

ETUC statement

“Trade unions call for MEPs to promote solidarity and the rights of all workers”

Endorsed at the Executive Committee of 24 April 2019

The trade union movement stands for the rights of all workers, no matter what country they are from or their immigration status.

We are concerned that the problems too many workers are facing around precarious contracts, low pay and cuts to public services are being exploited by right wing and populist parties across Europe who advocate anti-migrant and anti-asylum seeker policies as false solutions to workers' problems.

Trade unions stand against all forms of discrimination, racism and xenophobia.

Member states are signatories to the UN Refugee Convention that contains two core principles. Firstly, asylum seekers should be afforded individual consideration of their cases and given legal protection if they face a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. Secondly, a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom.

Member States that have sought to restrict the access of asylum seekers to the labour market have made it easier for bad employers to use asylum seekers to undercut other workers and abuse them.

The ETUC believes member states must not conflate policies on asylum seekers, which must be determined by international human rights obligations, with policies on third country nationals. The ETUC believes that the rights of asylum seekers should not be viewed in relation to labour market needs or skills.

We need measures to address both the problems of racial and religious discrimination as well as measures to prevent exploitative conditions at work. We need action to ensure that all marginalised workers, regardless of nationality or immigration status, are given opportunities to get quality jobs and training to progress at work. This is what integration must mean. Integration cannot imply that migrant workers should accept worse working conditions or poor quality jobs. Labour market integration cannot succeed if there continue to be discrimination against migrant workers. Divisions between workers only make it easier for bad employers to use one group of workers to undercut the conditions and pay of another. The only way exploitation and low pay can be tackled is with workers joining together in a union to demand rights at work and decent pay.

The ETUC supports trade unions across Europe to organise migrant workers together with other workers and secure collective agreements with employers that guarantee fair treatment for all.

A negative portrayal of migrants and asylum seekers by populist and far right parties across Europe and during the coming European elections will give confidence to some with racist attitudes to voice and act on their prejudices.

The ETUC stands with trade unions across Europe in calling on current and potential future MEPs running in the forthcoming European parliament elections to support solidarity and

rights for all workers - labour rights are human rights and must not be limited by immigration status.

Against this backdrop of hostile policies and an emboldened far right, the role of unions in challenging racism in the workplace and in the community is more important than ever.

Unions have a long history of fighting against racism and the far right. The trade union movement has been strengthened and enriched by migrant workers who have led many struggles for better conditions and pay.

Many unions organise and support particular national and ethnic minority groups and migrant workers, both documented and undocumented, in order to build strong unions that are able to demand better treatment for all workers.

Unions have also developed training and guidance on challenging racism in the workplace. Many unions also partner with anti-racism groups and community groups and engage in community organising.

Strong rights at work, underpinned by strong unions, are essential to stop migrant workers, asylum seekers or other groups being used to undercut other workers' terms and conditions and guarantee decent treatment for all.

The ETUC calls on trade union members to take part in the European elections and support MEPs who promote an approach to migration built on solidarity and respect for human rights. The ETUC will work with MEPs in the new parliament to stand against xenophobia and discriminatory policies and promote trade union principles on migrants and asylum seekers.