



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Exploiting the employment potential of green growth

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

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I am grateful for the chance to address you.

May I start by congratulating ETUC on its involvement in the Green Workplaces Network project. It has been extremely useful in terms of learning how to cope with the shift to a low-carbon, resource-efficient economy.

The Commission is convinced that the social partners and social dialogue can and must play a crucial role in ensuring that developing an environmentally sustainable EU economy goes hand in hand with the creation of a sizeable number of quality jobs and a smooth transition for workers currently employed in the sectors affected.

The latest employment data leave little doubt that EU labour markets are in a critical phase.

Unemployment in Europe stood at 10.5% in August, and 11.4% in the euro area. That means more than 25 million EU citizens are out of work.

Those figures are dramatic in both economic and social terms. They demand prompt action by the European Union and the Member States.

The European Commission is ready to do its share. In April we put forward an Employment Package of practical measures to boost job creation.

We identified the green economy as one of the three key sectors with the biggest potential for employment creation in the future — alongside health and social care, and information and communication technologies.

The Commission's action plan on green jobs, which I intend to present today, should reassure you that we are fully aware of the challenges that the transition to a greener economy will mean for employment in Europe.

The greening of the economy offers new job opportunities — and not just in "eco-industries" like water supply, renewable energy production, and waste management and recycling.

Virtually all sectors will be involved in transforming production to make more intelligent use of resources and technology.

That is why our definition of "green jobs" encompasses a wide range of occupations, where the skills and working methods are redefined, replaced or created anew within a greener economy.

Far-sighted policy can contribute significantly to the growth of new "green sectors" and the smooth adaptation of less green-friendly ones.

The Commission will promote all necessary demand-side and supply-side measures that help to drive employment creation.

We know that investing more in low-carbon, resource-efficient industries is vital, but the crisis has severely affected EU investments in renewable energies. These fell by around 24% from 2008 to 2009 in the EU, while they rose by more than 50% in China.

Our analysis shows that an ambitious capital investment policy could generate up to 2.8 million jobs in this sector by 2020.

My services are keen to ensure that the European Investment Bank undertakes to provide funding for public and private ventures in the field of resource efficiency and renewable energy with a specific focus on job creation.

The Member States' recent decision to increase the Bank's capital by an extra €10 billion is a move in that direction.

However necessary they may be, demand-side measures alone cannot ensure that the green economy delivers the results anticipated.

Developing the right skills among workers is vital to their smooth adaptation to the labour market.

As the green economy implies that many jobs in almost all sectors will progressively be redefined, employees will need new skills to meet business growth needs and cope with changes in job profiles.

Of course, the skills needed by a greener economy will not necessarily be new skills.

For instance, in the construction industry, specific “green” skills will probably be needed on top of such existing competencies as an knowledge of sustainable materials, the introduction of new technology and a capacity to assess the environmental impact.

But other skills seem to be increasingly important in emerging green sectors — such as strategic planning, risk analysis and communications to users about new technologies.

EU companies in renewable energy industries — like wind energy — complain of a shortage of such qualified workers as technical engineers, designers and electricians.

This shows there is already a need to tackle the EU’s shortage of skills in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Ensuring that workers have the right skills will be a challenging task. It will mean mapping employers’ fast-evolving needs in emerging and consolidated areas, and delivering suitable training tailored to the individual.

Managing the switchover to new skills is not just in the employer’s interest, but also — and perhaps even more so — in that of the worker too.

In high-carbon industries, the transition to greener production processes will make some skills and occupations obsolete.

Recent OECD and ILO reports point out that the percentage of low-skilled and older workers is higher in such sectors as agriculture, inland waterways, maritime and rail transport, mining and the coal industry.

What is more, depending where these sectors are concentrated, upgrading skills will be more relevant in certain regions and Member States.

The provision of training will be crucial to ensuring that jobs are safeguarded when firms are restructured and workers can be helped to switch to other industries.

That is why the Commission is committed to encouraging close coordination between the EU and the Member States.

At EU level, the Commission will launch the Skills Panorama in December. The aim is to provide information on sector-specific skill demand and supply, including green skills, and labour market dynamics.

The EU will also promote the uptake of standardised skill qualification and certification schemes in line with the EU Directives on energy efficiency, energy performance of buildings, and the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources.

The EU cannot and does not intend to be the only player in this process. The Member States’ full commitment and the involvement of the widest possible range of stakeholders in implementing these policies are vital to achieving effective results.

To that end, the Commission will utilise all instruments available.

First, it will ensure that the employment dimension of resource efficiency and the implementation of the reforms needed are included in the third European Semester and country-specific recommendations for 2013.

There will be special emphasis on encouraging the Member States to shift tax from labour — for instance by calling for greater use of environmental taxes to provide job creation incentives and fund the necessary social protection measures.

For example, environmental taxes can help offset lower social security contributions paid by employers and employees, and increase in-work benefit for the most disadvantaged workers and their households.

Secondly, the Commission will ensure that the challenges of the green economy are mainstreamed in the European Social Fund.

The EU budget will contribute decisively to supporting national and local efforts to deploy suitable active labour market policies and training programmes.

Thirdly, the Commission will promote action to raise awareness and build partnerships on the ground with a view to implementing the right policies.

Industry-level engagement in skill management is vital. Producers' and workers' in-depth knowledge of production processes and work patterns will be crucial to coping with the scale and pace of skill needs.

In line with experience in some countries, industry associations, sector skill councils and chambers of commerce and industry can provide industry-level responses.

For its part, the Commission welcomes the establishment and work of European Sector Skills Councils, which show that social dialogue is effective in tackling skill challenges.

Best practice in the UK and Denmark also involve joint initiatives that bring together local-level actors — such as the social partners, research centres, training-providers and regional development agencies.

Given their detailed knowledge of local needs, local authorities' input is especially valuable here.

The EU will do its part by organising mutual learning actions with relevant labour market actors. It will start by putting together a special programme for public employment services across Europe on such issues as training, job-search assistance, apprenticeships, information campaigns and support for self-employment.

Business and workers' organisations can play a very important role here.

In the Employment Package, the Commission declared its firm intention of involving the EU social partners to a greater extent ahead of and during the European Semester.

The social partners will make a crucial contribution to the design of employment and growth policies in order to ensure that the green economy goes hand in hand with more jobs.

At national and local level, the corroboration of social dialogue and employee representation will help safeguard workers' fundamental rights, equal pay, decent work, and health and safety in the workplace.

In this connection, I regard the contribution of the Green Workplaces Network which you are presenting today as of great value.

In 2013 the Commission will present a handbook of good practice on best bipartite and tripartite initiatives and activities for green employment.

Your work will be an important contribution to this action.

ETUC's activity in this area confirms that social dialogue not only paves the way for effective policy implementation in managing change in production processes, employment and skill transition, but also contributes to ensuring that green jobs will be synonymous of quality jobs for all.

In conclusion, the European Commission sees the endeavour to develop a competitive, low-carbon, resource-efficient economy as an opportunity not to be missed for achieving the dual objectives of job creation and environmental protection.

The sustainable development model we all want to build for the future has more and better jobs at its core.

The policy actions I have presented today seek to convince EU stakeholders and people across Europe that there is a safe way to manage the transition.

We can control the factors that may make the green economy look like a threat to jobs.

The extent to which we can win people's support for a new economic model depends on our joint efforts to identify the right measures and put them into effect.

Naturally, on their own, green jobs will not be enough to solve the EU's dramatic employment challenges.

The Employment Package is much more ambitious in scope and includes a wide variety of actions in a number of other fields.

But green jobs will be a crucial aspect of our joint action to tackle the challenges on the labour market and prevent far-reaching changes in the economy from becoming threats.

I count on you for your support.