



Policy Position Paper

Quality Jobs

November 2025

Contents

• Introduction	3
• Progress so far on Quality Jobs	4
• Social Platform position on the Quality Jobs	5
○ Job safety	6
○ Job security	7
○ Fair Wages	8
○ Equality and inclusion	8
○ Equal pay and work-life balance	9
○ Inclusivity and non-discrimination	10
○ Inclusion of civil society, and social economy actors	11
○ Training and new skills	12
• Conclusion	14



Introduction

The European Commission is preparing a **Quality Jobs Roadmap and Act** as part of the broader **European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan**. Anchored in 20 key principles, the Action Plan aims to foster a strong, fair, and inclusive Europe by promoting equal opportunities, fair working conditions, social protection, and inclusion. In her State of the Union address on 10 September 2025, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced that the European Commission will “*propose a Quality Jobs Act to ensure that modern employment keeps pace with the modern economy*”. We await the details but a legislative initiative on Quality Jobs would be a very welcome step forward.

The Quality Jobs Roadmap can play a central role in achieving the EU's headline target of **at least 78% employment among people aged 20 to 64 by 2030**. However, achieving high employment rates alone is not sufficient. In 2024, **10.9% of employed individuals in the European Union were at risk of poverty or social exclusion¹**. The figure is even higher in some Member States, within specific sectors, and among people in vulnerable situations, highlighting **persistent structural inequalities** in the European labour market. The result is an ongoing **labour shortage, unemployment traps, underemployment** and the continued prevalence of **in-work poverty**. Quality jobs are therefore needed to **contribute to the wellbeing of people and the sustainability of the planet**, rather than being driven solely by the logic of competitiveness and economic growth.



¹ [Eurostat, Living conditions in Europe – Poverty and social exclusion, 2025.](#)



Progress so far on Quality Jobs

In recent years, the European Union has launched a series of strategic initiatives aimed at strengthening the social dimension of the European project and responding to the changes taking place in the labour market. Among these, the Employment Equality Directive (2000/78/EC), the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC), the Minimum Wage Directive, the Work-Life Balance Directive, the Platform Work Directive, the Union of Skills proposal and the creation of the European Labour Authority (ELA) stand out as key instruments for promoting fairer working conditions, supporting social inclusion and strengthening the EU's economic resilience in the face of digital, demographic and green transitions. These measures represent significant progress in promoting workers' rights, improving gender equality, enabling a better work-life balance and providing workers with the skills they need.

However, despite this progress, questions remain about their adequacy and impact on reducing poverty, inequalities and effectively responding to the specific needs of vulnerable groups. Monitoring and evaluation tools should be introduced for Member States to ensure that they implement the directives ambitiously to make them effective.

It is increasingly urgent to recognise the importance and support alternative models of inclusive employment, such as social economy actors. Indeed, social economy enterprises have been working for decades to offer inclusive and sustainable models for creating quality jobs for disadvantaged groups and have proven effective in reaching people who are furthest from the labour market.



Social Platform position on the Quality Jobs

A new European Pillar of Social Rights headline target on quality jobs can have a positive impact if combined with concrete legislation to promote and improve working conditions, social protection, wages, security, inclusivity and equality. A new EU quality employment target must serve as a way of pursuing many of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plans and thus contribute to advancing on the existing EU 2030 targets. For example, it could help to tackle in-work poverty and labour shortages.

For this purpose, it is important to define what we mean by a quality job. A quality job should, as a minimum standard: combine fair wages; good working conditions; job security and adequate social protection; access to paid for training; reskilling and/or upskilling without costs and during working time; adequate health and safety at the workplace; work-life balance; equality and non-discrimination; an inclusive environment; as well as collective bargaining and full respect for workers and trade union rights, regardless of their employment status. It should also specifically look at the quality of jobs for disadvantaged groups, which should feature the same characteristics as the rest of the working population. Quality jobs must benefit workers individually and society collectively.

A necessary step is to define a multifaceted composite indicator measuring key components of a quality job. To do so, it would be necessary to develop additional comparable quality indicators. Despite the lack of an EU definition of job quality, the Executive Vice President for Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness Roxana Mînzatu announced at the Porto Social Summit that there was a need to measure quality jobs and her desire to create a target. Several European instruments that already define quality jobs offer a useful starting point. There are the **OECD Job Quality Framework**², the **EUROFOUND Quality Job Index**³, and the **Opinion of the Employment Committee** on the dimensions of job quality⁴. They highlight core dimensions like the level of **earnings**, **labour market security**, and the **quality of the working environment**. The new Porto target should build on these existing measures to support the implementation of the Quality Jobs Act and help ensure Member States' accountability.

² *Measuring and assessing Job Quality. The OCED Job Quality Framework, 2015.*

³ *New European Job Quality Index to monitor job quality. EUROFOUND on Job Quality, 2008.*

⁴ *Opinion of the Employment Committee on the dimensions of job quality. Council of the European Union, June 2025.*



In this regard, any legislation must be based on a clear definition of job quality and supported by robust, multidimensional indicators - such as fair wages and working conditions, democracy at work, work-life balance, inclusive work environment, social support and cohesion - in order to have concrete policy measures that reflect the complexity of modern labour markets.

The Quality Jobs Roadmap must consider the following aspects:



Job safety

Quality work is, first and foremost, safe work. No one should lose their life, suffer injury or long-term damage because of unsafe or unhealthy working conditions. Ensuring safety and dignity in the workplace must be a key priority in all sectors and occupations. The EU has developed tools, such as the '*Manual for the management of chronic diseases and preventing the risk of acquiring disabilities*'⁵ to provide practical guidance for employers on how to avoid health deterioration or how to manage chronic diseases in the workplace – this and similar tools should be scaled up and actively promoted among Member states.

Particular attention must be paid to the growing challenges posed by climate change, such as extreme temperatures, which increasingly threaten the conditions of outdoor and manual workers. Inspection services need to be improved, and safety ensured throughout the entire chain of work, as workers employed at the end of a long chain of subcontracting often face precarious conditions in the workplace.

At the same time, risks to mental health and psychosocial well-being must no longer be overlooked. Work-related stress, burnout, harassment, job insecurity, and the effects of algorithmic management - such as constant monitoring, automated performance evaluation, and lack of human oversight – have a serious impact on workers' lives and must be addressed with the same urgency as physical safety risks.

⁵ *Disability employment package - Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.*



In the definition of “*strained job*”⁶ the Eurofound consider, between other indicators, the impact of intrinsic job features on its quality; the main idea is that intrinsic rewards, the opportunity for self-realisation, the feeling of being useful and having an impact contributes to the well-being of workers and should therefore be promoted in the workplace. Workplaces cannot be considered good if attention is not paid to the safety and well-being of workers.



Job security

Quality jobs must be secure and provide a solid social protection system. Access to quality social services, unemployment benefits and fair pensions is a fundamental element of decent work. Every worker must be able to count on robust and inclusive systems that guarantee security throughout their lives, even in the event of illness, unemployment or retirement. Furthermore, the growing prevalence of atypical and non-standard forms of work is problematic because greater flexibility must not come at the expense of workers' rights. As labour markets evolve, the EU must ensure that flexibility does not compromise equality or protections. Standard employment contracts should be promoted as the norm, by tackling the growing issue of atypical and nonstandard contracts by providing workers with more rights to transfer to more secure forms of employment. It's necessary to address the work situation of young people, who are disproportionately likely to be in precarious work. The prevalence of fixed-term contracts has increased rapidly for younger people, with 43.3% of 15 to 24-year-olds on fixed-term contracts, compared to 14.1% of all workers⁷. Contracts such as zero-hour contracts, which deny predictability of work and stability of income, must be effectively banned. There is a strong need to tackle the intolerable system of exploitation in the subcontracting chains. It is also necessary to ensure the effective implementation of directives such as the Platform Work Directive and the 2019 directive on transparent and predictable working conditions, in order to guarantee fair working conditions and employment rights for workers.

⁶ [Job quality is pivotal in addressing today's workplace and societal challenges, EUROFOUND, 2023](#)

⁷ [Young people and precarious work, ETUC.](#)



Fair Wages

To tackle in-work poverty, it is essential to ensure adequate remuneration for workers, which is necessary to guarantee decent living conditions and meet the needs of workers and their families. Member States must ambitiously implement the Minimum Wage Directive, to guarantee both adequate remuneration and higher collective bargaining rates. Legislation on quality jobs may consider wages above the minimum wage that raise the wage floor, that reflect real living costs and enhance purchasing power. A Quality Jobs Act must also address the situation of traineeships which have become a rite of passage for millions of young people who find themselves working for low pay or no pay at all. Collective bargaining mechanisms play a central role in achieving and securing quality jobs with adequate wages and decent working conditions. Strengthening collective agreements in all sectors and in all Member States is key to achieving fairer wage-setting systems, reducing in-work poverty and combating inequalities. The EU must actively promote and safeguard the right of workers and trade unions to organise, negotiate and be represented.



Equality and inclusion

The 2025 Employment and Social Developments in Europe (ESDE) report highlights that one-fifth of the working-age population, around 51 million people, are currently outside the EU labour market, with women, people aged 55–64, migrants, and persons with disabilities making up the vast majority⁸. Structural inequalities continue to shape access to jobs, working conditions, and career progression across the EU. Marginalised groups still face systemic barriers that must be actively addressed through policy and practice.

⁸ [Women, older people, migrants and persons with disabilities key to tackling EU skills and labour shortages - Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion](#)



Equal pay and work-life balance

Equal pay, equal pensions, and equal opportunities must become guaranteed throughout all employment-related policies and sectors. Significant gaps persist and are often compounded by unpaid work, which disproportionately affects women, especially because of unpaid care responsibilities. Access to quality, affordable and accessible social and care services is a key enabler of employment, particularly for informal carers. This includes childcare, long-term care and support for persons with disabilities. Across Europe, millions of individuals are excluded or restricted in their participation in the labour market, this situation not only reinforces inequalities but also undermines Europe's economic potential. In particular, care responsibilities remain a major obstacle to women's full and equal participation in the labour market, contributing to career interruptions, part-time work, lower pensions and lower lifetime earnings. As women grow older, these inequalities are often exacerbated by ageism, which further limits access to employment, fair pay, and advancement opportunities. Recognising, reducing, and redistributing unpaid care work is essential to achieve gender equality and afford greater freedom for carers, which are disproportionately women, to pursue greater leisure time, labour market participation or other priorities. In this regard, the effective implementation of the Work-Life Balance Directive must be a priority, ensuring that all workers can benefit from flexible working arrangements, adequate parental and care leave, and protections against discrimination related to family responsibilities.

At the same time, occupational segregation is evident, particularly for women and migrants. Certain sectors, particularly those related to care, education or cleaning, remain undervalued and underpaid despite being essential to our societies. Employees in this sector, who are predominantly women, are often paid 21% below the average of all workers⁹, have limited career progression and are not offered many opportunities for training, together with the exclusion from certain protections. Elements which can have an impact on the continuity and quality of care and support provided. Addressing this imbalance means not only improving working conditions and pay, but also increasing the quality of the services and the attractiveness of these sectors. This is necessary to attract more workers, especially considering the growing demand for care services across Europe, due to an ageing population and the need for long-term care.

⁹ [Tackling the gender pay gap - TUC, 2024.](#)



Inclusivity and non-discrimination

Inclusive labour markets are built on active, supportive policies that address the specific needs of those furthest from employment. This includes the use of tools such as quotas, strong protection, harassment prevention and anti-discrimination legislation and the promotion of diverse recruitment practices that account for the experiences of discrimination across other sectors such as education and housing. Combating intersectional discrimination - whether based on ethnicity, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, or socio-economic background - requires action both in recruitment and within the workplace itself. It is not enough to ensure access to jobs if discriminatory practices and unequal treatment persist once people are employed. For example, one in three trans people had experienced harassment or exclusion in the workplace¹⁰, which results in them not feeling safe or comfortable being open about their identity at work. Therefore it's necessary to implement sensitisation training on diversity in the workplace, guarantee equal opportunities for progression, and address discrimination, gender-based violence and sexual assault in order to promote inclusive workplace cultures. Addressing these inequities will contribute to the eradication of harmful social norms and stereotypes, essential for full realisation of equality and inclusion for all. It also necessitates supporting these policies with meaningful investments in holistic social and professional support, especially for people in vulnerable situations and marginalised communities, while adopting an intersectional approach.

The Quality Jobs Roadmap should also create effective pathways for persons with disabilities and other disadvantaged workers to transition from alternative employment models into the open labour market, ensuring that these transitions are supported with adequate resources, legal frameworks, and person-centred approaches.

Initiatives such as the EU Disability Employment Package must be scaled up and most importantly enforced by Member State to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy social inclusion and economic autonomy through employment. Public procurement and state aid serve as powerful tools for driving positive social outcomes, including increasing employment opportunities for vulnerable groups. However, their full potential remains underutilised. The EU should adopt an EU Action Plan to combat Ageism¹¹ which would seek to develop a comprehensive framework for age-friendly labour

10 [Workplace Experiences of Transgender Employees. Williams Institute – UCLA, November 2024.](#)

11 [AGE Proposal for an EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism – AGE Platform Europe, September 2025.](#)



markets, eliminate age-based discrimination, and embed age equality across all EU employment policies. Inclusion needs to be achieved through concrete and coordinated action, by improving education and training, social services and diversity-friendly workplace practices.



Inclusion of civil society, and social economy actors

Civil society, and meaningful civil dialogue, play key roles in ensuring the development and implementation of inclusive labour market policies that promote quality jobs for all. Being connected to people at grassroots level, the engagement of civil society is essential for identifying the right policy responses.

For this reason, greater financial support should be provided to civil society to operate and engage in policy dialogue. Organisations that prioritise inclusive employment and services, such as not-for-profit social service providers, and other social economy actors need to be recognised for creating meaningful and supportive employment opportunities for people facing significant barriers to employment, such as people with disabilities, third country nationals, ethnic minorities, ex-prisoners, LGBTQIA+, NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) and the long-term unemployed.

For example, Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) and other social economy enterprises provide personalised support and training, helping workers with support needs (WSNs) to develop skills and autonomy. Their objective is not only economic, but also deeply social and educational. By offering inclusive and sustainable employment, these enterprises contribute directly to the quality of work by promoting fair pay, skills development, job security, social inclusion and long-term integration. They play a crucial role in building a more equitable and inclusive labour market across the EU. Examples also include supported employment schemes, which strive for the employment of disadvantaged groups directly on the open labour market, individual placement and support schemes (IPS), and other alternative models of employment, which respect workers' rights¹².

¹² [Study on alternative employment models for persons with disabilities - Publications Office of the EU](#)



The Quality Jobs Roadmap should also promote worker-owned cooperatives, including those for freelancers and autonomous workers facing the challenges of non-standard employment, which aim to ensure better working conditions, greater pay equality and greater worker satisfaction through participation, solidarity and mutualisation among workers

In order to unlock the full potential of the social economy, financial barriers must be overcome. Social impact investment and equity investment that take into account non-traditional business models, such as the cooperative model, should be promoted. The Quality Jobs Roadmap must also be coherent with the Social Economy Action Plan which is an important initiative in terms of creating favourable conditions and support for social economy enterprises.



Training and new skills

Existing EU policies such as the Union of Skills have rightly emphasised the need of upskilling and reskilling workers, particularly in response to new challenges, such as the digital and green transformations. This is an opportunity as well as a challenge especially for older workers and low-skilled workers. In particular, the rise in demand for green skills must be addressed through dedicated training programs to support a Just Transition that target training provided by civil society and social economy actors, including social enterprises active in reuse, repair and recycling. At the same time, the social care and support sector is under restructuring with the shift towards community-based and person-centred services, as well as digitalisation and policy reforms. The Quality Jobs Roadmap comes at a crucial moment, as the sector faces growing demand for care and support services and requires a larger, well-trained workforce to meet evolving and individual needs in line with human rights standards. Training must be paid, held during working hours and address the language barriers that exist especially for migrant workers.

Technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) could be valuable tools for enabling these changes, enhancing efficiency, access, and innovation, but must be used with established boundaries and safeguards. AI deployment in the workplace must respect



the "human-in-control" principle. AI can support decision-making, but final accountability and last decisions must still rest with human beings. Moreover, while digital tools and artificial intelligence can be promising in terms of enhancing efficiency, the risks they present must also be considered, such as access an ownership of data and the automatic sharing with immigration offices or discriminatory and unfair algorithmic decision-making. Nevertheless, ethical alternatives already exist. Within the platform economy, platform cooperatives are emerging, providing the right status to workers accompanied by adequate social protection, mutual ownership of the technology and data and, crucially, human-centred management even as algorithmic management is increasingly prevalent in capitalistic platforms.

The right to disconnect must be upheld. Eurostat figures of 2019¹³ already revealed that nearly one in five EU employees were called several times during their leisure time, highlighting the need for more protection around working time and rest breaks. Flexibility must enable employees, not an obstacle to their private lives. Extended coverage of flexible working hours, telework arrangements, and secure schedules should not undermine workers' rights.

13 [Eurostat, Flexibility at work – statistics, 2020.](#)



Conclusion

The upcoming Quality Jobs Roadmap and Act, especially if tied with a new headline target have the potential to help reduce in-work poverty and labour shortages. Work must be a guarantee of dignity and security, and not a pathway into in-work poverty or social exclusion. To this end, investing in quality jobs, social protection and social inclusion need to be seen as fundamentals for a wellbeing economy and society, and not the byproducts of economic growth.

To be successful, the legislation on quality jobs should be characterised by clear definitions, measurable targets and concrete legislative measures. It should actively involve civil society and social economy actors such as WISEs. It can be useful to adopt some form of social conditionality, such as ensuring public procurement, state aid, and circular economy policies include social criteria that prioritise inclusive employment and social economy actors.

With this in mind, the Roadmap must have an integrated and responsive approach that addresses the needs of those furthest from decent work, considering the specific difficulties of each different marginalised group. Investment in decent wages, stable contracts, strong social protections, and access to lifelong learning is essential to building resilience and opportunity for all. Also, decent work must be at the centre of a fair green and digital transition. This means ensuring access to paid, inclusive training, technology use responsibility, and protecting fundamental rights like the right to disconnect.

With concrete legislation to ensure quality work, a fairer, more inclusive and more sustainable Europe can be built.





Social Platform is the largest, leading organisation working on social issues. We have strength in numbers and put power back into people's hands who want a more Social Europe. Collectively we unite and give a voice to tens of thousands of organisations and hundreds of millions of people in Europe in all their diversity.



**Funded by
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.