



TOGETHER FOR A FAIR DEAL FOR WORKERS

The Welfare State in the EU delivering a fair deal for workers

The ETUC Manifesto for the 2024 European Parliament elections and the HLG Report on the Future of Social Protection and the Welfare State in the EU

Opening speech of Giulio Romani at the event in Rome on 18 January 2023

Good morning everyone.

I would like to express special greetings and thanks to the group of renowned experts, led by Anna Diamantopoulou, for their support at this meeting and for their outstanding Report on the Future of Social Protection and the Welfare State in the EU.

The ETUC endorsed the HLG Report on the Future of Social Protection and the Welfare State in the EU in a [position](#) already in the immediate aftermath of its publication and this for several reasons:

- **The Report represents a crucial step for implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights**, consistently with its Action Plan. Far from being just “another” expert dissertation, the Report not only clearly frames the challenges at stakes, it
 - underscores the importance of an **inclusive welfare state, effective to minimise social risks and mitigate economic hardship, while supporting economic output and individual well-being**
 - **provides the concrete policy recommendations** that embody a **clear roadmap for policy-making to be adopted by the European Commission and all member states**. These are rooted in a **forward-looking call to invest in people** that the ETUC considers fundamental for making the EU **home for progress and well-being for all citizens and residents**, through the realization of a *true social market economy*.

The Recommendations for the future of social protection and the welfare state in the EU promote **life-cycle and right-based approaches**, also at the core of the [ETUC Manifesto for a fair deal for workers](#) that must characterise the work of the renewed European institutions and the EU political approach in the coming years.

Europe is about to face a period of great changes that characterise this millennium following the green and the digital agendas.

Important **changes** will have to be faced in **the world of production, strategic for the European autonomy and for its** positioning within the global scene and especially with respect to markets and countries that have demonstrated insufficient reliability in supply chains and political relations.

The inevitable **repercussions of changes and transitions on European workers must not inevitably see exclusion and precariousness grow**, particularly among older workers. The Report shows the way to mitigate and prevent the impact of change in the short and long term: **investing in people to enable them to face the future developments foreseen**.





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We certainly need **to invest in re-training and re-skilling for career changes, thus training is key.**

However, our societies and labour markets see the coexistence of young generations that are currently denied hope and increasingly older ones, largely deprived of rights. The EU cannot afford to lose the potential of the millions of people experiencing poverty, lack of education, no access to healthcare.

Investing in people means **erasing inequalities, increasing social mobility, guaranteeing opportunities to all.**

We must **invest in education, and starting from the youngest ages,** to provide people with the necessary intellectual tools to learn-how-to-learn throughout their lifetimes, to be the authors of change, the innovators of tomorrow.

Similarly, the digital transition not only poses the need to manage an already ongoing change but, for the first time in the history of progress, with the advent of artificial intelligence, scenarios seem possible in which **even the processing and decision-making phases could be dehumanised.** If this is the case, in addition to the many ethical questions, we would have to ask ourselves what the fate of work is and what the ways might be in the future for recognising the right of people to participate in social life and to earn their livelihood and well-being.

We must **guarantee a just digital transformation, a human-centred digitalisation and the effective regulation of AI with the 'human in control' principle incorporated into EU law.**

There is no doubt that in this context the 21 priorities, set out with great lucidity, accurately indicate what modern welfare states have to provide strong buffers against economic shocks and invest in people across critical life-course transitions.

The very future of the EU relies on **effective political decisions to invest in better jobs and in income, protection including pensions.** EU institutions and member states must take effective action in these dimensions, as **decisive measures to address and prevent the social impact of recurrent crises.**

The focus must be on the social groups most in difficulty and most exposed to risk, starting with the many instances of precariousness that already exist and that may result from the upheavals to come.

Equally, we must provide clear orientations to **the choices between public and private intervention,** with concrete references in support of a **non-replaceable role of public institutions in the construction of an overall sustainable scenario.** Welfare rights are not always about return on investments, right enjoyment is not supposed to be directly profitable – yet no forward-looking society can ignore the need for investment in welfare





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While the considerations that emerge from the Report are a 'cornerstone' for the construction of a fairer society, a healthier environment and a more prosperous economy, we cannot, however, fail to see how some of the choices that the European institutions are making risk going in the opposite direction to that indicated by the Report itself.

The **lack of progress on the reform of the Stability and Growth Pact** risks sinking the capacity to react to the social imbalances underway precisely in those countries where these imbalances are manifesting and will manifest themselves most severely. This is a challenging aspect to deal with, as **we must prevent anti-European forces and reactionary solutions that would expose Europe to an unprecedented civil and social regression**. Nothing would be more wrong than to legitimise in public opinion the feeling that transnational financial powers are stronger and more decisive than people's wellbeing in the hierarchy of European powers

That is why **we must say NO to austerity**, to reject solutions that, in the name of monetary stability - useful above all to defend large private financial interests - diminishing the dignity of citizens, excluding the most fragile from society, generating poverty and inequality, and making workers precarious and humiliated. Against market uncontrolled freedom, we stand for people's well-being, for the weakest to be protected and helped to emerge and for social cohesion. These features make a stronger, more competitive and more attractive economy, a true alternative to other competing models.

The ETUC Manifesto for the 2024 European Elections shows the path for a better society, that **is** possible: a society that trusts in people; built with the crucial **collaboration of strong social partners and trade unions fully enabled to engage in meaningful social dialogue**; a society where there is more public spending for the promotion and the protection of people; a society where illegality, fraud, contribution and tax avoidance and evasion are fought with determination because they are detrimental for the collective good; where asylum and reception policies are made and the value of equality and sustainability is put at the core.

I wish you all success in your work on this day and the next ones to follow, which are essential to raise our awareness on what can and must be done for the well-being of people.

