



PERC PAN-EUROPEAN TRADE UNION COUNCIL
CRE CONSEIL REGIONAL EUROPEEN
ВЕРС ВСЕЕВРОПЕЙСКИЙ РЕГИОНАЛЬНЫЙ СОВЕТ
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5TH PERC GENERAL ASSEMBLY

5 DECEMBER 2023

PERC PROGRAMME OF ACTION 2023-2027: UNITED FOR A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR EUROPE

INTRODUCTION

This PERC programme of action defines the priorities for PERC activities for the period 2023-2027.

This constitutes a call to action for trade unions in Europe and Central Asia to come together – united in solidarity – and address the multiple challenges that face workers and their trade unions. It is a call to action to deliver for working people and their representative trade unions!

Today the PERC region is being challenged by numerous emergencies: war, attacks to democracy and to human rights, including trade union and workers' rights, the cost-of-living crisis, precarious work, low pay and exploitative wages, the rise of the far right, low collective bargaining coverage and weak social dialogue in a growing number of countries, the impacts of climate change, as well as the ongoing risk of a return to disastrous austerity policies.

The war in Ukraine is the worst military conflict in the region since the second world war and there are other conflicts that threaten violent escalation. In several PERC countries, governments and employers attack and disregard workers and trade union rights. In too many cases, wages do not guarantee a decent standard of living and working conditions are precarious and exploitative. The cost-of-living crisis has made the situation even worse. Too often governments fail to respect their commitments to promote collective bargaining and ignore the necessity for social dialogue.

The unity of the trade union movement, international trade union solidarity and joint initiatives across borders are of paramount importance to overcome those challenges.

In this spirit, the European trade union movement must mobilise to deliver on key areas

- For peace and, when military operations stop, for a fair reconstruction of the regions affected by war. These efforts must be based on social dialogue, respect for workers and trade union

rights and social conditionalities; for disarmament, for European security, and against the arms race, nuclear weapons and other nuclear threats.

- For democracy, workers' and trade union rights, social dialogue, and international trade union solidarity; for healthy and safe workplaces.
- Against inequalities and any form of discrimination, for inclusion and respect of different groups of workers.
- For economic justice and against austerity.
- For just transitions to green economies and for technologies that serve workers and do not undermine their rights and freedoms.
- For trade union renewal.

The present programme of action for 2023-2027 builds upon the PERC framework defined by the General Assembly in 2019 and considers regional developments in the interim period, global and European trade union debates and priorities set by the ITUC and ETUC Congresses.

This programme of action focuses on specific areas for engagement where PERC initiatives will have an added value, but also complement ITUC and ETUC actions, in cooperation and mutual reinforcement.

PERC affiliates commit to supporting the PERC mission and actions and to contribute to the implementation of its programme of action.

The annual working plans of the PERC shall define – year by year – the specific activities to be undertaken to implement the PERC programme of action.

CHAPTER I: TRADE UNIONS UNITED FOR DEMOCRACY, WORKERS' AND TRADE UNION RIGHTS AND SOLIDARITY

State of play and challenges

Trade union rights and freedoms are under attack in several countries in Europe and the democratic space is shrinking. The ILO and its standards need reinforcement and commitment, as transnational exploitation and human rights abuses take new forms across the continent. The Global Rights Index revealed a declining trend for respect to workers and trade union rights in the region, with an **increase in the number of violations of freedom of association, right to organise and collective bargaining**. The right to strike is challenged and collective actions persecuted and often the right to genuine **social dialogue** is denied. Social dialogue is not respected or undermined in several countries.

Authoritarian regimes **criminalise trade unionism**, with Belarus being the worst but not the only case. The trade union movement is united in action against these threats, running solidarity campaigns and supporting oppressed activists. But even in developed democracies, cases of trade union busting and persecution of trade union actions are on the rise.

At the same time **far right** and other anti-democratic **groups** mobilise to exploit discontent to divide working people, undermine democratic institutions and processes, manipulate and instigate violence and hatred, also against unions and human rights activists.

Fundamental rights of migrants and asylum seekers are not respected. Every day people die in the sea, face inhuman treatment on the borders, and are sent back to misery, violence and, in some cases, death. This situation feeds trafficking and abuse, where criminal networks benefit from vulnerabilities.

Respect for international labour standards and international institutions is at an historical low. As such, the **ILO standards** and **its supervisory mechanisms** are challenged in numerous ways, such as their weak implementation by certain states, coupled with intentional misinterpretation. Despite this, the international trade union movement recently won an historical vote at the International Labour Conference on the application of Article 33 of the ILO Constitution on the government of Belarus; the second ever and the first for violations of freedom of association.

Another achievement was the recognition of **OSH as fundamental worker right**, which now requires the necessary follow up at the national level to ensure the ratification and implementation of C155 and C187. **In addition, standard setting processes** agreed by the ILO tripartite constituencies will require thorough discussions and contributions by regions. The ILO regional offices' monitoring and assistance in the implementation of international labour standards is not efficient enough and should be improved.

In the last years, there has been a tendency towards the **dilution and disempowerment of labour inspectorates** under the guise of "investment friendly policies", in violation of ILO C.81. In several countries, trade unions were able to resist to this dangerous trend, through coordinated action with international and European trade union movement. Without robust and trusted independent labour inspection, labour rights and health and safety norms cannot be guaranteed.

Too often **MNEs** can exploit weaknesses and loopholes in regulations and fail to respect workers' and trade union rights and to ensure decent working conditions.

PERC actions

The PERC actions will include:

1) Trade unions as key pillars of democracy

- *Developing a campaign to stress that trade unionism is not a crime, but trade union busting is: 'no democracy without unions' campaign.*
- *Continuing to take initiatives to defend social dialogue and social partners' prerogatives against attacks from governments.*
- *Global Rights Index: localisation / promotion / communication.*
- *Developing initiatives to demand migration and asylum policies based on solidarity, the application of international laws, standards and conventions and full respect of human rights*

and promoting exchanges on legal frameworks and tools to combat trafficking. It is also key to ensure safe and legal channels for migrants.

- *Supporting affiliates fighting against the far right and all forms of fascism, racism and xenophobia.*

2) International trade union solidarity

- *Continuing to support trade unionists in Belarus and mobilising towards EU, European and international institutions to ensure support for them and increased pressure on the regime to stop the prosecution and ensure respect of trade union rights.*
- *Supporting Ukrainian society and trade unions faced by the war of aggression and illegal invasion of Ukraine by Russia and facilitating the gathering of solidarity funds for institutional support to trade unions in Ukraine, and the resumption of trade union work in the de-occupied territories.*
- *Taking action to ensure that the Ukrainian reconstruction is based on social dialogue, the involvement of trade unions at all stages and social conditionalities to ensure decent work.*

3) Making full use of international labour standards

- *Making full use of ILO standards and the ILO supervisory system: assisting affiliates, coordinating preparations for the Committee on Application of Standards, exposing non implementation by governments, meetings with local ILO office's.*
- *Following-up ILO resolution on Belarus re. Art. 33.*
- *Promoting the application of international labour standards, including via Multilateral Development Banks safeguard mechanisms / complaint mechanisms.*
- *Promoting ILO C81 countering labour inspection disempowerment.*
- *Promoting the ratification and implementation of the newly core OSH conventions (C155 and C187) as well as C161 on occupational health services and conventions on specific sectors and hazards.*
- *Demanding regional consultations to ensure inputs on new standards and reviving the European Regional meeting.*
- *Taking actions to defend the right to strike against attacks by governments and employers, including by coordinating and supporting solidarity actions for affiliates in countries where the right is challenged.*

4) Combating transnational exploitation

- *Developing communication and supporting coordination in cross-border actions: building upon successful cases of exposing and bringing perpetrators to justice of.*

- *Facilitating cooperation between unions of host and operation countries to ensure workers' rights respect within MNEs and their networks, using as tools the EU due diligence directive, the UN Treaty on Business and Human Rights, the OECD MNEs guideline, MDB safeguards, national due diligence policies and legislation and other instruments.*

CHAPTER II: TRADE UNIONS UNITED AGAINST INEQUALITIES AND DISCRIMINATION

State of play and challenges

Inequalities – also in European countries – are at a historic high. The Covid-19 crisis has revealed the **unfair and exploitative conditions** that millions of workers still face, despite their invaluable contribution to society. More and more workers find themselves in precarious, low-paid, irregular jobs. The **gender pay and social protection gaps** still affect women workers in Europe, though EU pay transparency directive is a big step forward to ensure a re-evaluation of work done predominantly by women. Reinforced social investments, including investment in care and **proper remuneration for care workers** is of paramount importance in this framework.

The adoption of the ILO C190 was a breakthrough in **combating violence and harassment in the world of work**. Since then, the number of ratifications has been growing. We need reinforced efforts in this area. A growing number of workers need protection because they are subject to online harassment and shaming.

Covid-19 exposed the social exclusion that **vulnerable groups** face too often in labour markets and society, as well as the failures of social protection schemes. Firm actions are necessary against discrimination based – among others – on sex, religion, colour, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, political opinion, social origin, age or disability.

PERC actions

The PERC actions will include:

1) *Closing the gender gaps:*

- *Promoting transposition and implementation of the Gender Pay Transparency Directive and pushing for similar measures in countries outside the EU.*
- *Promoting the ILO “social conventions” (183, 189, 156...).*
- *Promoting investments in care and taking actions to promote better working conditions in the care sector.*

2) Countering Violence and harassment at work

- *Continuing the campaign to ensure ratifications of ILO C190; monitoring implementation and building upon reporting experience.*
- *Developing initiatives on zero tolerance to violence and harassment at work, including through supporting the implementation and use of EU and national legal instruments.*
- *Promoting exchanges of views on trade union actions against cyberviolence, online harassment and shaming and to support victims and survivors of all forms of gender-based or any type of violence and harassment at work.*

3) Combating discrimination

- *Promoting the full implementation of ILO Convention 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation).*
- *Promoting exchanges on trade union actions against discrimination at the workplace, including through collective bargaining.*

CHAPTER III: TRADE UNIONS UNITED FOR ECONOMIC JUSTICE: NO TO AUSTERITY

State of play and challenges

While many communities have not fully recovered after the pandemic (including the continuing effects of long-Covid), the cost-of-living crisis is hitting workers across Europe. Once again, workers are paying the price of the economic crisis, with the value of wages, pensions and income support falling, while prices for everyday goods and services rise. Wages are not the cause of inflation; profits are, and profits for certain companies and sectors have skyrocketed. A new economic model is needed based on fair taxation, redistribution, reinforced investments in social and ecological objectives, reindustrialisation with social conditionalities, improved social protection. Any attempt to return to discredited austerity measures must be firmly rejected.

Investments in social progress, in quality jobs, in sustainable industries in all countries and regions are necessary to develop an economy that delivers for all. Employment friendly measures are necessary, including investments to ensure just transition and the creation of quality jobs. Neo-liberal predatory policies of privatisation and outsourcing continue bringing devastating effects on **public services and education**.

The argument that wages are causing inflation is false and both the IMF and ECB have firmly asserted that **inflation is caused by profits**. Pay rises that meet the increase in the cost of living and ensure workers receive a fair share of productivity gains are necessary. Collective bargaining, at sectoral and cross-sectoral level, must be promoted in all countries. Minimum wages and pensions and benefits in many countries do not guarantee a decent standard of living. Measures to promote **collective**

bargaining and to ensure the respect for the right to collective bargaining are necessary to achieve fair pay, shared prosperity, and democracy. Yet collective bargaining coverage remains unacceptably low in many countries, and too often states fail to live up to their commitments to promote collective bargaining. Reinforced collective bargaining is necessary to ensure better income and wealth distribution and to ensure workers get a fair share.

Taxation – including more **progressive taxation** – must be part of the solution. For decades fiscal systems have failed to ensure fair wealth redistribution, with businesses exploiting loopholes and tax “optimisation” schemes, while the workers’ burden is increased. It bears repeating that flat taxation and fiscal advantages as an “investment policy” did not bring investments and instead depleted budgets and resources for social objectives and social protection and increased inequalities. Several governments took on reforms long demanded by trade unions, while global economic bodies coordinate on universal fiscal floors for MNEs to fight tax avoidance and tax competition.

High profits were recorded by companies, while they benefited by public funds assistance during the Covid-19 crisis, while the cost-of-living crisis hit the poorest hardest. A **tax on the excessive profits** of companies to ensure they are not allowed to speculate on crises, along with other measures to stop profiteering, such as curbing dividends and limiting CEO pay and bonuses must be part of the solution. Interest rate increases hit working people the hardest and have negative economic consequences. Therefore, interest rate increases are not the correct response to this crisis. As the healthcare crisis revealed, **social protection** is far from being adequate in terms of either the coverage or the means to support people in need. It is underfinanced, while its management often is not based on shared ownership and social dialogue.

PERC actions

The PERC actions will include:

1) Investments for quality jobs:

- *Calling for reinforced investments in social objectives and quality jobs: public funding must be based on social conditionalities and investments for sustainable industry in all countries and regions are necessary.*
- *Organising dialogue with the IFIs, countering World Bank B-ready index report and advancing principles of decent work in investment strategies.*
- *Promoting a “beyond GDP” approach: labour, social and environmental indicators to be included in national and supranational discourse on economic development, not only GDP and debt.*
- *Developing alternative reporting to the Decent Work Country Programs in the countries concerned.*
- *Support affiliates engaged in campaigns to secure jobs, better wages and adequate social protection.*

2) Higher wages and reinforced collective bargaining

- Promoting the Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages in the EU and its transposition and application; mobilising for similar instruments to be established in countries outside the EU; mobilising to support the protection of well-functioning collective bargaining systems.
- Assisting in building argumentation for living wages setting at a national level, including by promoting ILO C131; Supporting affiliates engaged in campaigns to secure quality jobs, higher wages, collective bargaining and adequate social protection.

3) Fair redistribution and welfare state

- *Promoting and supporting tax fairness actions and campaigns to fight against tax evasion and avoidance and for tax transparency, to promote more progressive taxation (countering flat tax and overreliance on indirect taxes), and Financial Transaction Taxes to ensure excessive profit taxation and other means to stop profiteering and short-term investment decisions.*
- *Promoting ratification and implementation of the ILO Co102 (and recommendation 202) to ensure adequate social protection, participation of unions in social protection institutions, and proper financing of social protection through solidarity mechanisms and fair fiscal policies.*
- *Mapping the implementation of SDGs in PERC region, assessing their implementation both on national level (promoting alternative voluntary national reports) and on a regional level (e.g., within UNECE bodies, UNHFLF etc.).*

CHAPTER IV: TRADE UNIONS UNITED FOR JUST TRANSITIONS

State of play and challenges

The last decade has been the warmest in modern time. Extreme weather events accompany this increase and the most vulnerable are the worst affected. Unadapted environments have led to workers suffering heat stress and as temperatures rise, this is set to continue. The transition to address climate change, to promote alternatives for industries and regions and to ensure control over technological advancements place **just transition** at the heart of trade union policies and priorities.

Investments in people, sustainable industries in all countries and regions, just transition and quality jobs, social protection schemes, targeted assistance and place-based solutions on local levels are urgently needed.

When transition policies are not based on social dialogue, when the collective rights of workers are violated, transition lacks fairness and workers, families, entire communities are at risk of being left behind. **Place-based solutions** are key for transitions and centre the rights of workers and communities to anticipate and manage change and be part of decision-making. As such, they must be recognised and respected. The **SDG framework** provides trade unions with a means to monitor the transition, to promote engagement and to call for workers' interests to be addressed.

The success of the climate transition relies on **new technology** that provides for quality green jobs creation in all the regions (including transfers and sharing of technologies and innovations).

The development of technologies, digitalisation and artificial intelligence needs the full involvement of trade unions and collective bargaining, and a fundamental respect for the right to training, as well as new regulations to ensure that the opportunities and benefits of digitalisation are equally shared, to limit the new risks for workers, communities, businesses and states and to counter threats to fundamental rights and freedoms.

Guaranteeing the **same rights to all workers**, including those who are engaged in platform work and remote work, closing regulatory loopholes, ensuring the transition from informal to formal employment is vital. Unions have achieved significant successes in courts, in collective bargaining, in campaigning to reveal bogus self-employment and exploitation and to close labour laws gaps. Supra-national actions for strong regulations and promotion of universal labour guarantees are also vital.

The use of **artificial intelligence** and new technologies without adequate impact assessment and proper legislation and strong social dialogue and collective bargaining pose strong risks to workers and trade union rights and working conditions. The human-in-control principle is of paramount importance.

PERC actions

The PERC actions will include:

1) *Just transition to green economy.*

- *Mobilising for social conditionalities: support to companies will be conditional on quality jobs creation, support of collective bargaining, respect for trade unions and workers' rights.*
- *Mobilising for just transition: social dialogue, collective bargaining and involvement of trade unions in planning and implementing transitions.*
- *Working with affiliates for SDGs via development of alternative Voluntary National Reports and inputs to multilateral forums.*
- *Initiating developing briefings on investments in quality jobs in sustainable industries as key for national trade union policies (in cooperation with the Just Transition Centre, including on mapping of best practices).*
- *Acting to establish temperature limits for people to work to prevent injuries and accidents at work.*
- *Organising exchanges on place-based solutions (with Just Transition Centre): quality jobs in all regions.*

2) Technologies: digitalisation and artificial intelligence

- *Promoting universal labour guarantees in national social dialogues and international forums and, where requested by affiliates, their implementation in practice at national level.*
- *Promoting the implementation of the EU directive on improving working conditions in platform work (once adopted) and similar initiatives outside the EU, while contributing to the ILO platform work standard building by sharing national examples and strategies.*
- *Continuing actions in reinforcement of labour inspectorates / enforcement mechanism to prevent and reveal labour rights denial and abuse by usage of technological means.*
- *Facilitating trade union discussions about the implications of technological advancement on working life and human rights and contributing to elaborating solutions at multilateral level: artificial intelligence, telework, remote work etc.*
- *Strengthening public investments in and governmental commitment to sustainable development projects, with full respect of social conditionalities, social dialogue and collective bargaining.*
- *Sharing best practices on using new technologies in trade union work and initiatives.*

CHAPTER V: UNITED FOR TRADE UNION RENEWAL

State of play and challenges

Trade union membership and collective bargaining coverage have been in decline in Europe in the last decades. Addressing the challenges the European trade union movement faces will require, among other measures, focus on trade union renewal efforts and strategies. It is important to link-up and support exchanges between affiliates on trade union renewal strategies at national level, with a particular focus on organizing, collective bargaining, mobilisation and digital trade unionism. It is also important to create occasion for exchanges between the affiliates also on how to reach out and organise new groups of workers and specific sectors.

PERC actions

The PERC action will include:

- *Promoting solidarity networks to support and provide solidarity to brothers and sisters in need.*
- *Promote networking and issue-based activism.*
- *Organising exchanges on trade union renewal initiatives and experiences, including on digital trade unionism and digital mobilisation and actions.*
- *Sharing experiences on new trade union initiatives and strategies to organise and represent specific groups of workers and sectors.*

- *Assisting organisations interested in reform processes to modernise and develop new initiatives and strategies, with particular focus on organising, collective actions and bargaining.*
- *Supporting women's leadership and organising women into unions; Focusing on achieving higher women representation in PERC structures and actions.*
- *Foster stronger youth involvement, including on apprenticeships, students and other movements and in general in decision making process.*
- *Support trade union leadership schools; cooperation of trade union educators, communication specialists and lead organisers.*
- *Strengthening the PERC Women and Youth committees, including by promoting activist networks / actions.*