



Joint ETUC-TUC statement on EU-UK partnership “reset” – United, we stand, divided we fall!

Adopted at the Enlarged Steering Committee meeting of 29 January 2025

Since the day of the UK referendum on EU membership, the trade union movement on both sides of the Channel and across the Irish Sea has remained united in its resolve to protect workers from the impact of that historic decision.

The UK has since called for a ‘reset’ and has jointly agreed with the EU that they will strengthen cooperation in areas including the economy, energy, security and resilience.¹

This development, combined with the review of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) in 2026 and emerging geopolitical necessities, provide the opportunity to deepen the EU-UK partnership and upgrade it. We look forward to working with governments and EU institutions to achieve a mutually beneficial partnership for the UK and EU, delivering sustainable growth, good jobs and strong workers’ rights.

Trade union participation

Trade unions must be part of this process, starting with a seat at the table at the forthcoming EU-UK summit, and we believe the existing Domestic Advisory Groups established by the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement are the key vehicle to ensure worker, business and civil society interests are represented in a balanced way.²

Northern Ireland and Gibraltar

We recall the commitments already in place stemming from the Withdrawal Agreement and the Windsor Framework, with particular attention to the commitment to non-diminution of rights in Northern Ireland³, which must continue to be upheld.

We must also prevent disruption to the lives of workers around the Campo de Gibraltar and ensure the rights of both EU and UK workers are protected.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-by-the-president-of-the-european-commission-and-the-prime-minister-of-the-united-kingdom-on-enhancing-strategic-cooperation-2-october--2>

² See the joint statement of UK and EU Domestic Advisory Groups agreed in October 2024 outlining union, business and civil society joint priorities for enhancement of the UK-EU TCA https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-09/eu-uk_dags_joint_statement_2024-updated.pdf

³ Article 2 of the Windsor Framework provides legal protections that certain equality and human rights in Northern Ireland are not reduced as a result of Brexit.



Upholding workers' rights

EU and UK trade unions' joint approach in advocating for a good deal for workers since 2016 led to the TCA containing the most innovative labour clauses the EU ever negotiated in its trade agreements with third countries - the non-regression and the level playing field clauses.

As we welcome the introduction of the Employment Rights Bill in the UK, upholding mutual high standards on workers' rights in the UK and EU to encourage a race to the top should be fostered by building on the **non-regression and level playing field clauses**. There should be regular dialogue, exchanges⁴ and cooperation⁵ around improvements on workers' rights to make progress towards this goal, combined with effective enforcement of these clauses. This remains the core objective of the trade union movement as we prepare for the review of the TCA in 2026 and the UK-EU "reset" process.

Opportunities for workers

Building pathways for workers to improve their employability and open up new opportunities for good quality employment for EU workers in the UK and vice versa is another key demand⁶.

The UK has already rejoined the Horizon programme; there is a strong case for the UK to also rejoin the Erasmus+, which also supports vocational learning and apprenticeships among others. Apprenticeships should meet the trade union criteria for being good quality, with decent terms and conditions⁷. It is essential that opportunities created by Erasmus+ benefit all workers and not just certain sectors: we should progressively remove barriers for workers to seizing new opportunities.

Creating quality jobs through reduced barriers to trade

Further reducing trade barriers and border checks would contribute greatly to improved trade flows between the EU and the UK, which in turn is good for job creation. To this end, additional agreements in areas such as mutual recognition of professional qualifications, sanitary and phytosanitary checks, chemical standards will be needed to support close regulatory alignment.

Mutually reinforcing climate action and industrial policy

Given geographical proximity, and again with a view to eliminating trade barriers, closer regulatory and policy alignment is also important in the field of climate action and active industrial policy. We would want to see the Emissions Trading Schemes in both parties to be linked, as well as cooperation to allow the necessary investments to support the transition to clean energy and industry.

Striving together for peace

The parties have identified closer cooperation on foreign policy and security as an ambition. Security cooperation is important and a pressing need in today's multipolar world, but for us the interests of the defence industry should not come before those of

⁴ as article 399 of the trade agreement already foresees.

⁵ The EU already has [cooperation with the US on workplace safety and health](#), which could serve as a model.

⁶ Visas must be renewable subject to ongoing employment rather than short term so that workers are not at risk of losing legal status and thus being vulnerable to exploitation.

⁷ [European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships 2018](#) and [Jacques Delors Institute's call for an 'Erasmus Pro'](#).



workers and peace, and security spending should not be to the detriment of social justice.

Building just societies and combating the far right

Finally, there is a need for the EU and the UK to cooperate to fight the resurgence of the far right populism and extremism, corporate capture and disinformation. We believe that a closer and deeper partnership between the EU and the UK can contribute to creating new jobs, improving working conditions and reversing the cost of living crisis, which are effective tools – together with our shared trade union values and solidarity - to stem the discontent in our societies on which the far right’s campaign of hatred and scapegoating thrives.