



Joint ETUC-TUC statement on a common sense EU-UK deeper cooperation

Adopted at the Executive Committee meeting of 19-20 May 2026

The ETUC and the TUC welcome the renewed momentum in the EU-UK partnership as an opportunity to protect and expand quality jobs, defend rights, and foster shared prosperity across Europe. We reiterate our joint call for a pragmatic, worker-centred relationship that reduces frictions in trade and increases job opportunities while prioritising high labour and social standards, stopping any race to the bottom.

We note the progress already achieved, including the UK's association to Erasmus+, and ongoing negotiations. These developments demonstrate that constructive cooperation is both possible and beneficial. The agreement in respect of Gibraltar, now operational, illustrates how pragmatic solutions can reduce barriers, support local economies, and improve the daily lives of workers and communities.

Against a backdrop of geopolitical instability, trade tensions, and security risks, a deeper EU-UK relationship is more necessary than ever. It must deliver tangible improvements for working people, strengthen economic resilience, and support a fair and sustainable future. Deepening relations cannot be measured solely in economic or diplomatic terms – it must improve working lives, address the cost-of-living crisis, and reinforce shared stability.

The ETUC and the TUC call for the next EU-UK summit to deliver concrete outcomes that deliver real benefits for workers in key priority areas resting on the governance structure of the existing trade agreement, and stand ready to engage constructively.

Workers' rights and social standards

A core condition for closer cooperation is a firm commitment by both parties to uphold and strengthen high standards in employment rights, health and safety, and social protection. However, existing provisions are not sufficient to ensure upward convergence. We need a requirement for the UK to adopt new EU labour standards, as well as the rights included in the European Pillar of Social Rights, combined with adequate safeguards against deregulation in the EU. What we now need is a level playing field 2.0 that should include:

- A structured regulatory dialogue under Article 399 TCA to promote common high standards and a shared commitment to advancing high levels of worker protection;
- Full involvement of trade unions as social partners at all stages; stronger participation of UK unions in European social dialogue and reintegration of UK trade unions into European Works Councils;
- Continued respect for commitments under the Withdrawal Agreement and the Windsor Framework, including the non-diminution of rights in Northern Ireland.





Trade facilitation and economic integration

Reducing trade barriers and border frictions is essential to protect jobs and maintain integrated supply chains. Dynamic alignment on standards is key to achieving this, as recognised in SPS negotiations between the EU and UK. Priority areas include:

- chemicals and pharmaceuticals;
- strengthened energy cooperation, including electricity markets and renewables;
- support for strategic industries such as automotive, steel, aerospace, and defence;
- robust digital and AI frameworks with protections for platform workers;
- conditionality for procurement to protect workers' rights and promote collective bargaining;
- agri-food sector.

Highly integrated supply chains call for the UK's inclusion in relevant European industrial initiatives, and the ETUC and TUC will work together on trade union tests to ensure the Industrial Accelerator Act, the Made in Europe approach and the SAFE scheme promote good jobs.

Any deepening of economic relations must exclude public services including rail from liberalisation, ensure fair taxation, and be underpinned by comprehensive mobility arrangements, including for touring artists, with mutual recognition of professional qualifications. It must also ensure full rights for workers to prevent workers being used to undercut one another; provide support for workers and communities affected by economic change, both in the EU and the UK and avoiding the shortcomings in the implementation of the Brexit Adjustment Reserve; and support, safeguard and promote quality jobs.

Defence and geopolitical cooperation

Renewed discussions on EU-UK defence cooperation reflect shared security challenges and the need to strengthen European capabilities. Such cooperation should be embedded in stable frameworks and support joint development where appropriate, but also the joint pursuit of peaceful solutions to conflicts with full respect for international law.

For trade unions, this must prioritise good jobs, high labour standards, transparency in supply chains, and investment in skills and training. Security only comes with social justice, therefore public investment must have clear social conditionalities attached.

Global instability and shifting trade dynamics reinforce the need for a closer relationship between the UK and EU and for strengthened cooperation in external trade policy to promote sustainable development standards globally, increasing resilience of supply chains to external shocks. Moreover, cooperation on migration must abide by international law on rescue at sea and ensure the highest standard in terms of fundamental rights and human dignity.

The ETUC and the TUC believe that a closer EU-UK partnership must be rooted in shared values, high standards, and a clear commitment to improving the lives of working people. Pragmatic cooperation shows what can be achieved when both sides work constructively together. Building on this, we call on EU and UK leaders to deliver an ambitious agenda that deepens cooperation while placing workers, rights, and social progress at its core.