

ETUC statement on Afghanistan

Adopted by the ETUC Executive Committee on 9 September 2021

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) is alarmed with the situation in Afghanistan and concerned about the security of the Afghan people, both those that remain in the country and those seeking protection. The fall of the Afghan government has demonstrated the failure of the NATO and has shown the need for a relaunch of global multilateralism, based on democracy and peace, solidarity and respect for human rights.

The ETUC has flagged the need for the EU institutions to take immediate action and ensure that all EU Member States work together for the safe passage out of Afghanistan and unconditional asylum for anyone in danger¹. The EU and Member States must do all that they can to protect all trade union, human and women's rights activists, journalists and those who have campaigned for freedom, democracy and equality. The creation of humanitarian corridors for refugees is more than ever needed.

The ETUC welcomes and supports the call by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres urging all countries to receive Afghan refugees, and refrain from any deportations and forced returns. The particular circumstances of women and girls must be recognised. Asylum processes throughout the EU must guarantee the safety and well-being of the Afghan people, particularly women and girls.

The ETUC fully supports the statement made by the Chair of the European Parliament FEMM Committee Evelyn Regner, who raised her concerns for Afghan women and girls, in relation to the systemic and brutal oppression in all aspects of life. In Taliban controlled areas, women's universities have been closed, they are denying girls access to education, and women are sold as sex slaves. The ETUC joins the ITUC in voicing its concern about the safety of trade union officials and activists.

The ETUC regrets the response given by the EU Ministers of Home Affairs at the extraordinary Council meeting on 31 August; in relation to the prevention of "uncontrolled large-scale" irregular migration, the reinforcement of border controls and the necessity to keep people out of Europe. It is worth recalling that the vast majority of Afghan refugees are located in neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and Iran. It is a disgrace that EU countries only focus on keeping refugees away from Europe, instead of teaming up in solidarity to host and protect Afghan people fearing the Taliban. The ETUC considers that a new agreement such as the EU-Turkey deal is unacceptable. Europe should learn from the mistakes made in the past. The ETUC has always denounced the illegitimacy and the inconsistency of the EU-Turkey deal, which represent a clear violation of human rights and international law.

As expressed in the ETUC Statement on the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum ², the ETUC regrets that the new Pact fails to create a common EU-wide, rights-based policy. One that ensures Member States take responsibility of asylum seekers and caters for migrants' needs. Instead, it succumbed to anti-immigrant political movements and

¹ <https://www.etuc.org/en/document/etuc-letter-eu-institutions-presidents-afghanistan>

² <https://www.etuc.org/en/document/etuc-statement-new-pact-migration-and-asylum>

Member States who wish to treat migration and asylum as an exclusively national matter in order to continue restricting access of those who seek international protection in their countries and refusing the fundamental rights of migrants.

The ETUC is very concerned about the decisions already taken by some countries (e.g. France) to consider Afghanistan as a peaceful and safe country since 15 August, thus limiting access to the right of asylum for persons, including trade union activists in danger.

The ETUC cannot but share the International Council of Museum's cry of alarm about the risks to the Afghan cultural heritage and the workers who work to preserve and protect it. Recently, we have already watched helplessly as it has been devastated, those working to protect it have been killed, and at the same time a black market is flourishing. The ETUC expresses its full support for the workers who, amidst many difficulties, are working to keep the country's extraordinary cultural heritage alive and intact, and calls for constant attention from the international community.

The ETUC demands that EU institutions and Member States in Afghanistan report on how its contractors and sub-contractors have been safeguarded during their exit from Afghanistan.

The ETUC urges EU institutions and Member States to act swiftly and protect the Afghan people, to bring safety to women and girls and grant immediate access to safe and regular pathways to the EU and suspend all deportations and forced returns. It is the EU's duty and responsibility to give them a dignified and unconditional welcome.

The ETUC calls on the EU and Member States to support the Non-Governmental Organisations and trade unionists that still remain in the country and calls on the trade union movement to support the worldwide demonstration planned on the 25th of September for Afghan women.

The ETUC demands that the new Afghan regime fully respect human rights and their obligations under international law.