Eurocadres policy programme 2025 – 2029

European Professionals and Managers
For strengthened democracy in the workplace

EUROCADRES

Executive Summary

The outlook for European professionals and managers (P&Ms) has altered significantly since the formulation of our last policy programme. We face changes to the European labour market due to the pandemic recovery, elections, war in Ukraine, Trump presidency and various other factors.

Despite challenging times, P&Ms have reached a number of victories in the previous mandate which will now need to be fully implemented. From platform work to pay transparency, we have won a number of reforms that we cannot allow anti-worker sentiment to overturn. However, much more needs to be done.

Our overarching theme for this congress is the need to strengthen democracy at work.

Over the last number of years we have faced increased automation, bogus self-employment, and more widespread digital management. Trade union involvement and dialogue at the workplace level is needed more than ever to reclaim our collective voice in all working matters.

Being heard is not, however, enough.

Democracy at work is the first step in creating an economy that delivers for workers, puts social advancement on par with financial gain, and places human rights at its core. Delivering quality jobs that protects worker's health and safety, leveraging technological gains in a way that benefit us all, and allowing for the ability to balance private and professional activities are all fundamental challenges we must deliver upon. In our role as P&Ms, we must be seen as the workers to consult in the creation of company strategies, given we will be the ones tasked with their implementation.

Advancing workplace democracy will not occur without challenges to pre-existing inadequacies. Workers being denied their right to mobility, classist, sexist, racist and discriminatory practices, abuses of categories of workers and misallocation of public funds to companies who fail to meet social and/or environmental standards must be addressed at the heart of professional matters.

Integrity at the workplace is not an issue to be dealt with at the individual level, but through collective action and change. Over the next four years our aim is to show the significance of integrity at work to P&Ms, not least in digital environments.

One of our greatest challenges remains the greening of our economy, where short-term gain has been the altar at which many political and business leaders bow.

There is no future without a viable ecosystem, and it is not the time to compromise, but stand firm on the need to deliver on our climate goals. There are no jobs on a dead planet.

Ensuring a just transition remains a critical issue, with new European legislation a welcome first step. Guaranteeing P&Ms a crucial role in bridging the widening skills gap and finding alternatives to energy-intensive technologies will be central to addressing climate targets. The transition needs to be delivered by both sides of industry, trade unions and employers working together on the realisation of common climate goals.

Through cost of living crises', near permanent global turmoil and increased uncertainty, workers have shown incredible resilience over the last few years. Often this resilience is weaponised as a reason to delay interventions when they are needed to protect health and safety, improve workers' input or make the changes needed to leverage opportunities with new technologies.

Improving key public services, labour inspections, and professionals and mangers' right to re/up-skilling is a prerequisite for improving resilience at the workplace

Political ambitions blindly pushing for deregulation and weakening employees' rights in the name of competitiveness must be counteracted. An agenda to weaken trade unions, reduce human rights/climate targets and diminish the powers of those keeping businesses in check must be opposed at every possible opportunity.

One major avenue for this is in increased social dialogue, where P&Ms must be equal participants in discussions around pay, conditions, activities and all other aspects of their work life. Strengthening social dialogue at a European and national level is essential to reach increased collective bargaining coverage targets, and reset the balance of power to a more equitable footing.

A competitive Europe is one with a well-functioning social dialogue, high living standards, quality jobs and healthy workers.

A deregulated Europe with extraordinary profiteering, increased in-work poverty and underfunded public services is bad both for competitiveness and for employees. We must be clear on which we aim for.

Introduction

Despite doomsday prophets lamenting its untimely death, evidence (not empty rhetoric) shows that the European labour market is both robust and record setting. Our employment rate is around 75%, and is on course to reaching the 78% target set out by European leaders during the previous mandate. The employment rate for women is now above 70% for the first time, while a record low 5.9% in unemployment was also reached in 2024[1].

Unfortunately, employment no longer guarantees a high standard of living in European Member States.

The reality for millions of workers remains bleak, with 93.3 million Europeans at risk of experiencing poverty or social exclusion in 2023, with this figures encompassing a growing number of P&Ms. Roughly 20 million children in the EU were at risk, representing 24.8% of children under the age of 18[2].

P&Ms share of the labour market is ever-increasing, with CEDEFOP data showing that from 2009 – 2022, the share of professionals and managers in the workforce grew from 19% to 27%. Based on this growth rate, P&Ms could account for 35% of our labour force by 2035[3].

Eurocadres needs to mirror this increasing influence, and transform it into political power when it comes to labour market conditions, practices and all workplace issues.

Despite a recent cost of living crisis, record-setting years for corporate profits and rising inequality, the political prioritisation from Member States and the European institutions is to provide business groups as much as possible. Coupled with the election of far-right governments and MEPs, trade unions need to step up to make their voices heard. Many political challenges lie ahead of us, not least the European Commission's Omnibus proposals, proposing to exclude 80% of companies from the scope of the crucial Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive[4].

We must be clear in calling out when "Simplifying rules" becomes a synonym for cutting sector-specific standards.

At a time of market instability, dismantling the expected business framework is not going to bring companies the certainty they need. It will not favour businesses who have already invested in worker and climate friendly measures, but only businesses who have refused to implement European rules.

---

[1] European Commission, *Employment and Social Developments in Europe – Upward social convergence in the EU and the role of social investment*, available at: (europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2024_2029/plmrep/COMMITTEES/EMPL/DV/2025/02-19/EMPL20250219_KE-BD-24-002-EN.pdf)

[2] Ibid

[3] CEDEFOP, *Employment trends*, dataset available at: (https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/skills-intelligence/trend-focus/employment-trends#1)

[4] European Commission, *Questions and answers on simplification omnibus I and II*, available at: (https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/da/qanda_25_615)

Europe must boost competitiveness, but competitiveness not just in corporate profits, but in higher living standards, quality jobs and a clean economy.

What we have outlined in this programme, and in our action plan, is the : What, why and how to achieving improved democracy in the workplace for Europe's professionals and managers.

An Economy that delivers for professionals and managers

Our post-pandemic recovery has not yielded positive results for many citizens. We see a rise in inequality, wage stagnation, an insufficient decrease in in-work poverty, lower purchasing power for P&Ms and increased health and safety risks at work.

Critical to any economic or societal growth is the health and wealth of working people. While navigating challenges during a turbulent political era, Europe's economy must be centred on delivering for workers, including P&Ms.

Tackling work-related psychosocial risks in a targeted manner

We understand that building competitiveness is the mantra of this mandate, and reiterate the point made by trade unions that a competitive market is created with and by workers.

Central to competitiveness is the recruiting and retention of workers, along with high workplace participation. Workplace sickness is one of the largest drains on competitiveness, with rates of absenteeism due to illness or disability rising by 44% from 2006 – 2020[5].

One of the largest contributing factors to this is mental health, and the prevalence of psychosocial risks (PSRs) in the workplace. 80% of establishments report these risks being present[6], 60% of all lost working days can be attributed to them[7], and over a decade ago (2013) depression due to work was estimated to cost 617 billion euros per year[8].

Despite further studies and pressure being applied over the course of the previous mandate, PSRs remain one of the largest health risks to P&Ms.

---

[5] Antczak E, Miszczyńska KM. Causes of Sickness Absenteeism in Europe-Analysis from an Intercountry and Gender Perspective. Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2021 Nov 11;18(22):11823. doi: 10.3390/ijerph182211823. PMID: 34831580; PMCID: PMC8623318.

[6] EU-OSHA, *Third European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER 3)*, available at: (https://osha.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ESENER_3_first_findings.pdf)

[7] EU-OSHA, *Research on work-related stress*, available at: (https://osha.europa.eu/sites/default/files/TE2800882ENC_-_Research_on_Work-Related_Stress.pdf)

[8] Matrix Insight, *Economic analysis of workplace mental health promotion and mental disorder prevention programmes and of their potential contribution to EU health, social and economic policy objectives*, available at: (http://www.mentalhealthpromotion.net/resources/matrix_2012-economic-analysis-of-wmhp-programmes.pdf)

The overwhelming majority of European workplaces report PSR as commonplace, with 88% of workers saying they have experienced stress at work. In 2022, the European Occupation Safety Health Agency (EU-OSHA) detailed that 27% of workers experience stress, anxiety or depression caused or made worse by work.

Compared to pre-COVID figures, data has shown a 25% increase in the prevalence of PSRs in workplaces[9].

Both P&Ms and employers face uncertainty regarding the who, why and how in addressing these issues. What has become clear is that concrete action is needed to address the root causes of psychosocial risks. Non-binding agreements have failed to implement prevention measures and often do not address systemic issues in work organisation. For European P&Ms (and to ensure they receive adequate protection throughout the EU, wherever they may work) action at a European level must be a consideration for the Commission.

Through our EndStress platform, Eurocadres have been the leading voice in the field of PSR management, undertaking extensive advocacy activities to push for the change necessary. Supporting our calls, the European Parliament's Employment and Social Affairs Committee (EMPL) stated in 2023 that "New EU legislation in this area (PSR) could create greater uniformity across Member States, setting minimum standards and ensuring that legislation covers new and emerging psychosocial risks", and calling for the Commission to act for the third time in the previous mandate.

Added to this is the political support from Member States such as Belgium, who hosted a high-level event on this topic during their presidency. Many stakeholders have concluded that not enough is done in Europe to improve the situation.

A chasm exists between Member States where workers are afforded protection against one of the most prominent occupational health risks within the EU, creating a two-tiered system.

We must not experience varied levels of protection across the Single Market, not only for health and safety reasons, but for businesses to operate on a level-playing field, attract and retain talent, and to boost competitiveness throughout Member States. Therefore, legislation must recognise the arduous nature of P&Ms professions, and burnout must be recognised as an occupational disease. Many employers and managers, with an absence of precise legislation on PSR, state that what is expected of them in terms of health and safety protection is unclear, in just one example, managers experience the highest level of work-life balance conflict and the highest work intensity and longest working days.

---

[9] European Trade Union Institute, *Benchmarking Working Europe 2023: Europe in transition – Towards sustainable resilience*, available at: (https://www.etui.org/publications/benchmarking-working-europe-2023)

The EndStress platform has adopted concrete measures which must be within a European directive, including:

1. Clear definitions on what PSRs include. These definitions should include the definition of psychosocial risks as, though not limited to;
2. "Anything in the design or management of work including that referring to social and organisational issues, and covers balance between demands and resources that could, among others, increase the risk of work-related stress". It is key to introduce systematic and preventive measures in order to minimise psychosocial risks at the workplace.
3. An obligation for the employer to evaluate, assess and to prevent the short-, medium- and long-term exposure to psychosocial risks factors.
4. An obligation for the employer to adopt, in consultation with the workers or their
5. representatives, internal procedures (including within supply chains and subcontractors) in the event of; increased workload and/or time pressure, interpersonal conflicts, with a guarantee of non-retaliation against workers giving alert to, or involved in, these matters.
6. Establishment of health and safety committees dedicated to the prevention of PSRs.
7. Information and consultation with workers' representatives on the implementation and follow-up of measures introduced to prevent PSRs at the workplace.
8. An obligation for the employer to guarantee that all workers receive appropriate training, with a specific training being provided for managers.
9. An obligation for the employer to set objectives and indicators to reduce psychosocial risks at work, in consultation/cooperation with the workers and/or their representatives. Workers should have the right to have access to health surveillance regarding psychosocial risks.
10. The reversal of the burden of proof.
11. The scope of application of this directive should be broader than the Dir. 89/391/EEC and should guarantee that domestic workers are not going to be excluded from it.
12. Means for a better functioning and efficiency of the labour inspectorates, and increased inspection rates of this aspect of the workplace. This will include further funding and training to ensure inspectorates can adequately protect employees. Within the directive funds must be dedicated for allocation to labour inspectorates within Member States.
13. Clear enforcement procedures and deterrents for non-compliance, including financial penalties for companies who fail to uphold the standards laid down in the text. These penalties should dissuade companies from non-compliance, while also securing a competitive advantage for companies in compliance with the rules.
14. The Directive should not reduce the general level of protection regarding OSH already provided to workers within Member States and it should be without prejudice to the full respect for the autonomy of the social partners, as well as the right to negotiate and conclude collective agreements, particularly sectoral collective agreements.

With PSR expected to be on the agenda of the European Parliament, EU-OSHA and the Commission (through their *Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health Strategy*), Eurocadres will continue to advocate for appropriate legislative measures to protect P&Ms, while also contributing to the Commission's advisory committee on safety and health working group, "Mental Health and PSR at work".

Bringing transparency and human oversight to algorithms at work

Despite the passing of two major texts during the last mandate, neither the AI Act nor the Platform Work Directive adequately address the growing concerns and risks workers face due to the emergence of new/existing AI systems.

The latter directive includes an entire chapter on algorithmic management in the workplace which enshrines a complete prohibition on the processing of certain sets of data, including psychological state, religious affiliation, or sexuality, but also private conversations or any information outside of the worker's activity. This prohibition is extended to the hiring process.

To allow enforcement, these automated systems "must be monitored by qualified personnel, who benefit from particular protection against any unfavourable treatment. Human control is also guaranteed for important decisions such as suspension of accounts". Systems in the workplace will face requirements for workers and their representatives to receive transparent information on the systems being used, prohibition against systems making important decisions such as dismissals, and a guarantee of human oversight in decisions which directly affect those undertaking work from platforms.

While the directive represented a landmark victory for platform workers, we now demand and encourage the extension of these protections to all workers, as with these newly won protections, we see a two-tier system for European workers in regard to their rights when it comes to algorithmic management.

With simplification being one of the headlines of the new European Commission Eurocadres ask to support the political aim of simplification and extend these rules on algorithmic management set out in the platform work directive to all workers.

In line with our advocacy requests for a directive on algorithmic management there now seem to be a political momentum for new legislation. Member of European Parliament expect the issue to be addressed in the European Commission's Quality Jobs Roadmap.

To be successful, the text would need to include dedicated chapters on; definitions, governance, the use of algorithmic management, education and the external impact of AI systems. With regard to the external impacts of AI, its impact on the environment must be taken into account. Indeed, the rapid and massive development of generative AI suggests a trend of worsening of its environmental footprint. It is in fact necessary to anticipate a potential rebound effect: as progress in AI saves resources, users could paradoxically intensify their use of AI. Eurocadres is aware of this and proposes a series of measures to anticipate this development and ensure that it is not detrimental to workers or the environment.

All workers affected by AI systems should have a right to adequate training, including a clear understanding of how the AI systems operate, how their job is impacted and how they can keep control over the system. This is why transparency and explainability are important components, which can only be delivered through adequate training.

P&Ms are central when it comes to designing, developing and implementing AI systems. Training, and re/up-skilling are therefore essential to provide the qualifications required (in particular for developers and engineers), but also for the professions using AI tools, such as researchers and teachers. Skills development is a prerequisite for the safe handling of AI and to maintain and defend the safeguarding of the human in control principle.

Ensuring the adherence to the "human in control" principle, allow workers' representatives the right to expertise, and promote social dialogue to protect P&Ms, must be central in balancing the risks and rewards of workplace AI use.

For P&Ms, it is imperative to define that the responsibilities relating to these algorithms is placed solely on the employer. The impact of AI systems on workers must also be addressed through risk and health and safety assessments, designed in conjunction with trade unions. Transparency in the use, scope and data collection included in all AI systems used in the workplace will be a core demand for trade unions. Data protection and personal integrity are non-negotiable aspects of a legislative initiative on algorithmic management in the workplace.

Equal rights for teleworkers and an enforceable right to disconnect

After lengthy negotiations, European employer groups, decided to vote against a text negotiated by social partners on a directive on telework and the right to disconnect. Eurocadres and the European trade union movement has asked the Commission to take action in this area. Telework is no longer an obscure working arrangement for freelancers or the self-employed, but rather a flexible option for P&Ms across Europe, giving a clear need for the creation of a robust regulatory framework.

Eurocadres has responded to the Commission's first phase consultation on the topic, is currently awaiting the second phase and potential action through the Quality Jobs Roadmap. At the time of writing, no update on this process or next steps has been provided.

The need for binding measures on telework and the right to disconnect is more pressing than ever before in this rapidly changing world of work. P&Ms are often at risk with little to no protection, subject to excessively long working hours, and changing working practices and places.

We ask for equal treatment and non-discrimination between workers at the employers' premises and teleworkers, safeguarding of the voluntary aspect of telework, while ensuring that the right to disconnect is effectively applied by involving trade unions through collective bargaining and by developing measures for P&Ms to be able to exercise their rights.

As with all changes at work, telework can lead to additional risks. Training on the prevention of these risks is fundamental and must be mandatory.

The employers need to be responsible for the assessment of risks, put into place the necessary preventions when it comes to occupational risks related to telework and ensure protection for the safety and health of workers performing telework. These risk assessments should cover physical, psychosocial, organisational, and other relevant risk factors related to telework.

The employer is responsible for work-related accidents and in all areas of health and safety at work and must adapt their risk assessments and the implementation of findings to new work organisations, including telework and the provision of adequate equipment for teleworkers.

Aspects to be addressed in the directive on telework and the right to disconnect should include, but not be limited to:

- Scope (all workers)
- Voluntary aspect
- Collective agreements and their associated prerogatives
- Equal rights, measure of working time
- Costs & equipment
- Training
- Health and Safety
- Data Protection
- Surveillance and monitoring
- Trade union and workers' representatives' rights

On the right to disconnect, employers should engage in the negotiation with trade unions on adequate and effective measures to ensure all workers (including those with large autonomy) can effectively exercise their right to disconnect. The measures should question the work organisation (including performance evaluation system, objective-based reward workload assessment and regulation) and should be evaluated regularly.

Europe's Quality Jobs Roadmap

With the Commission's work programme failing to put forward social legislation for the first time in many years, trade unions have been told to await new initiatives in "the Quality Jobs Roadmap".

While a draft is not available at the time of writing, our calls will remain consistent in ensuring binding protections are afforded to P&Ms, with the delivery of a competitive Europe only possible where workers ultimately benefit.

Guaranteeing workers their right to collective bargaining and social dialogue must also be at the heart of the strategy, along with reaffirming the need for action regarding equality, diversity and non-discrimination in workplaces. Eurocadres has, with the support of the European Commission, developed a project on *collec-*

tive bargaining for the self-employed which aims at promoting a guarantee of access to negotiate and enter into social partner agreements, in particular professionals forced to be self-employed, be it in consultancy, media or otherwise.

The measures mentioned throughout this policy programme should be addressed in the roadmap of the European Commission's Quality Jobs roadmap, which we expect to provide tangible, binding outputs, metrics for success, measures to monitor implementation and room for consultation with trade unions and social partners.

Recognition of qualifications

A strategic opportunity: 25 years of the LMD system (2027):

To mark the 25th anniversary of the European Bachelor's-Master's-Doctorate (LMD) system in 2027, Eurocadres will emphasise the need to strengthen the recognition of qualifications across Member States, highlighting that the existing system, which is supposed to promote mobility, harmonisation and recognition of qualifications, is not delivering on its promises.

Based on the data made available as a result of the Pay Transaprency Directive, Eurocadres will follow the links between qualifications and salaries in Member States, seeking to build a better understanding of, and to evaluate, the existing gaps facing P&Ms.

Eurocadres must aim to harmonise reference working time in Europe in order to promote the fair recognition of skilled workers, combat social dumping disguised as excessive or hidden working hours and guarantee decent working conditions, particularly for managers who are often subject to derogations.

We will further investigate the challenges P&Ms are facing across Europe. As part of a wider project application on the working conditions and pensions of our members, we should seek to highlight the growth of this category of workers, and the issues they are facing.

Integrity and Justice at Work

A lack of autonomy, blurring of personal and professional life and barriers to labour and social mobility are everyday challenges to many P&Ms. Work should not be seen a daily struggle with poor health and safety provisions, lack of worker input and dictation from employers on the processes and practices of working life reducing the voice of P&Ms in the workplace.

We need to push not only for quality jobs, but for the return of integrity and justice to our working lives.

Effective action against non-competition clauses

Mobility rights are a key element in P&Ms careers. This is why action and European regulation is needed when it comes to non-competition clauses (NCCs) in working contracts.

A ban on NCCs is needed to enhanced labour mobility, especially for P&Ms where we see widespread use of these clauses.

Non-competition clauses in working contracts are intended to protect company's intellectual property (and already dealt with via the Trade Secrets Directive), trade secrets, and client relationships. However, they can have severely negative implications for labour mobility and economic competitiveness. Several Member States have therefore initiated regulating a ban or restriction of the use of these clauses in working contracts. Currently there is no European regulation addressing NCCs. With a recent ruling in the United States that renders such clauses illegal, the continuation of this practice puts EU workers and companies in a disadvantageous position, including when attempting to attract talent to Europe from the US.

NCCs have been widely studied around the world, but there has not been comprehensive assessment on exactly how widespread the clauses are in the EU.

The European Commission's impact assessment for the predictable working conditions in 2017 estimated that there were 0.5 - 1.5 million[10] (many being the most vulnerable workers) in the EU working under different types of exclusivity contracts, while recognising that "[A] non-competition clause can put an unreasonable weight on the challenge to find new employment after ending the temporary job at a company". However, these findings only demonstrate the use of NCCs to a very limited extent, judging by several national studies.

[10] European Commission impact assessment available at: (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52017SC0478).

- A 2015 survey showed that nearly 19% of Dutch employees are working under a NCC[11]. Of the 9.75 million Dutch employees this would mean roughly 1,840,000 workers have NCCs in their contracts.
- As many as 37% of Finnish professionals and managers had a NCC in 2017[12]. This was representative sample of the professional and managerial staff under the trade union Akava, which has 616,000 members.
- In Italy, a recent survey found that 16% of Italian workers have NCCs in their working contracts[13]. As the Italian working population is roughly 22.5 million individuals, 3.6 million would be under a NCC.

Given the current European agenda, where there is a strong focus on competitiveness and simplification, it is vital for European regulations to be aware of the developments in the US when it comes to these clauses, which have been documented as an important barrier to increased innovation and productivity. Should Europe wish to keep pace with the US competitiveness, we must ensure our regulatory framework does the same.

The US ban is expected to have significant positive impacts, including:

- An annual average rise of worker's earnings of extra 524 USD annually.
- 2.7% of more new businesses being formed annually.
- Rapid rise in innovation, estimated to materialise in 17 000 – 29 000 patents annually (in comparison, the EU had 193,460 patents in 2022).

Reduced health care costs between 74 - 194bn USD in next ten years[14].

We urge the Commission to initiate comprehensive mapping of these clauses and their impact on worker mobility. This must be done with full respect for national social partner autonomy and for national collective agreements.

International evidence shows that these clauses may have several harmful consequences to European workers and the EU's economy at large, varying from reduced labour mobility and lower salaries to limiting innovation, entrepreneurship, and competitiveness. Due to the cross-border limitations of non-competition clauses, there is a wider impact to the Single Market, and not solely to national economies.

The current EU regulatory environment does not provide an EU-wide approach on non-competition clauses. This leads to situations where NCCs are either unenforceable or their extensive use causes have negative impacts to the wider European economy. This is why several EU Member States have already taken national measures to address the problem and limit their use.

---

[11] Streefkerk, Elshout and Cuelenaere, *Non-compete agreements, tacit knowledge, and market imperfections*, available at: (https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/non-compete-agreements-tacit-knowledge-and-market-imperfections)

[12] Akava, *Kilpailukieltosopimukset akavalaisilla*, available at: (https://akavaworks.fi/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/08/kilpalukiellot-akavalaisilla-2017.pdf).

[13] Boeri, Garnero, Luisetto, *The use of non-compete agreements in the Italian labour market*, available at: (https://www.frdb.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Summary_Garnero_et_al_ENG.pdf)

[14] Federal Trade Commission, *Non-compete clause rulemaking*, available at: (https://www.ftc.gov/legal-library/browse/federal-register-notices/non-compete-clause-rulemaking).

Consequently, there are two policy options available to address this issue at a European level. The non-regulatory approach would involve soft law measures, guidelines, and limitations on the unlawful use of NCCs. The approach favoured in the US would call for a ban of NCCs. The extent of this ban would need to be carefully examined and defined. The cost of non-regulation is likely to go beyond alternative approaches.

Over the coming mandate Eurocadres continue to push for appropriate attention and action to be taken against these clauses, which harm professionals and managers across Europe.

Equality

From 2019 – 2024 the European Commission enacted a number of previous Eurocadres requests in the field of gender equality, including unblocking the Women on Boards directive, enshrining the concept of equal pay for work of equal value through the Pay Transparency directive, and adopting a directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence (CVAW&DV).

As with all texts, some compromises were to be expected, leading to aspects of these initiatives falling short in delivering true gender equality in the workplace.

This text was successful in some aspects, with minimum standards in EU law for criminalising certain forms of gender-based violence, improve access to justice, protection and support for victims, ensure coordination between relevant services, and prevent these types of crime. It did, however, fall short in failing to include the definition of rape being based on a lack of consent, and with no workplace references within the final text.

Additionally the scope of the pay transparency directive was massively reduced by Member States. Despite this, the text represents a key victory in the fight for gender equality, enshrining a number of avenues for professionals and managers to identify and eradicate pay inequality.

In using certain criteria (the nature of the work performed; the training or skills necessary to do the job; the conditions of work; and the decision-making that is part of their role), P&Ms can now push for joint pay assessments with their trade union representatives. From there, inequality can be found or wrongdoing assessed jointly. Ending pay secrecy, even at the hiring stage, is also a newly won right. This and more leads to better outcomes for all workers.

Through our project on implementing pay transparency for P&Ms, our activities have been focused on spreading awareness of these vital wins to as many workers as possible.

In the coming months and years, we will focus on ensuring the implementation of the progress made, including on the scope, reporting requirements or the level of protection afforded to those covered by the directive.

Unfortunately, the political ambition we have seen will not be repeated under the current European Commission, with *Equality* downgraded as a sub-section of a cabinet, and no binding proposals in the pipeline.

The Roadmap to Women's Rights hearings paved the way for highlighting that gender-based violence and sexual harassment in the world of work must be tackled, with zero-tolerance for gender-based violence, harassment and bullying in education and gender-sensitive spatial planning and transport infrastructure.

So far, no concrete actions or solutions have been proposed by the Commission.

Addressing the care burden, lack of gender-specific planning in work organisation, pension inequalities, and systemic gender-based inequalities in an intersectional manner will be a requirement for unions going forward.

Diversity

The European Disability Strategy will be in force until 2030. It is clear that equal participation in working and social life is not a reality for millions of Europeans. Eurocadres will continue work in this area with civil society and advocacy groups to push for stronger measures for those with disabilities.

Similarly, the EU's Anti-Racism strategy will end in 2025, with impact assessments on the initiatives within available soon after. 61% of Europeans say that discrimination based on skin colour is widespread in their country[15], with repeated increases in discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, race and ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation and gender identity noted by several European agencies.

Europe's move to a harsher migration policy unfortunately is supporting the scapegoating and alienating of groups in our societies. Eurocadres will prioritise the push for more regular pathways for people to come and work in Europe under safer working conditions, with the avoidance of exploitation of those most vulnerable the objective.

Increased polarisation and discrimination are issues that unions must do more to address.

This is all the more important in a context where the Trump administration's crackdown on corporate inclusion and diversity policies is having repercussions as far afield as Europe. It is therefore necessary for a policy promoting diversity to be adopted at EU level, with Eurocadres acting as its champion. European social dialogue affords us the opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions on diversity, and through this scope Eurocadres should raise the issue where possible.

In the coming years, Eurocadres will widen our anti-racism network, establishing links with civil society organisations and advocates for European action. Fighting against harmful narratives in the workplace is not just an individual responsibility, but a common responsibility for trade unions and their members.

We cannot allow individuals and communities to be made into scapegoats by anti-democratic politicians and forces.

Protecting trainees

A longstanding demand of the union movement, including Eurocadres, the proposed Traineeships directive was a welcomed action when announced by the Commission in March 2024.

Having twice provided feedback to Social Partner consultations in 2023, and having repeatedly called for adequate protection for those undertaking employment as trainees, we are happy that the systemic issues

[15] European Commission, *Discrimination in the European Union*, available at: (https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2972)

facing trainees is now a political priority.

Many P&Ms rely on these contractual agreements to kickstart their career, to reorientate their work or to move into different sectors. As with any worker, we affirm that trainee's rights must be respected and upheld through legal certainty. All workers are deserving of a quality job.

We welcome within the text the prominent role for trade unions as worker's representatives, guarantees that trainees will not be treated in a less favourable manner than comparable regular employees in the same establishment (including pay) and the introduction of measures that will provide more transparency on key indicators within these working relationships.

The future of the directive is unfortunately uncertain, with employer groups expressing doubts on their future commitment to ensuring better pay and working conditions for trainees in Europe.

At the time of writing the trilogue negotiations continue, but should the text be abandoned, the principles within it must be delivered through other means at the EU level.

Ensuring a positive compromise text is delivered and implemented remains, currently, our core objective for this file.

Improving public procurement rules

Public money must be spent to improve the lives of citizens. While Europe considers itself a global leader in better regulation, the use of public funds is a blind spot where action is urgently required.

14% of Europe's GDP is spent on public procurement[16] - the contracting of public firms by public authorities to deliver goods and services. Often, the financial aspect of these contracts and tenders are the overriding principle brought into consideration.

Eurocadres supports the call of ETUC and other unions to update European rules on public procurement, with a directive needed to ensure public funds are spent in the public interest.

Public procurement contracts where price is the primary consideration have a tendency to encourage cost-cutting measures, putting pressure on wages and working conditions. With new public procurement rules being revised during this Commission mandate, it is essential that rules are introduced guaranteeing the right to collective bargaining, respect for workers' rights and adequate health and safety provisions at a minimum. It must be ensured that economic operators that provide good working conditions and that apply collective agreements concluded with trade unions are not undercut in public procurement processes.

The respect for the role of trade unions must be safeguarded in all contracts.

Eurocadres will push to secure these rights for P&Ms throughout Member States.

---

[16] European Commission, *Public Procurement factsheet*, available at: (https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/single-market/public-procurement_en)

A Just Transition to a Green European economy

Decarbonising Europe's economy remains a critical task we cannot shy away from.

This cannot be delivered without P&Ms, who will have a vital role to play in securing a fair green transition.

Clean Industrial Deal

Industrial crises have a significant social impact. That is why it is crucial to make the voice and proposals of trade unions heard on the industrial future of Europe.

The Commission unveiling of the Clean Industrial Deal in February of this year, a welcome initiative aimed at jumpstarting European industry and our decarbonisation efforts.

This proposal is a landmark move, and contains many positive points. However, it lacks an urgency and underpinning of workers' role.

While investment of €100 billion in EU-made clean manufacturing, and the aim to create 500,000 jobs are notable targets, workers need assurances that quality jobs, underpinned by social conditionalities in public funding, will be delivered. We insist that the allocation of masses of public funds to this deal must be coupled with a key role for trade unions in the workplace. The role of trade unions must be clearly stated in the initiative to support the Commission's stated aim to keep workers and communities at the heart of decarbonisation efforts.

The mobilisation of funds called for in the Draghi report, must create certainty for workers and investors, and is most easily delivered through a SURE 2.0 mechanism. In adopting this approach, the Commission would provide workers with safeguards that would allow the return on investment they crave.

We welcome the focus on energy pricing and efficiency, and highlight that affordable energy prices must be made available to workers and companies in order to kickstart and continue decarbonisation. Reform of the energy sector and decoupling of electricity and gas pricing must be a priority moving forward.

Regarding trade policy, we share concerns relating to human rights, standards, and social dumping within supply chains. Decarbonisation and stimulation of investment into Europe's green economy must not come at the cost of our values, at home or abroad.

A Just Transition

Infinite growth is impossible in a world of finite resources.

The European Green Deal has led to the adoption of ambitious targets and reforms, this central contradiction – along with a narrow framing of our fight for a fair and green economy, will continue to prevent effective change for Europe's P&Ms.

Eurocadres believes that a truly just transition is one that focuses of environmental, economic and social fairness. Making our economy more sustainable must include a social element.

It was reported in June of 2024 that over €16.5 billion in EU sustainable funds had been invested in the 200 biggest polluters[17].

Research from Friends of the Earth also show that Europe's top carbon-high companies funnel 75% of their profits to shareholders, instead of clean energy.

The idea that climate change can be mitigated by allowing businesses further access to (often public) capital does not reconcile with the evidence we currently have.

It is not a level playing field, and decarbonisation cannot come at a higher cost to workers, including P&Ms, than those who pollute more, hold more wealth and control corporate business practices. Legislation must even the playing field.

Trade unions must push for public ownership of renewable energy production, supported by heightened investment into these areas to finance infrastructure, grids and effective climate resilience.

Industrial policy must be developed with the need for a just transition at its centre. We must increase our investment in green and socially conscious practices, and deliver climate justice through a taxation system that funds' investments through higher contributions from the biggest polluters. The finance raised should be equally distributed across Europe, with social conditionality a crucial component in the release of funds.

A clampdown on corporate tax evasion, along with a progress taxation system aimed at leveraging the financial assistance needed to decarbonise our economy, will play a critical role in the success or failure to deliver a just transition.

Bridging the skills gap

P&Ms will be essential to the delivery of a just transition, but can only do so when given the tools to succeed, including the right to access and financing of training, during working hours and at no cost to the workers themselves, along with emphasis needing to be placed upon re/up-skilling for the development, rollout and operation of green technology in industries across all sectors.

---

[17] Voxeurop, *How big finance greenwashes climate crisis culprits*, available at: (https://voxeurop.eu/en/big-finance-greenwashing-climate-crisis-culprits/)

Mutual recognition of the qualifications necessary to decarbonise the economy, and the ability for P&Ms to utilise their mobility rights across Europe, must be recognised and enforced. A European framework classifying, promoting and making green skills attainable must be a priority throughout industrial policy activities.

While previous European Council recommendations have called upon Member States to put appropriate actions into place, ensuing all workers access and financing of individual learning opportunities - such as France's *Individual Learning Account* (ILA), firm deadlines and sanctions must be set to guarantee action follows rhetoric.

The skills gap and green transition will not be realised without quality jobs. Securing employment that encompasses the criteria for quality jobs is paramount to achieving decarbonisation goals.

Artificial Intelligence

With working people having paid the price of Europe's recent energy and cost-of-living crises', and with 40% of workers directly impacted by the Green Transition[18] (not including the impact of climate change to our living environment), the use and development of AI systems should also be included in the political debate around sustainability targets and sanctions.

The European Environment Agency (EEA) notes that Europe is the fastest-warming continent in the world, and climate risks are threatening its energy and food security, ecosystems, infrastructure, water resources, financial stability, and people's health. While AI can play a role in combating this, it carries with it a series of risks. Climate Action Against Disinformation (CAAD) also highlights AI's role in rising energy and water use and how generative AI could increase the spread of climate disinformation.

A 2024 report jointly published by Climate Action Against Disinformation[19], Check My Ads, Friends of the Earth, Global Action Plan, Greenpeace and Karios cites estimates from the International Energy Agency that on an industry-wide level, energy use from data centres that power AI will double in just the next two years, consuming as much energy as Japan. These data centres and AI systems also use large amounts of water in operations and are often located in areas that already face water shortages.

Generative AI therefore consumes significantly more resources than traditional AI, which increases its environmental impact. To address this, it is necessary to train workers, assess the ecological footprint, direct funding towards sustainable projects, inform users, eco-design equipment and limit the impact of data centres.

Transparency, safety for workers, and accountability where shortcomings are found must be central components of future AI development in an already changing Europe, with dissuasive sanctions against large polluters or energy-intensive company practices needed at European level.

---

[18] European Working Conditions Telephone Survey, details made available via Eurofound *Quality Job side of climate change*, available at: (https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/publications/2024/job-quality-side-climate-change#:~:text=Analysis%20of%20European%20Working%20Conditions,impacted%20by%20the%20green%20transition).

[19] Artificial Intelligence Threats to Climate Change, available at: (https://foe.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/AI_Climate_Disinfo_v6_031224.pdf)

Resilience in the workplace

P&Ms have been tasked with overcoming a seemingly never-ending series of crises' over the last two decades. From the 2008 financial crisis, rise in zero-hour contracts and bogus self-employment, and cost of living constraints, it is working people who have been asked to show resilience.

It is time for our workplaces to adapt too, building professional settings that are flexible, adaptive and safe.

The right to training

In 2019 it was estimated that 80 million European workers possess skills mismatched with their jobs. According to the European Commission, more than three quarters of companies in the EU say they have difficulties finding workers with the necessary skills, while only 37% of adults undertake training on a regular basis. The Digital Economy and Society Index shows that 4 out of 10 adults and every third person who works in Europe lack basic digital skills. Women are under-represented in tech-related professions and studies, with only 1 in 5 ICT specialists and 1 in 3 science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) graduates being women[20].

The Commission have recognised the need for development of the skills of our workforce, and has introduced the title of an Executive Vice-President for People, Skills and Preparedness, tasked with bridging the gaps identified above, and setting headline targets on skills, having at least 60% of Europeans participating annually in training and promoting access to basic digital skills for at least 80% of people aged 16-74 by the year 2030. While also juggling the employment rate target of 78%, and halving the gender pay gap (at east), the ambition must be matched by sufficient legislative progress[21].

Various initiatives have been discussed, namely an Action Plan on Basic Skills, a STEM Education Strategic Plan, European Strategy for Vocational Education and Training and a Skills Portability Initiative to scale up the recognition of skills and qualifications.

We welcome these initiatives and note the long-term potential of such action, immediate steps should be taken to address the skills gaps in workplaces, allowing us to deliver our twin transitions.

Firstly, we need a binding right for training for all workers, as part of working life and during working time, which will build the green and digital skills so urgently needed for the twin green transitions. No matter if they are

---

[20] European Commission, *Union of Skills*, factsheet available at: (https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/edocc7da-a656-40ff-b30a-640cec20adde_en?filename=FS%20-%20Union_Of_Skills_v12.pdf)

[21] Ibid

entrepreneurs or self-employed, white or blue-collar workers, all workers should be able to access free training during their working hours, with no additional financial burdens.

Legal provisions for the protection of trainees need to be put in place to ensure a correct transposition of the directive. Managers need to receive proper training on how best to accompany trainees during their internship.

Obstacles for labour mobility must be addressed to ensure that skillsets are matched to the employers, sectors and Member States where they are needed. Non-competition clauses in workers' contracts are often used to limit the ability of skilled workers to freely change their workplaces. A ban is needed to support the European objective of free movement of capital and labour.

There is a clear need for greater protection of academic teaching freedom, and freedom of research, as the Bologna Process' fundamental values. We call for increased basic public investment in higher education and research alongside greater recognition for higher education professionals, ensuring them a good and healthy working environment.

To ensure for the continuous assessment of and implementation of necessary changes, the introduction of indicators that measure the quality of jobs as a subsection of the social scoreboard may be beneficial. Legislative frameworks should be improved and ensure the coordinated transposition of the Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions Directive, while addressing these non-financial working targets.

All workers must have the right to be represented in collective bargaining negotiations. Active participation in initiatives to boost re/up-skilling must be monitored by a European body of employee participation, benchmarking where success has been achieved and where future work may be needed.

There needs to be sustainable public investment in education and training across Europe, as is set out in the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights. EU-wide minimum standards – for investment – are needed, taking into account the different national social systems, within the framework of EU secondary legislation.

This is a prerequisite for the future resilience of the European Union and the cohesion of its Member States through the upward convergence of working and living conditions.

Implementation will be contingent on consistent investment, with skills a moving target in an evolving market and labour force. Only binding commitments to minimum investments can ensure a match between the supply and demand of a skilled workforce.

Research and innovation

European research and innovation have, throughout the years, been underfunded. This has led to researchers facing career uncertainty, job insecurity and wage stagnation.

In some Member States and third countries, brain drain is a critical and sad reality. The impacts of climate change, and its regional imbalance, will also negatively affect local markets, institutions and P&Ms.

Eurocadres is calling for the EU to double its budget allocation for research and education over the next decade, as this investment is vital for European competitiveness.

The Commission has laid out their agenda for the next five years, stressing the shift toward a skills-based economy. The upcoming 2028-2034 multi-year budget should reflect this by significantly increasing funding for research and education.

Currently, only 10% of the EU budget is allocated to these crucial areas, despite clear evidence from recent reports by **Mario Draghi** and **Enrico Letta** highlighting the need for improved innovation and skills. Letta has even proposed a "fifth freedom" for research, innovation, and data in the internal market. Draghi pointed to the EU's innovation gap, especially compared to the United States.

Europe cannot achieve productivity or sustainable growth without high levels of competence and skills. This is not just about the economy but about people and their development.

As a result, we are advocating for research and education to make up nearly 20% of the budget, which should strengthen both the EU's economy and workforce.

Labour inspectorates and social services

Underfunding of public services throughout European Member States has resulted in dramatic downturns in health, social and economic outcomes for European workers.

Consistent cuts to essential public services have left working people in different Member States at the mercy of charitable organisations, who have been inundated with requests for assistance.

The European social model must be underpinned by strong public services, which must receive higher funding to function, not cuts.

Included in this are labour inspectorates, who work tirelessly to ensure employers adhere to the protections afforded to them through European and national law.

While not all Member States have labour inspectors (respecting varying systems based on national practices), in many countries the deterioration of labour inspections has led to a reduction of inspections at the workplace and an increase of occupational accidents and makes it near impossible to carry out preventive measures.

It is urgent that European governments take action and invest in (where applicable) effective labour inspections systems at national and cross-border levels, facilitating rather than complicating inspectors' working lives.

While there are differences in the organisation of national labour inspectorates in the EU, ILO Convention no.81 provides common minimum standards for all. Yet many Member States fail to comply with the convention, not least Article 10, which lays down that the number of labour inspectors must be sufficient to ensure the effective exercise of the functions of the inspection services.

The lack of resources in labour inspectorates has been further compounded by a weakening of labour laws in many EU Member States and regular attacks against trade union rights.

With various new developments in our labour market, such as telework, and platform work, the legislative framework does not, or not sufficiently, provide labour inspectorates with the necessary tools to address these developments.

The lack of protection for workers in a vulnerable situation remains, such as undocumented or posted migrant workers, ethnic minorities, women and LGBTQI++, workers in subcontracting as well as platform workers who are often young, untrained and unorganised in trade unions.

Inspectorates need more support and training to address new forms of labour organisations and technological innovations such as AI and algorithms.

Such support is critical to cross-border inspections, which require, amongst others, joint databases allowing for cross-examination of employment contracts in complex global labour chain situations.

Moreover, the judicial services need more resources to prosecute breaches of labour regulations effectively. Penalties must be dissuasive, effective, and be enforced within reasonable time limits to respect the rights of victims.

As more EU directives in the social area refer to labour inspectors, we call for closer cooperation with labour inspectors, making them involved formally in the drafting and transposition phases of European labour rules to ensure better compliance and monitoring in accordance with national systems.

Finally, all labour inspectors deserve respect and solidarity. This is essential to combat the attacks against the independence of the labour inspectorates and the principles governing their missions as protected by ILO Conventions 81 and 129 ratified by all Member States. The independent function of inspectorates needs to be complied by national governments.

Competitiveness and enforcement

Many of the questions on competitiveness could, as outlined, be addressed through measures that place the health, safety and quality of working life as a central element to be improved upon.

Equally, many of the issues mentioned could be addressed through better enforcement procedures, including through giving labour inspectors the ability to carry out their mandate.

Simplification of legislation omit the fact that compliance with existing texts are not adequate. At the end of 2023 there were 1,482 infringements procedures open in the EU[22]. Underfunding of detection and prevention bodies likely leads to under-reporting, with the lived experience of most in the workforce seeing protection of their rights and health on paper, but not in practice.

[22] European Commission, *2023 Annual Report on moniroting the application of EU law*, available at: (https://commission.europa.eu/law/application-eu-law/implementing-eu-law/infringement-procedure/2023-annual-report-monitoring-application-eu-law_en).

Current estimates state that tax avoidance and evasion cost European Union member states an estimated €160-190 billion annually in lost revenue[23], a figure that cannot be ignored when discussing the investment needed (as outlined by the Draghi report) and the potential impact on enforcement through proposed deregulation.

Enforcement mechanisms for existing protections are severely lacking, with the funding of the bodies detecting non-compliance critically underfunded. Providing these bodies the means to detect malpractice allows for a more competitive industry, reducing the monopolies held by (some) cowboy companies.

Closing loopholes in taxation, zero-hour contracts, company union-busting tactics and inadequate pay, health, and wage practices benefits all of us.

Deregulating simply punishes good employers who have invested in their social and environmental responsibilities, and rewards those who flout existing, necessary rules.

[23] European Parliament, *Quantification of the scale of tax evasion and avoidance*, available at: (https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/carriage/quantification-of-the-scale-of-tax-evasion-and-avoidance/report?sid=7701)

Delivering through social dialogue

Social dialogue remains at the core of the work of trade unions. As a recognised European social partner, Eurocadres will continue to ensure social dialogue is developed at all levels, that social partners be active in finding the solutions to challenges we are facing, and that P&Ms have the input their crucial role in the workplace merits.

European social dialogue has suffered from the decision of the employers to end negotiations for a directive on telework and right to disconnect.

Social dialogue remains an important channel through which we advocate for activities and policies in Eurocadres.

Within the new pact for social dialogue, Eurocadres will voice, protect and defend the interests of P&Ms. Engaging in the renewal of social dialogue, we will now receive more information on the challenges and functioning of national social dialogue, while engaging in further negotiations at a European level.

Through social partner consultations and hearings our positions will be heard by the European Commission, and the tripartite social summit will offer an annual forum through which we will voice our concerns and demands directly to European leaders.

Our efforts will centre on ensuring respect for and strengthening of national and EU-level social dialogue, the right to information and consultation, and the role of P&Ms within the framework of the revision of the European Works Councils (EWC) directive.

Bd du Jardin Botanique, 20 B-1000 Bruxelles | secretariat@eurocadres.eu | www.eurocadres.eu