



WORK PROGRAMME OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL PARTNERS 2012-2014

OUR APPROACH

The European Union is living through the worst crisis of its history. After the financial crisis burst in 2008, a deep crisis is shaking several European states. European countries are increasingly facing difficulties in finding resources, and in adopting economic policies and necessary reforms to underpin growth and employment while ensuring the sustainability of public finances and social protection systems.

The challenges facing Europe in the coming years are immense. With more than 23.5 million unemployed in the EU, the EU unemployment rate is at its highest since the early 1990s. Reaching the 75% employment rate target set in the Europe 2020 strategy will require the creation of 17.6 million new jobs.

Europe can only succeed if sound macro-economic policies are put in place. At the same time, resources must be invested as a priority in sustainable growth-enhancing strategies.

In order to create more and better jobs, Europe needs well-functioning labour markets and a labour force with the necessary qualifications. The appropriate framework conditions must be established to ensure employment opportunities for all workers and to allow for the integration, retention and development of workers in European labour markets.

In this exceptional situation, BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP, ETUC (and the liaison committee EUROCADRES/CEC) are put to a test. Our success will be measured in our capacity to put forward solutions notably to EU labour markets problems in order to contribute to growth, employment and social cohesion.



... At national, regional, local and sectoral levels, social dialogue is playing an important role for coming through economic difficulties and grasping the challenges that are ahead of enterprises and employees. It is therefore our conviction that the EU social dialogue can also complement and build on these other levels and must be able to address the most difficult issues in a spirit of cooperation.

Aware of the remits of European competences in the field of employment and social affairs, we aim to contribute to sound EU social and employment policies. European social partners will participate actively to shape upcoming European debates on employment and social affairs, in a way which serves the needs of employers and workers. We also aim to set up a useful framework for national discussions on the policies and reforms needed. In this respect, better coordination between EU and national social agendas can help achieve results for Europeans.

As European social partners, ETUC (and the liaison committee EUROCADRES/CEC), BUSINESSEUROPE, CEEP and UEAPME are engaged in a wide range of activities. This work programme 2012-14 is a key pillar of our agenda. We may decide to update it in light of future EU developments. In addition, we will continue to take actions at both bipartite and tripartite levels based on upcoming Commission proposals and initiatives.

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OUR ACTIVITIES

This work programme covers a period of three years from 2012 to 2014. It includes the following issues and activities:

1 Youth employment

With more than 22% of young people unemployed, there is an urgent need to remedy this unacceptable situation. The situation of young people will be assessed as a priority. We will focus on the link between education, young people's expectations and labour market needs, taking into account young people's transition into the labour market, in an effort to increase employment rates in general.

We will make, in the context of a framework of actions, concrete recommendations also to Member States and the EU institutions. This work will feed into the employment analysis (Point 2 infra). We will also contribute to the G20 agenda on youth employment.

2 In-depth employment analysis

We will conduct an analysis of the functioning of European labour markets, notably building upon our joint analysis of 2007 and agreed facts/figures. This analysis will address both short-term challenges deriving from the crisis and structural issues. We want to understand the reasons why some national policies have so far been able to overcome the crisis in a much more effective way than others, notably in terms of employment and skills. On this basis, we will draw conclusions and make concrete recommendations to Member States and EU institutions which will be promoted and taken forward by European and national social partners.

3 Gender equality

Social partners agree that further action is needed to address remaining inequalities between women and men including the gender pay gap. To meet this end, social partners will continue to act on the four priorities agreed in the 2005 framework of actions on gender equality which remain valid and essential. They will build on successful experiences identified at enterprise level in the implementation of the framework of actions such as a toolkit to help the setting up of measures.

4 Education and lifelong learning

The continuous development of competencies and the acquisition of qualifications are a shared interest and responsibility for employers, employees and public authorities. For enterprises, access to and development of a skilled workforce is one of the conditions for innovation and competitiveness. For workers, acquiring, updating and developing relevant knowledge, skills and competences throughout working lives is most effective to find and remain in employment.

In 2002, European social partners adopted a framework of actions on the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications. This framework of actions remains valid in the present situation as to its four priorities. Nevertheless, the two following issues have emerged since 2002: 1) Skills needs in greening economies; 2) update and upgrade of the skills of older workers in the context of longer working lives. We will take action on these two issues using as a basis the existing matrix of four priorities.

5 Mobility and economic migration

As previously agreed in the 2009-2010 work programme, we will jointly address mobility and economic migration issues and promote the integration of migrant workers in the labour market and at the workplace in order to identify possible joint actions.

6 Better implementation and impact of social dialogue instruments

The joint evaluation of the “social dialogue results and challenges” conducted in 2011 reveals that most national social partners have positive opinions on past achievements with regard to the implementation of autonomous framework agreements. On the other hand, European social partners have acknowledged that the impact and/or implementation of different social dialogue instruments need to be improved, in particular in some countries. As agreed in the framework of the 2006/2008 and 2009/2010 work programmes, and building on the lessons learned from previous implementation processes and on the findings of the 2012 seminars on this issue, we will jointly ensure better impact and/or implementation of EU social dialogue instruments throughout Europe.

7 Capacity of social partner organisations

Social dialogue needs strong social partner organizations to deliver positive results. We have in the past conducted a successful project to assist Central and Eastern European social partners. In some Member States, more efforts are needed. We will assess and make recommendations to optimise the way in which the European Social Fund could contribute to this. Moreover, we will consider joint action to support the capacity-building of social partners in the Southern shore of the Mediterranean, in particular those which have recently experienced regime change during the “Arab Spring”.

8 Economic and social governance of the EU

The EU economic governance touches the competences of social partners, namely in issues like wages, pensions and labour costs which are at the heart of industrial relations systems in the Member States. Therefore, we will launch a reflection in the social dialogue committee with the aim of defining a shared vision on the consequences that the current debate on European economic governance will have on social dialogue at EU and national levels, and with a view to develop possible recommendations at relevant levels.
