

Conclusions of the 17th High Level Meeting between the European Commission and the International Labour Office

Brussels, 9 July 2026

Purpose and context

On 9 July 2026, the European Commission (Commission) and the International Labour Office (ILO) held their 17th High-Level Meeting (HLM). The meeting took place at a critical moment, in a context marked by geopolitical uncertainty and ongoing shifts in the world of work driven by digital, demographic and climate transitions, as well as against the background of the UN80 initiative, and the ongoing ILO reform. It offered an opportunity to reaffirm the collaboration between the two organizations and the relevance of multilateral cooperation. The discussions were further informed by three round tables on Trade and Decent work, Artificial Intelligence and Quality Jobs, and Partnerships and International Cooperation, the key messages of which feed into the present Conclusions.

Shared values and a common vision for the world of work

The Commission and the ILO are guided by shared values and a common vision for the world of work, rooted in the pursuit of decent work and social justice. This shared foundation underpins their joint ambition to advance social rights, social protection, inclusion, equal opportunities, and fair working conditions; strengthen skills and support quality job creation; and enhance preparedness for ongoing transitions for all, thereby contributing to fair and inclusive societies.

Guiding policy frameworks

The renewed Exchange of Letters between the Commission on behalf of the European Union and the ILO (2021) reaffirmed and updated the shared policy priorities underpinning cooperation between the two organizations, building on their longstanding partnership and adapting it to evolving transformations in the world of work. This framework was further complemented by the Commission's Communication on promoting decent work worldwide (2022), which articulated how decent work and international labour standards are advanced through its policies and processes. The priorities and objectives reflected in these instruments remain fully relevant and continue to shape the collaboration between the two organizations.

Strategic approach

The cooperation between the Commission and the ILO will take shape in different forms, including through regular dialogue on policy and legislative priorities and normative cooperation, joint research and knowledge sharing, joint initiatives and programmes, including in the framework of the Global Gateway strategy. Both organizations will also explore possibilities to raise the visibility of the ILO-EU collaboration and its results.

Common perspectives and future cooperation

Both organizations will continue to contribute, as appropriate, to each other's initiatives and processes in areas of common interest, building on existing practice and their longstanding partnership; and the outcomes of the three strategic high-level roundtables on Trade and Decent Work; AI and Quality Jobs; and International Partnerships and Commission-ILO Cooperation, which were

organized within the overall framework of the 17th High Level Meeting and form part of the broader cooperation between the Commission and the ILO.

Trade and decent work

In a context of increasing geopolitical fragmentation and pressure on the rules-based trading system, the EU-ILO partnership is emerging as a key lever to anchor trade in shared values. Demand from a growing number of EU trading partners for support in implementing their labour commitments in trade agreements further underscores the importance of a reinforced and joint EU-ILO engagement.

The EU-ILO cooperation has evolved into a mature and trusted partnership with demonstrated impact, offering a credible and practical framework for jointly advancing trade objectives and international labour standards globally. The priority now is to scale proven approaches. By supporting Member States in implementing International Labour Standards, the ILO helps them to align national efforts with labour commitments under EU trade agreements, to maximize decent work outcomes.

A central imperative is to ensure that commitments linked to trade and labour deliver. This requires strong follow up during the implementation stage, supported by systematic mobilisation of ILO expertise and a stronger focus on country-level impact, where reforms, institutions, and social dialogue ultimately shape results.

Work aimed at tackling forced labour is an example of this cooperation. The implementation of the EU Forced Labour Regulation provides an opportunity to build complementary approaches on both sides, combining enforcement efforts with sustained joint engagement on tackling the root causes of forced labour in EU trade partner countries.

At the same time, responsible business conduct and due diligence frameworks are becoming central to translating trade opportunities into tangible

improvements for business and workers across supply chains. Fulfilling this potential at scale will need practical guidance, active support and engagement with businesses, and a strengthened role for social partners.

Looking ahead, greater policy coherence, stronger evidence, and practical guidance supporting governments, enterprises and workers to implement international labour standards, regulations and responsible business conduct will be essential to enhance overall impact. Sustained, more regular and structured strategic dialogue between the Commission and the ILO will be key to maintain momentum, advance shared priorities, and reinforce the EU-ILO partnership as a cornerstone of a fair, predictable, and sustainable global trading system.

AI and quality jobs

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digitalisation are reshaping labour markets and workplaces, creating significant opportunities for productivity, economic growth and innovation, while at the same time, highlighting the need to address challenges relating to working conditions, psychosocial risks, workers' rights, industrial relations, data protection, privacy, and non-discrimination.

The following principles should underpin the deployment of AI and automated technologies in the labour market:

First, AI deployment in the world of work should be human-centred and contribute to the creation and preservation of decent and quality jobs. The new ILO Convention on Decent Work in the Platform Economy is a landmark international instrument, that establishes a global framework of principles, rights and obligations to guide the governance of work in the platform economy across diverse legal, economic and institutional contexts. The Commission's ongoing preparation for a Quality Jobs Act, as well as the forthcoming general discussion on "Harnessing the fullest potential of technology to foster structural transformation of the economy, higher levels of

productivity and decent work for all as a pathway towards social justice” at the 115th International Labour Conference (2027) are of particular relevance in this context. Both organisations will follow these respective processes with interest. Second, strengthening skills development, reskilling and lifelong learning will be essential to ensure that workers can successfully adapt to technological change and that enterprises have access to the skilled workforce needed to seize the opportunities offered by AI. The implementation of the EU's Union of Skills initiative and ongoing ILO work on skills recognition and portability demonstrate complementary efforts to support labour market transitions and skill needs.

Third, social dialogue has a central role to play in the governance and deployment of AI in the world of work and is essential to ensuring that technological change is fair, inclusive and broadly shared. Effective social dialogue can also help reduce digital divides and strengthen trust in the adoption of AI. The ongoing Commission's engagement with the social partners, including currently on the issue of Quality Jobs, as well as the ILO's follow up to the 2026 recurrent discussion on Social Dialogue provide important avenues to strengthening social dialogue in this context.

Fourth, given its global nature, the international dimension of AI governance and the need to promote coherent approaches across international and multilateral fora remains essential. In this context, it is important to build on the ILO's supervisory system, its unique tripartite governance model and the body of international labour standards.

The longstanding collaboration between the ILO and the Commission provides a strong foundation for continued exchanges on AI and its application in the world of work as well as for collaboration in areas of mutual interest, including on the follow up to the new ILO Convention on Decent Work in the Platform Economy, 2026 (No193).

International partnerships and Commission-ILO cooperation

The strategic alignment between the Commission and the ILO, grounded in shared standards and longstanding cooperation, provides a strong foundation for continued cooperation in support of shared development objectives. As the Commission increasingly pursues investment-led partnerships through the Global Gateway, using Team Europe and a broader ecosystem of financing and implementation partners, evolving cooperation models offer opportunities to ensure social and economic development advance hand in hand.

Drawing on international labour standards and the ILO's unique tripartite structure, the Commission-ILO cooperation can help ensure that investment-led partnerships embed rights, the creation of decent jobs, skills development, social protection, labour market institutions and social dialogue from the outset, rather than as parallel or downstream considerations.

The Global Gateway's 360-degree approach provides significant opportunities to strengthen the employment and social dimensions of investment in infrastructure, productive sectors and value chains. Sustainable outcomes depend not only on financing and policy commitments, but also on effective institutions, labour standards and social dialogue to implement reforms in practice. The growing role of international financial institutions (IFIs), development finance institutions and private investors in shaping development outcomes creates new opportunities for the ILO to work closely with these actors to strengthen the employment and social dimensions of national public investment programmes and development finance.

The Southern and Eastern Neighbourhoods as well as the EU enlargement partners through the unique enlargement framework, provide an important context for demonstrating how investment, economic transformation and social inclusion can be advanced together through productive employment, skills

development, labour market governance, social and labour protection and social dialogue.

In the Middle East and North Africa region, EU-ILO cooperation contributes to the three pillars of the Pact for the Mediterranean, and has been key in fostering youth employment, labour mobility and skills, including adapting education and curricula to labour market needs and strengthening tripartite skills councils.

As both institutions adapt to evolving cooperation models, the EU–ILO partnership should increasingly be built around countries' long-term transformation agendas. This means bringing together the EU's investment and policy leverage with the ILO's international labour standards, tripartite governance and technical expertise to help ensure that inclusive growth is accompanied by strong institutions, decent work and social justice from the outset.

Looking ahead

The 17th High-Level Meeting reaffirmed the enduring relevance of the EU-ILO partnership in advancing social justice and decent work for all, at a time when the world of work is undergoing profound transformation. Grounded in the outcomes of the roundtables on trade and decent work, artificial intelligence and quality jobs, and international partnerships both organisations reaffirmed their shared commitment to a human-centred approach to the future of work, in which economic progress and social justice are pursued as mutually reinforcing goals. The Commission and the ILO will continue to deepen their cooperation, mobilising the ILO's normative mandate, tripartite structure and constituency of governments, employers' and workers' organisations alongside the EU's policy and investment instruments, to ensure that growth, trade and investment translate into decent work, stronger social dialogue and more

inclusive labour markets. Both sides look forward to sustaining and consolidating this partnership as a pillar of multilateral cooperation, ahead of the 18th High-Level Meeting.