, and that they can enjoy the labour rights and social benefits they are entitled to. It also gives workers and the self-employed the tools to uphold their rights in relation to algorithm management by platforms.
European Parliament resolution based on art. 225 on telework and the right to disconnect	The first stage social partner consultation was carried out in April/June 2024, and the Commission is currently preparing to launch the second stage social partner consultation.
Directive on adequate minimum wages	It marked a milestone in European social policy by setting, for the first time ever, EU-wide standards to promote adequate minimum wages and collective bargaining on wage-setting across Member States.
EU strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027	In the context of the framework, the Commission proposed rules to reinforce protection in the workplace against asbestos and will continue its efforts to ensure workers' protection against the exposure to hazardous chemicals, including carcinogens. It also adopted a Communication on a new comprehensive approach to mental health in the coming years, including psychosocial risks at work.
Action Plan on Labour and Skills Shortages	To boost competitiveness, enhance economic and social resilience and address challenges such as demographic change, the demand for new skills or poor working conditions in some sectors and occupations, the Commission also brought forward in cooperation with social partners the Action Plan, spanning across close to 90 actions by the EU, Member States, the Commission and social partners.

Union of Skills	The Commission delivered several key actions that contribute to a more skilled and adaptable workforce across Europe. Building on initiatives such as the 2020 Skills agenda and the Pact for Skills aimed at tackling challenges and shortages in skills development, the Union of Skills provides a long-term framework to enhance skills development across the EU.
Labour mobility package	The Commission will publish the evaluation of the European Labour Authority (ELA) in May 2025. Based on the evaluation's results as well as the report of the European Parliament, the focus will be on strengthening the mandate and empowering ELA to further promote fair labour mobility within the EU. A proposal will be put forward in early 2026 as part of a comprehensive Fair Labour Mobility Package that will include – inter alia - concrete initiatives to digitalise further labour mobility, like ESSPASS, as well as actions to address the challenges linked to posting of third country nationals as well as risks linked to long and complex sub-contracting chains and labour market intermediaries. Practical steps were proposed to further digitalise the coordination of social security systems in Europe.
Just Transition	The Just Transition Fund supports communities and territories affected by the transition towards climate neutrality. This was further underpinned by the Council Recommendation of June 2022, which provides guidance to Member States to put in place comprehensive policy packages that support workers and citizens in this transition. In the framework of the Action Plans on the Automotive Sector and on Steels and Metals, a recent proposal to amend the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund aims to make it faster, through a simplified procedure, and broader in scope, allowing that it intervenes earlier to support workers, before job losses occur.
European Works Councils	To ensure better information and consultation of workers in large multinational undertakings, the Commission proposed to revise existing rules.

Council Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed	The Recommendation aims to improve the social protection coverage of people in different types of jobs and economic activity.
Council Recommendation on strengthening social dialogue	Adopted in 2023, it was designed to help Member States enhance the role of national social partners through specific measures, while at the Val Duchesse Social Partners Summit, the Commission, the Belgian presidency of the Council of the EU and European social partners signed a ‘Tripartite Declaration for a Thriving European Social Dialogue’. EU funding allows the European-level social partners to develop their dialogue, with more than 440 social dialogue outcomes generated between 2014 and 2024, and to contribute to the EU policymaking and delivery. Additionally, the European Social Fund was mobilised at the national level to support the capacity-building of social partners.
Amendment of ESF+	In April 2025, the Commission proposed to amend the ESF+ to make it easier to mobilise support for workers. Under the proposed changes, Member States would gain more flexibility to redirect ESF+ funding towards skills development in strategic sectors, such as defence and clean industries, and to provide additional support to regions bordering Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, which are facing specific challenges linked to Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine.

These are only a few examples of initiatives which reflect the EU’s commitment to strengthening its social fabric, promoting fairness, inclusion, and fair working conditions across Member States. However, while these developments mark significant steps forward, challenges remain. To address them, the Commission is putting forward a new initiative aimed at promoting quality jobs.

3. SHAPING THE QUALITY JOBS ROADMAP

The Quality Jobs Roadmap will take the form of a Commission Communication, planned for the last quarter of 2025. It will outline a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges and opportunities of the European labour market as regards quality jobs and present concrete initiatives and tools to deliver on them, notably from the Commission. It could contain both legislative and non-legislative actions. It will be a compass guiding our work for the next five years, catering for the needs of workers, across different sectors, as well as self-employed individuals.

It could be structured around three pillars:

- I. **Fair working conditions:** fair working conditions and equal opportunities are fundamental levers of quality jobs and should be ensured for any type of contract, across sectors and subcontracting chains. Adequate earnings and working time, access to social protection as well as work life balance through flexible working conditions and care leaves can boost both personal empowerment and productivity and facilitate access to the labour market. Good health and safety at work is also key. Enhancing job quality can help decrease labour shortages and increase labour supply. This needs to be combined with strengthened efforts to tackle undeclared work and ensure overall fair labour mobility within the EU.
- II. **Digitalisation:** digital tools, particularly ICT tools at work, have paved the way for more flexible work arrangements and a more productive workforce. As work becomes more digitalised and decentralised, it is crucial to seize the opportunities that digitalisation offers, both for businesses and for workers, while protecting workers' rights and preventing risks and potential harms arising from the use of digital technologies, algorithmic management and AI in the workplace.
- III. **Fair transitions:** Collective interest representation, anticipation and management of transitions are key. Preparing for labour shifts and duly involving workers play also an important role in smoothening transitions. It is essential to support restructuring processes at EU and Member States level, focusing on just transition, sound information, consultation and participation of workers and their representatives, anticipation of change, and quicker interventions when there is a threat of restructuring. It is also vital to create accessible pathways for workers to acquire new competencies, building on the Union of Skills. Effective measures to foster the skills of the workforce are essential to support competitiveness and foster a more innovative and productive labour market.

Horizontal enablers: Supporting frameworks, such as access to affordable high-quality early childhood education and care, healthcare and long-term care services, indirectly influence quality jobs, as does strong social dialogue and collective bargaining. Boosting reforms and investments that gear towards quality jobs can also help creating a level playing field and maintaining high standards for job quality across the EU.

The Roadmap will build up on initiatives such as the Competitiveness Compass, the Clean Industrial Deal, the Union of Skills, the new Action Plan on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and a new Fair Labour Mobility Package, the Roadmap for Women's Rights, the Anti-Poverty Strategy and the EU Action Plan on labour and skills shortages, to name but a few.

The Roadmap will benefit from cross-industry and sectoral social partners' unrivalled expertise and knowledge of the employment and social situation on the ground, reflecting views from both sides and allowing them to develop targeted and effective responses, jointly or individually.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

The Commission is keen to receive from social partners specific and concrete ideas on how to future proof and create quality jobs in the EU. We recommend focussing specifically on the barriers that hinder, and the conditions that enable the creation of quality jobs – particularly those that can be addressed at EU level, or by social partners themselves. We would welcome suggestions for concrete solutions of a regulatory or non-regulatory nature to the challenges you identify as well as any joint and individual commitments from the social partners.

In this context, social partners are invited to reflect on the following questions:

- Are we going in the right direction for addressing the challenges and taking on the opportunities arising from the changes in the world of work?
- What is necessary for quality jobs to be future oriented and future-proof?
- Do you agree with the proposed key areas linked to job quality identified?
- In your view, which area(s) should be prioritised at the EU level, and why? What specific measures and tools should be used? Please distinguish between legislative, non-legislative and funding.
- Which initiative can you commit to deliver as social partners at the EU level?
- What is better done at EU and national level?
- What specific measures can be implemented to increase collective bargaining coverage and to implement the Council recommendation on strengthening social dialogue in the Member States?