Glastuinbouw Nederland
growing for tomorrow today

Position paper

Social Rights, Skills, and Quality Jobs

Fully automatic growing fruit, vegetables, flowers, and plants. That is our ambition for 2050. Robotisation, digitisation, and AI shall phase out manual labour along the value chain – from breeding and cultivation to harvesting and packaging. In our high-tech greenhouses, growers foster the digital transition to tackle labour gaps while advancing competitiveness and sustainability. Upskilling and reskilling workers and recognising qualifications is key to enhance skills intelligence ensuring a fair job transition. Despite skills changing, (migrant) workers remain vital to secure year-round production of the tastiest fruits and vegetables and the prettiest flowers and plants in Europe. To strengthening our human capital, controlled environment agriculture (CEA) welcomes the EU agenda to lifting social rights, retaining skills, and delivering quality jobs.

Fruit and vegetables are not just delicious but healthy too. Europe's growing and aging population does not just need more healthy nutrition in order to be fed, but also to foster its public health and well-being. Meanwhile, flowers and plants green and cool our cities, restore biodiversity, mitigate climate change, and improve people's health.

To meet year-round demand for fruit, vegetables, flowers, and plants in Europe, high-tech systems as CEA enable these crops to be grown as automated as possible. Innovation continues to boost our transition to autonomous growing to reduce our labour demand. Until then, (migrant) labour for harvesting our delicious, healthy, and green crops remains essential. Reinforcing Europe's social market economy, our Human Capital Agenda ensures opportunities, stability, and wellbeing for all workers in this transition.

Delivering quality jobs

Our people are our most valuable asset. Delivering quality jobs keeps working among the fruits, vegetables, flowers, and plants attractive. It supports fair wages, high health and safety standards, good working conditions, training and fair job transitions for workers and self-employed. Collective bargaining agreements – customarily renegotiated annually in CEA – endorse fair wages and a proper pension for retirement. Tackling labour gaps does not depend solely on adequate wages. Ensuring that Europe can draw on all of its talent and potential, it should become financially more beneficial for people to work more or part-time. Raising wages while high labour taxes and ancillary costs such as childcare continue to discourage people from participating (more) in the labour market is not productive. Working more across the EU economy should pay off better.

Healthy and driven workers are the foundation of a healthy and sustainable economy. This goes beyond occupational health and safety. It is about addressing long-term care workforce challenges. By 2050, robots and machines shall replace heavy and repetitive labour in CEA. This makes working in our fruit, vegetables, flowers, and plants production healthier and safer, but also more alluring. Supporting physical and mental health of our workers turns this digital transition into a social transition too. The Human Capital Agenda guides growers to facilitate recognition of skills and qualifications and supporting skilling and career progression for a fair job transition as well as improving working conditions.

Seasonality and local labour gaps move still many migrant workers to CEA. Growers owe an extra duty to protect this vulnerable group of workers. They shall enjoy the same remuneration, good working conditions, and training opportunities as local workers. Ensuring affordable and solid housing is a key pillar in assuring good working conditions for

these workers. Something growers are eager to providing themselves, as skilled workers will continue to be necessary to steer our high-tech, automatic cultivation in the future.

To delivering quality jobs:

- The **European Pillar of Social Rights** should be implemented fully.
- The **Quality Jobs Roadmap** should support employers in providing decent working conditions, high standards for health and safety, access to training and ensuring fair job transition for workers. Standardising conditions and exchanging best practices in upskilling and reskilling could lift Europe's social market economy. Tackling labour gaps does not depend solely on adequate wages. Making it financially beneficial for people to work more or part-time will help to close this gap. Raising (minimum) wages mainly increases costs for employers, while reducing labour taxes and ancillary costs would actually stimulate people to participate in the labour market.
- **Facilitating labour mobility** should coincide with a stronger, Europe-wide standards for the certification and regulation of temp agencies to protect migrant and flexible workers across the Union. Assuring that only sound agencies operate in the internal market through standardisation, oversight, and enforcement, safeguards migrant workers' fair wages and working conditions regardless of nationality or job.
- The **European Affordable Housing Plan** should encourage Member States to allow construction of housing for own workers on commercial property to decrease impact on the local housing market whereas clinching sound housing as basic working condition. This requires the development of a business case for high-quality housing. To raise the productivity of housing supply, fatal deadlines should be included in the permitting procedure to speeding up permitting with granting a permit by operation of law if these deadlines are unjustifiably exceeded.

Enhancing skills intelligence

Robots taking over repetitive tasks makes work not just healthier and more appealing, but also creates opportunities for development and quality jobs. Labour will therefore remain necessary, but the skills required will change. Robotisation in CEA shall thus create a fair working environment in which workers want to work longer. This transition to heads- and hands-free growing desires investment in (vocational) education and training preparing workers for the changes that robotisation will bring. This requires aligning education with the skills and knowledge needed to meet the industry's latest ambitions. Through lifelong learning, these skills and this knowledge could be absorbed by existing workers as well. Matching the innovation agendas of growers with training programmes of workers stimulates this upskilling and reskilling securing a fair job transition.

To enhancing skills intelligence:

- The **Pact for Skills** should develop triple helix partnerships to upskill and reskill workers in key industrial processes like CEA. The innovation needs of businesses to strengthen their competitiveness and sustainability should be better aligned with skills development at education and research institutes. Workers are crucial to shaping these industrial transitions. The triple helix (i.e., governments, education, and businesses) must invest in an active learning culture – such as lifelong learning – and endorse this by continuously diversifying the range of courses and learning methods on offer based on industrial needs. Businesses shall be closely involved in the education and research agenda of (local) knowledge institutes to align skills development with ongoing innovations in the sector. These institutes are consequently able to assisting workers in upskilling and reskilling.

- The **European Strategy for Vocational Education and Training** should accelerate the adoption of research and innovation from European life sciences in businesses. Vocational education and training should prosper new skills and competences at the intersection of identifying research questions at farm level to anew feed fundamental research, transferring knowledge and innovation, interdisciplinary thinking, and digitisation in line with the **Action Plan on Basic Skills** and the **STEM Education Strategy Plan**. Education and training institutes should opt for a stronger interaction with the industry to meet skills demand at company level and establish joint education and training programmes to match these needs. The transfer of fundamental knowledge gained by EU life sciences to practice also craves an upgraded link with education and more deployment research.
- The **Talent Pool** would address labour shortages in the EU – especially in critical sectors, including CEA – while preventing illegal migration and exploitation. The envisaged platform should reinforce EU level coordination, reducing risk of fragmented Member State recruitment and misuse of labour mobility. Promoting circular migration enables workers to gain skills in Europe and contribute later to economic development in their home countries. Accordingly, this Talent Pool balances economic needs with human-centred, regulated migration policies that support both the European economy as well as neighbouring countries.

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