Briefing

Commission initiative in preparation

European Parliament

EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service

Towards a quality jobs act

Marketa Pape, Members' Research Service

Published: July 2026 | Document number: PE 791.448

In this briefing

- Developments and insights – European Commission
- Why is the initiative important?
- What makes a quality job?
- Recent developments
- Member State positions and interested parties' opinions
- European Parliament views



This European Parliamentary Research Service paper aims to inform Members on issues related to a forthcoming Commission initiative. It highlights the main choices which may shape the initiative and which Members may wish to explore ahead of formal Commission adoption. Based on documentary and other sources, it reflects the information available at the time of writing.

For further information on this topic, Members and staff of the European Parliament may contact the author.

Issues at stake

- Following a non-legislative quality jobs roadmap, the European Commission is preparing a legislative initiative, the quality jobs act, in consultation with social partners.
- Job quality is a complex issue, hard to measure, context-dependent and evolves over time. Existing concepts vary as to the quality aspects they include.
- The Commission considered five areas of possible action: algorithmic management and artificial intelligence (AI) at work; health and safety at work; subcontracting; just transitions; and enforcement and role of social partners. It remains to be seen whether it proposes new measures in all these areas, and whether they will be implementable and effective, without adding administrative burdens.

- Parliament has called for legislative action to establish the right to disconnect, address digitalisation, artificial intelligence and algorithmic management in the workplace, and for a just transition directive in the world of work.

Developments and insights – European Commission

The 2024 Draghi report on the future of European competitiveness identified creating high-quality jobs and addressing skills shortages as key enabling actions to improve the EU innovation model. The European Commission sees quality jobs as an enabler of EU competitiveness and sustainable growth, while also supporting a resilient social Europe. This is reflected in its communications on the Competitiveness Compass, the Union of Skills and the Clean Industrial Deal.

Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, in her political guidelines 2024-2029, announced the (non-legislative) **quality jobs roadmap** to ensure competitiveness and prosperity in the EU. The March 2025 Pact for European social dialogue translated this announcement into a commitment to deliver on quality jobs, and the Commission then held exchanges with social partners and a two-stage consultation on the right to disconnect and telework. While the roadmap was still being finalised, President von der Leyen, in her State of the Union Speech 2025, called it a preparatory step to a (legislative) **quality jobs act**, envisaged in the Commission work programme for the last quarter of 2026. Once the quality jobs roadmap was published, the Commission started consulting European social partners on possible further EU action to be included in the quality jobs act. In the Commission, this initiative is dealt with by the DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. In Parliament, it falls mainly within the remit of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL).

Why is the initiative important?

In the current geopolitical and economic context, with global competition and trade dependencies, and the ongoing green, digital and demographic transformations, **companies struggle to remain competitive**. The Draghi report affirmed that higher productivity goes hand in hand with improved job quality and increased labour market participation. In parallel, over recent years, **citizens' economic concerns** have increased, in particular as regards the cost of living. For instance, in the European Parliament Spring 2026 Eurobarometer, the 'financial situation and ability to afford daily life' scored second highest, mentioned by 49 % of respondents as most important for good quality of life, while 'job security and working conditions' was in seventh position, mentioned by 38 % of respondents.

What makes a quality job?

Over the years, the **concept of job quality** has evolved. While earlier approaches emphasised dimensions such as wages, type of employment contract, social protection coverage, working time, and health and safety, the concept has been enriched with aspects such as work autonomy, work intensity, skills use and exposure to psychosocial risks.

For instance, Eurofound[1] sees job quality as a composition of the characteristics of work and employment that have an impact, positive or negative, on workers' health and well-being. They use **seven job quality dimensions** (each measured by an index): physical environment (absence of physical

hazards that pose a risk to health and well-being); social environment; working time quality; work intensity; skills and discretion; prospects; and earnings. These indicators capture demands on workers as well as resources that are at their disposal. Job quality is clearly multidimensional, as it is not just one aspect that makes a job a good job.

The **Employment Committee** (EMCO),[2] in its June 2025 opinion, updated the previous 2017 **framework on the dimensions of job quality**. It now defines 13 policy dimensions covering areas such as earnings, working conditions, including stress and psychosocial risks, job security, work-life balance, access to training, social protection, collective bargaining coverage, and equal opportunities.

The December 2024 Council Employment Guidelines already stress that Member States should facilitate and support investment in the creation of quality jobs. The Commission monitors various aspects of job quality via the European Semester.

Recent developments

The European Commission, in its December 2025 quality jobs roadmap communication, described the areas where it believes that EU action can make the greatest difference:

- creating and maintaining quality jobs across the EU;
- ensuring fairness and modernisation in the world of work;
- supporting workers and employers in the green, digital and demographic transitions;
- strengthening social dialogue and collective bargaining;
- ensuring effective access to rights, quality public services and adequate investment.

The Commission's 2025 two-stage consultation of European social partners outlined the following areas for possible further EU action.

Algorithmic management and artificial intelligence (AI) at work

The EU legal framework is established by the AI act and the GDPR, complemented with a set of safeguards contained in the platform workers' directive (which apply only to people working for digital platforms). However, several areas leave room for interpretation. For instance, the AI act – which imposes fewer obligations on deployers of high-risk AI systems (probably, employers) than on providers of AI systems – only requires employers to inform workers before the use of high-risk AI systems and to ensure human oversight. The GDPR is open to interpretation as to whether and under which conditions certain forms of employee monitoring are admissible.

The EU action would seek to support and enable the take-up of AI at work, while also protecting workers from potential risks arising from the use of algorithmic management. Furthermore, the Commission could seek to simplify administrative burdens on workers and companies and clarify the interaction with other EU rules.

Health and safety at work

The Occupational Safety and Health Framework Directive obliges employers to take measures to ensure the safety and health of workers in every aspect related to work, based on general principles of prevention. It has been complemented with specific individual directives setting, for instance, minimum conditions on workplace and display screen equipment.

To protect workers in the digital transition, the Commission is considering whether to extend the scope of the workplace directive to cover off-premises workplaces and to what extent to include telework and digital tools, without adding unnecessary burdens for companies. It could seek to address psychosocial and ergonomic risks, as well as risks affecting workers with disabilities.

Subcontracting

A legitimate business model, subcontracting can be prone to fraudulent practices, in particular when it involves long and complex subcontracting chains, in cross-border settings and in certain sectors, such as construction, logistics, transport and agriculture. EU rules already include some provisions aimed at preventing and addressing abuses of labour rights in subcontracting, for example in the Posting nforcement dDrective, Employers' Sanctions Directive, Anti-trafficking Directive, Seasonal Workers Directive and Platform Workers Directive.

The Commission could seek to strengthen enforcement, enhance transparency in national systems and see how social dialogue could improve respect for existing rules. It could also assess provisions such as liability schemes for specific sectors.

Just transitions

As the green and digital transitions bring challenges to both employees and employers, the Commission committed to discussing the framework to support restructuring processes at EU and Member State level. Following a 2022 Council Recommendation on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality, the 2023 EPSCO Council reviewed the progress achieved and noted that there is still scope for a more systematic, coordinated, and coherent approach.

The Commission could seek to strengthen early involvement of workers in companies' decisions and promotion of collective bargaining and social dialogue in just transitions with regard to the EU rules on information and consultation of workers (directives on informing and consulting employees, collective redundancies, transfer of undertakings and European Works Councils).

Enforcement and role of social partners

EU initiatives already seek to strengthen social dialogue at EU and national level. These include the 2023 Council Recommendation, the Adequate Minimum Wages Directive (Member States with collective bargaining coverage below 80 % have to establish an enabling framework for social dialogue and an action plan to promote collective bargaining), and the Platform Workers Directive (digital labour platforms have to create the possibility for people doing platform work to contact and communicate with each other and with their representatives). The Commission could promote better implementation and enforcement of workers' rights protected by EU labour law.

Member State positions and interested parties' opinions

Individually, Member States have distinct approaches to employment matters, such as labour inspections, workers' representation and collective bargaining, which resurface in discussions on the Commission's proposals. Recently, this was the case during negotiations on the directive on adequate minimum wages and in the aftermath of its adoption.

Acting **collectively**, the April 2024 European Council meeting called for an 'integrated approach across all policy areas to increase productivity and sustainable and inclusive growth', which should include

fostering high-quality jobs through social dialogue. In November 2024, EU leaders welcomed the Draghi report identifying high-quality jobs and addressing skills shortages as key enablers to improve the EU innovation model. The December 2024 Employment Guidelines stressed that Member States should facilitate and support investment in the creation of quality jobs.

The **Irish Presidency of the Council** states, among its priorities, that it will lead the discussion on how we create and support high quality jobs within modern labour markets.

Among the **interested parties**, **BusinessEurope**, representing EU **employers**, point in their policy orientation note to the **difficulty of assessing job quality** and **comparing the existing frameworks to measure job quality**. In their view, the EU should focus on putting in place the conditions for creating jobs that are productive and result in competitive enterprises, while also supporting workers' employability. They caution against measures that could undermine social dialogue or harm EU competitiveness through excessive regulation. In their contribution to the Commission consultation, BusinessEurope is **sceptical about** the attempts to create a **monitoring framework** to measure progress in job quality. Employers see the key challenges as being the need to address the consequences of an ageing and shrinking workforce, the high number of inactive people across Europe and structural mismatches between skills supply and demand, leading to recruitment difficulties. In their view, job quality in Europe is generally good and much higher than in other regions of the world, and the Commission should not create a negative narrative around certain types of jobs or introduce criteria that strictly categorise jobs and or introduce criteria that strictly categorise jobs and thereby introduce a job 'hierarchy'.

The **European Trade Union Confederation** (ETUC), in their Blueprint to deliver quality jobs, list the following elements to improve job quality: regulating AI in the workplace; tackling abuses in subcontracting and labour intermediation; a just transition; preventing psychosocial risks; telework and the right to disconnect; and making all jobs secure.

In their response to the Commission's consultation, ETUC calls for legislative action to:

- increase collective bargaining as the best way to achieve genuinely fair pay and conditions;
- introduce a right to training during working time as part of a just transition to a green and digital economy;
- regulate subcontracting chains and labour intermediaries;
- end Europe's stress epidemic, including by enforcing the right to disconnect;
- regulate algorithmic management at work based on the human in control principle;
- end precarious work through legal rights to permanent contracts and full-time employment.

European Parliament views

In its January 2026 legislative-initiative resolution, Parliament called for a **just transition directive in the world of work**, with a set of concrete measures that tangibly improve the working conditions, health and safety, democracy at work, collective bargaining coverage and training and skills of workers and the self-employed, and which ensure the effective enforcement of EU employment and social policy legislation. The directive should, among other things, establish an individual right to training for workers during working hours, establish national just transition strategies with a long-term vision for

local economies and workers, and develop support programmes for businesses, in particular SMEs and local actors in order to encourage local job-creation.

In its December 2025 legislative-initiative resolution, Parliament called for a directive framing **digitalisation, artificial intelligence and algorithmic management in the workplace**. The directive should ensure transparency, human oversight, data protection, and workers' information and consultation, as well as safeguarding workers' autonomy, mental health, and work-life balance.

In its January 2021 legislative-initiative resolution, Parliament called for a directive establishing **the right to disconnect** that would apply to all workers and all sectors, both public and private, and which would be effectively enforced. The purpose of the right to disconnect is to ensure the protection of workers' health and safety, and of fair working conditions, including work-life balance. Currently, Parliament's EMPL committee is preparing another legislative-initiative resolution, on **psychosocial risks, stress and mental health at work** (rapporteur: Estelle Ceulemans, S&D, Belgium).

Main references

European Commission,Quality Jobs Roadmap, 2025.

European Commission, Consultation document, First-phase consultation of social partners under Article 154 TFEU on possible direction of EU action to improve working conditions, health and safety at work and implementation of workers' rights – Quality Jobs Act, 2025.

Endnotes

1 The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions is the tripartite EU agency providing knowledge to assist in the development of better social, employment and work-related policies.

2 EMCO is composed of two experts from each Member State and the Commission.

Disclaimer and copyright

This document is prepared for, and addressed to, the Members and staff of the European Parliament as background material to assist them in their parliamentary work. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of the Parliament.

The reuse of this document is authorised under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC-BY 4.0) licence. https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.en

To use or reproduce elements that are not owned by the European Union, permission may need to be sought directly from the respective rightsholders.

© European Union, 2026 | Photo credits: © European Union, 2017.

Contact

E-mail: eprs@ep.europa.eu

Intranet: https://eprs.in.ep.europa.eu/

Internet: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank

Blog: https://epthinktank.eu