

Submission by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)

<https://www.etuc.org/>

The ETUC is involved in projects particularly dealing with the protection of (particular) human rights of older persons. See below for examples.

ETUC, BusinessEurope, UEAPME and CEEP European social dialogue framework agreement on active ageing and an intergenerational approach, March 2017

In July 2015, the EU cross-industry Social Partners ETUC/BUSINESSEUROPE-CEEP-UEAPME adopted their fifth multiannual work programme for 2015-2017, "Partnership for inclusive growth and employment". In that work programme, they committed themselves to negotiate a framework agreement on active ageing and intergenerational solidarity (further "AAIS"), in the framework of Article 155 (2) TFEU.

In response to demographic and active ageing challenges, they have pledged that *"measures need to be implemented, where necessary at national, sectoral and company levels, to make it easier for older workers to actively participate and stay in the labour market"*. In parallel, they believe that it is also important for *"other measures to be taken in order to ease inter-generational transitions in the context of high youth unemployment"*.

Taking into consideration the Europe 2020 strategy, the EU social partners also affirm that *"the ability of older workers to remain healthy and active for as long as possible in the labour market should be significantly improved, and that longer careers would contribute to maintaining sustainability and adequacy of pensions, social inclusion and cohesion and inter-generational solidarity in Europe"*.

At its meeting of October 2015, the ETUC Executive Committee, in conformity with Article 14 of the ETUC Constitution, after having consulted national confederations and European trade union federations, gave the ETUC a mandate to seek such an autonomous framework agreement on AAIS, in accordance with Article 155 (2) of the Treaty.

Hence, on 8 March 2017, the European cross industry social partners, ETUC, BusinessEurope, CEEP and UEAPME, approved their fifth autonomous framework agreement on active ageing and an intergenerational approach. The aim of this agreement is to ensure a healthy, safe and productive working environment and work organisation to enable workers of all ages to remain in work until legal retirement age. It is also to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and experience between generations at the workplace and takes into account the changing national demographic and labour market realities. The agreement, to be implemented by the members of the signatory organisations across Europe, includes tools, measures and actions on five main domains: 1) Strategic assessments of workforce demography; 2) Health and safety at the workplace; 3) Skills and competence management; 4) Work organisation for healthy and productive working lives; 5) Inter-generational approach.

ETUC has with success applied to the Commission for a project to help further disseminate this agreement and enhance its implementation via amongst others an interpretation guide, regional seminars, etc.

ETUC Action Programme for Welfare and Social Protection

<https://www.etuc.org/documents/etuc-action-programme-welfare-and-social-protection#.Wo6JsainGUK>

This Resolution, adopted at the Executive Committee Meeting of 14-15 December 2016, outlines the main political priorities of the ETUC in the field of welfare and social protection, and proposes consistent actions on core themes and areas of intervention. It considers necessary, *inter alia*, to take stock of the changing paths of work and demography, with the focus on more and better employment across all ages, skills development throughout the working life, and active ageing as a life-long approach to voluntary longer healthy working lives. In line with the priorities identified in this Action Programme, the ETUC committed to the European Commission and the European Council to integrate and apply the following principles in all EU policies and actions:

- Universal access to public, solidarity-based and adequate retirement and old age pensions must be granted to all.

Public pension sustainability must be ensured, mainly by increasing employment rates and quality jobs across all ages, improving working and employment conditions, and by committing the necessary supplementary public spending. The fiscal sustainability of pension systems cannot rest merely on the prolongation of working lives linked to life expectancy, ignoring real job opportunities and quality for elderly people.

Member States must fix the legal retirement age taking into account a series of factors impacting on life expectancy including health (e.g. exposure to arduous work, life expectancy gaps linked to the socio-economic status of workers, educational and integration levels, etc.), dignity and inclusion, as well as labour market conditions and capacity. Adequate public pension income must be ensured to all workers. Public funding must be engaged in order to ensure adequate pensions after a full life at work. Pension system sustainability and pension adequacy, in the given European demographic, employment and economic situation, cannot merely rely on labour income, but rather on greater

Public systems must take account of the situation of millions of workers in Europe, particularly women, youngsters and self-employed, suffering insecure, atypical employment, periods of involuntary unemployment and working-time reduction. Additionally, the gender pension gap is extremely worrying. Public expenditure must be put into compensation systems which ensure adequate pension incomes to those who have inadequate or no pension entitlement at all, due to fragmented and discontinuous contributions.

European minimum standards for publicly funded pension systems must be identified, with reference to median wage, minimum wage and especially living wage in a given country, as well as to adequacy criteria and prevention of risk of poverty, in order to allow decent living standards for all.

Pension reforms must offer clear and transparent eligibility conditions to all.

- Against the backdrop of a very jeopardised situation across the EU, the right to quality and professional long-term care must be established in all EU Member States, with common European standards covering access to care provisions, quality to ensure dignity for all ages and conditions, leave entitlements for carers and compensation for care leave.

(...)

ETUC Position on the European Pillar of Social Rights - Working for a Better Deal for All Workers (“Priority 6 social protection and strong public services”), September 2016:

<https://www.etuc.org/documents/etuc-position-european-pillar-social-rights-working-better-deal-all-workers#.Wo6KFKinGUk>

Priority 6 social protection and strong public services

The European Pillar of Social Rights must bring about tangible improvements in living standards, not just in terms of income but also issues affecting the quality of people's lives and their ability to work, such as public services including access to child and elderly care, transport, health and housing. It must also improve incomes for those who rely on social protection. Social welfare needs to be increased in real terms and substantial progress achieved towards targets for decent living standards for people who rely on welfare for tackling social exclusion and inadequate income, whether due to under-employment, unemployment, old age or disability, along with the right to occupational benefits. Social protection must cover people in and out of work, regardless of the employment contract and, in particular, be extended to the self-employed.

Welfare systems need to be about rights, not just assistance. The Pillar of Social Rights should therefore bring forward recommendations to secure a number of key rights including:

1. The right to good quality social protection benefits, in all branches of social security, including disability and social assistance systems and minimum income;
2. The right to provision of good quality, affordable and accessible social services adequately financed and provided by qualified professionals, including long-term care and childcare, good quality preventive and curative healthcare and a right to quality, safe and affordable social housing for those who need it;
3. The right to an adequate pension, indexed to protect purchasing power. The upward convergence of standards at EU level for national pension reforms should be considered;
4. A European Directive on adequate minimum income schemes to establish common principles, definitions and methods to grant rights throughout the EU;
5. A common European standard on the right to quality and professional long-term care, to include provision of care, leave entitlements for carers and compensation in respect of care leave;
6. The removal of the requirement on Member States to link statutory retirement age to life expectancy, and recognition of the impact of arduous work.

ETUC positions in the framework of the so-called “European Semester” and whereby also a lot of attention is devoted to how the European Semester (and the related Country-specific Recommendations) deal (or not) with issues of social protection (and welfare) in general and of older persons in particular):

The ETUC Executive Committee adopted on 25-26 October 2017 ETUC's early stage inputs for Broad Economic Guidelines for the European Semester cycle 2018. It considered, *inter alia*, that the criteria underpinning the economic governance of the EU aim at neutralising societal costs in governmental budgets, but this is done by unloading the underlying risks of an ageing population or of economic cycles onto individuals, reducing pensions, health, long-term care and survival in case of long-term unemployment. Pensions reforms envisaged in Country Specific Recommendations are conducive to cuts in public expenditure on retired and elderly people, while increasing statutory retirement age with reference merely to increased life expectancy, with too little attention to pension adequacy in the future. The assumption behind such pension policy trends is that public spending allocation for the next decades should not increase in line with demographic trends. Intergenerational gaps primarily suffer from these new trends, hampering access to adequate pensions and a dignified retirement.

In particular, pushing for 'privatisation' of social protection insurance-based schemes jeopardises adequacy, transparency, fairness, solidarity, and fiscal efficiency, thus boosting inequalities and social exclusion. Efficient insurance-based social protection systems should be

coupled with the role of public expenditure for social protection, providing safety nets for those who do not fulfil the minimum requirements for benefit entitlement.

It has to be acknowledged that:

- a. life expectancy projections already present huge variations across the workforce, affecting very important groups such as low-skilled workers, those performing arduous jobs, those suffering poor education and poor living and working conditions;
- b. effectively longer working lives are not a reality yet, and can be achieved only in presence of an adaptation of workplace and labour market approaches to an ageing workforce, requiring investments in skills which will take time to produce their results;
- c. longer working lives may produce appreciable sustainability results only on condition of an early entrance into the labour market, fair remuneration, good working conditions, continuity of employment and swift re-integration into the labour market after unemployment.

Whereas labour market is unable to absorb and retain a still huge rate of population in working age, and provide workers the means to ensure themselves adequate benefit entitlements, efficient insurance-based social protection systems should be coupled with public expenditure for social protection, providing both guarantee of adequacy, and ensuring adequate minimum safety nets for those who do not fulfil the minimum requirements.

Public spending for pensions, therefore, should evolve consistently with the needs of an ageing population to retire in dignity. Its fiscal sustainability should be assessed in the medium to long term, to allow automatic stabilisers to come into play. Systemic efforts must be undertaken to ensure the rationalisation of design and functioning of insurance systems and funds together with fairer taxation systems and contributory policies. Trade unions are convinced that pillars of social protection are crucial to maintain the EU integration progress on the right track. This means an immediate change of direction in EU policies to achieve tangible social progress. Social protection aims at banning poverty and moving people away from the poverty threshold. But we should ask more of our social protection systems: they should create conditions in which people are motivated to invest in themselves, are more confident about the future and restoring the reproduction rate in population trends, and accept the positive contributions that migrants bring to our economy and intra-society solidarity.

ETUC, FERPA, EPSU and Solidar publication “Who Cares? Experiences and possibilities to reconcile work and care responsibilities for dependent family members” (2015), available in several languages at:

<https://www.etuc.org/publications/who-cares#.Wo6KmKinGUk>:

In the context of demographic, social and societal change in Europe, it is likely that an ever increasing number of workers will have responsibilities to (help) look after an elderly or disabled relative at home. The main goal of the project was to gather and assess policies and initiatives which have been taken by social partner organisations to influence and provide for a supportive legislative and policy framework to assist workers to combine work with such (non-professional) caring responsibilities.

EPSU - CEMR “Future of the Workplace” project - Providing high quality, modern and sustainable jobs within local and regional government”, Theme 2 focuses on “Recruitment and retention (with special focus on youth and elderly employment)”, report available in several languages at <https://www.epsu.org/article/recruitment-and-retention-special-focus-youth-and-elderly-employment>.

EPSU report on “Care Services for Older People in Europe - Challenges for Labour” (2011); report and executive summaries in different languages are available at <https://www.epsu.org/article/care-services-older-people-europe-challenges-labour>.