

Revised ETUC Statement on the second COVID-19 wave:

Emergency measures and recovery strategy

Statement adopted by the Executive Committee at the meeting of 9-10 December 2020

The European Trade Union Confederation is deeply concerned about the extent of the damage the pandemic is causing in Europe, and the world in general, and particularly about the devastating affect it is having on workers in Europe.

The mistakes made in the past, where the financial crisis was addressed with austerity and cuts in wages, as well as in public services and social protection, had a tremendous adverse impact on workers, and their families, in Europe. It has made our economy and society less resilient to face the current emergency.

The ETUC appreciates the EU Recovery and Resilience Plan, it is good news for the tens of millions of workers in the EU who depend on rapid investment so their jobs will be saved. Such a plan represents a historical opportunity and a change in EU policy and decision-making, compared to the disastrous austerity-led response to the previous crisis.

Prolongation and extension of the emergency measures

At the same time, we are experiencing a second wave of the virus and new lockdowns are being imposed. We all know that the resources for investment from the Recovery and Resilience Plan cannot be disbursed before the second half of 2021. In this situation, we all have the responsibility to protect our economy and jobs.

This is why the ETUC has launched a strong appeal to all member states to prolong the emergency measures until next year. This includes urgently extending the coverage of the employment and income support to all categories of workers, including those in precarious, non-standard and self-employed work.

The ETUC also asks the European Commission to refinance SURE for 2021, and to set guidelines and priorities, according to the principles of the EPSR and with full involvement of social partners.

If this is not done quickly, we are going to face a tragedy in Europe, one where more than 40 million workers suspended from work will become unemployed and will fall further into poverty.

Furthermore, the EU and member states must never lose sight of the need to take all the necessary safety measures to get working people and their families through the second wave of the pandemic. This includes ensuring the safety and well-being of workers who continue to put their health at risk by providing essential services, often in under-paid and precarious jobs. It also means ensuring the safety and decent working conditions of those working from home.

The COVID-19 vaccine

The ETUC supports the important role of the European Union in coordinating the development, manufacturing and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine, and the objective of ensuring a fair access, for all in Europe, to a vaccine that is free of charge.

We ask the European Commission to make sure that the vaccine will be purchased at a fair price, avoiding any speculation by the pharmaceutical companies, and that in the production process of the vaccine fair wages and decent working conditions are provided.

We ask the Commission to ensure that a sufficient number of vaccine doses are provided to cover the whole population, and that the costs related to its purchase are not burdened on Member States, particularly those with less financial means.

The ETUC agrees on the Commission's recommendation to Member States to prioritise groups for the first batches of the vaccines, including vulnerable people and frontline and essential workers. The ETUC asks the Commission to monitor the full implementation of such criteria.

Furthermore, the ETUC demands the Commission to recommend to Member States to ensure that all health care structures, hospitals and care homes are totally safe and secure for patients and staff. Also such structures should be equipped with sufficient, well qualified and correctly remunerated medical staff, in order to cope with the workload that will transpire from the vaccination process and the catch up of postponed treatments.

Finally, to face the current and future emergencies, it is crucial that the European Union increases its monitoring of Member States. This would guarantee a fair access to quality care and medicines to all the population.

The agreement on the Multiannual Financial Framework and 'Next Generation EU'

The ETUC is glad that the European Parliament and Council have fulfilled their political responsibility in agreeing a long-term budget for the EU and the recovery instrument 'Next Generation EU'. It is an increased budget that comes alongside a substantial Recovery Plan, which represent a much better response than the one to the previous crisis.

However, we must be aware that the EU Budget alone cannot guarantee critical needs such as a socially fair transition to a low-carbon and digital economy; improved health care and essential public services for all; and a means to tackle the poverty and inequalities that have only increased since the previous crisis and during the pandemic.

The compromise reached between the negotiators from the European Parliament and the Council, envisages a €16 billion envelop that will top up the proposal agreed by the Council on 21 July. Improvements include enriching funds such as Horizon2020 and EU4Health that are quite significant to the European citizens. However, important funds like the Just Transition Fund and Solvency Support Instrument for workers hit by company restructuring, have not been sufficiently substantiated.

A roadmap on increasing the EU's own resources was also agreed, and this represents a significant advance to avoid that financing the recovery generates unsustainable debt on EU or national finances. Of course, it is still to be seen how timely this roadmap is going to be implemented in practice, on the basis of the Commission's proposals for new taxation tools and mechanisms to be introduced or strengthened at EU level.

The ETUC condemns the attempts coming from some Member States to block the approval of the Multiannual Financial Framework and 'Next Generation EU' on the basis of a rejection of the respect of the Rule of Law, and urges the EU institutions to fully implement the agreement they reached about the Rule-of-Law-related conditionalities for EU funding.

Now all EU institutions and national Governments need to concentrate on making the most of the national Recovery and Resilience Plans to save and create jobs in all sectors and industries, and to make sure that workers' rights, social dialogue, collective bargaining and democracy at work are respected as an integral part of a sustainable recovery. A recovery based on fair working and living conditions, which would not incur any further cuts on wages and pensions.

The ETUC asks all institutions to reinforce Social Partners' involvement in the MFF, in the 'Next Generation EU', and in the design, implementation and monitoring of the national Recovery and Resilience Plans; as well as to make the respect for social dialogue, collective bargaining and information, consultation and participation rights compulsory conditions for funding.

Furthermore, the ETUC asks the Commission and governments to make sure that a socially just green and digital transition and the principles enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights

and in the UN Agenda 2030 are included as cornerstones of 'Next Generation EU' and all the national Recovery and Resilience Plans.

The ETUC campaign for 'A People's Recovery'

The ETUC has launched a campaign for 'A People's Recovery' and keeps mobilising and lobbying together with its affiliates to ensure the emergency measures and the recovery plans are on the right track at European and national level.

We ask the EU institutions and governments to take responsibility not to leave anybody behind, to protect workers during the pandemic and grant them their fair share of the recovery, and to pave the path for a European economy and society based on social and environmental justice.

We want to build a future for Europe that works for workers. A future that lives up to the ambitions of a digital and green just transition. One that sees every member state respect the rule of law. We want an inclusive Europe, that leaves no one behind and that prevents having a lost generation.

This can be achieved only through the commitment of all stakeholders and a strong involvement of trade unions in all decisions that impact working people; including the Conference on the Future of Europe and the summit of Porto in May 2021, which will endorse the Action Plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and an ambitious EU 2030 Agenda.

The ETUC will actively participate to the Porto Summit and its preparation, with our proposals on the implementation of the Social Pillar and of the Sustainable Development Goals. As well as on the revision of the EU economic model and governance, to be based on going 'beyond GDP' and building an inclusive and fair 'European well-being'.