

European Social Partners' Autonomous Framework Agreement on Active Ageing and an Inter-generational Approach

INTERPRETATION GUIDE





With the financial support of the European Commission

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PREFACE

The negotiations of an autonomous framework agreement on Active Ageing and an Inter-generational Approach (AAIA) were part of the 2015-2017 Work Programme of the European Social Partners. Building on the conclusions of a joint fact-finding seminar (9 February 2016 – Brussels), the negotiations started in March 2016 and finished in December 2016.

The ETUC (and its liaison committee EUROCADRES/CEC), BusinessEurope, CEEP and SMEunited (formerly named UEAPME) signed this framework agreement on 8 March 2017 at the Tripartite Social Summit, after approval by the respective decision-making bodies of these organisations.

It must be implemented by all member organisations of the ETUC, BusinessEurope, CEEP and SMEunited in accordance with the procedures and practices specific to management and labour as specified in Article 155 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and within 3 years after its signature (i.e. before 8 March 2020).

This interpretation guide provides an overview on the content of the agreement, chapter by chapter, focusing on the main issues at stake as discussed throughout the negotiations.

It is intended to support the ETUC member organisations in the implementation of the content of the agreement and to allow better monitoring and evaluation of the results achieved. It is also hoped that this guide will help to enhance the dissemination and awareness of this agreement and its content among social partners, workers and the public at large.

It is thereby also to be noted that the European Pillar of Social Rights, as solemnly proclaimed by the Council, Parliament and Commission on 17 November 2017 in Gothenburg, Sweden, recognised and highlighted the importance of this framework agreement in particular in relation to the implementation of the Pillars Principle 10 b on “Healthy, safe and well-adapted work environment and data protection” and which states that “(...) b. Workers have the right to a working environment adapted to their professional needs and which enables them to prolong their participation in the labour market. (...)”.

According to the accompanying documents, “Principle 10b introduces two inter-related rights: first, it goes beyond the protection of health and safety by affording workers the right to a working environment adapted to their specific occupational circumstances. Secondly, in accordance also with the principle of active ageing, it recognises the need to adapt the working environment in order to enable workers to have sustainable and longer working careers.

Certain adaptations, such as for example better lighting for carrying out clerical work, may be necessary due to the worker's age. In addition, adjustments, such as more flexible working hours, may be necessary to maintain older workers' health and well-being".

As for the concrete implementation, the Commission highlights that "At Union level, social partners ... can promote and develop joint standards at national or Union level to adapt workplaces to accommodate active aging and intergenerational approach. European social partners signed on 8 March 2017 an autonomous agreement on active ageing and intergenerational approach also covering health and safety to be implemented by national social partners by 2020. Social partners may also collect and exchange good practices across the Union. At national level, social partners may support the implementation of this Principle via collective bargaining and through their involvement in the design and implementation of relevant policies."¹

¹ European Commission (2017) Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying the document COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS Establishing a European Pillar of Social Rights, SWD(2017) 201 final, Brussels, 26 April 2017.



INTRODUCTION

TEXT OF AGREEMENT	INTERPRETATION/COMMENT
<p>In response to the challenges deriving from demographic change, the European social partners, BusinessEurope, UEAPME, CEEP and the ETUC (and the liaison committee EUROCADRES/CEC), agreed in the context of their 2015-2017 Work Programme to negotiate an autonomous framework agreement on active ageing and an intergenerational approach.</p>	<p>The negotiation of an AAIA Agreement is an autonomous bipartite initiative taken by the social partners and for the social partners in the context of their 2015-2017 Social Dialogue Work Programme. The term 'demographic change' refers to the longer life expectancy, the mostly ageing workforce in the European Union, and implicitly the – regrettable– fact that in most countries the legally established pension age limit has been raised. The 'challenges' deriving from this are twofold: making sure workplaces are adapted to enable older workers to continue working in good health and good working conditions and also proactively ensuring a smooth transition between older and younger workers when the older workers retire.</p>
<p>The European social partners note that measures need to be implemented, where necessary at national, sectoral and/or company levels, to make it easier for older workers to actively participate and stay in the labour market until the legal retirement age, and at the same time make sure that measures are taken in order to ease inter-generational transitions in the context of high youth unemployment.</p>	<p>They recognise that measures have to be implemented at all levels and they define already the frame and the objectives of the agreement in a balanced way:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• to make it easier for older workers to actively participate and stay in the labour market until the legal retirement age,• and at the same time make sure that measures are taken in order to ease inter-generational transitions in the context of high youth unemployment. <p>Trade unions are certain and convinced that measures need to be taken, even though the agreement stipulates 'where necessary', which is a result of a compromise between social partners.</p>

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<p>Such measures should be aimed at significantly improving the ability of workers of all ages to stay in the labour market, healthy and active until the legal retirement age, as well as strengthening a culture of responsibility, commitment, respect and dignity in all workplaces where all workers are valued as important irrespective of age.</p>	<p>The introduction also specifies the aims of the various measures. The language is balanced in this paragraph and the same wording will be used later in the agreement (“healthy” for trade unions and “active” for the employers). The expression ‘of all ages’ illustrates the life cycle approach of the agreement which is jointly shared.</p>
<p>This framework agreement constitutes the contribution of the social partners to the EU policies (including non-discrimination legislation) and actions which have already been developed to support active ageing and the intergenerational approach. This agreement therefore aims to build upon and enhance the existing measures and approaches that are in place in different contexts across Europe. It outlines tools/ measures to be taken into account by social partners and/or HR managers in the context of national demographic and labour market realities, and in accordance with national practices and procedures specific to management and labour.</p>	<p>The European Social Partners wanted to underline that this agreement was negotiated in the context of various EU policies, including the European Pillar of Social Rights, and constitutes their bipartite contribution to face the identified challenges. For trade unions, the key aspect was the need to take measures collectively, through collective bargaining, rather than letting HR managers unilaterally decide things. Once again, the wording ‘and/ or HR managers’ is a result of the compromise we needed to achieve.</p>
<p>The framework agreement is based on the principle that ensuring active ageing and the inter-generational approach requires a shared commitment on the part of employers, workers and their representatives.</p>	<p>Social Partners acknowledge the key responsibility they have and the role they can play as representatives of workers and employers.</p>
<p>The social partners are aware of the fact that successfully addressing the challenges deriving from demographic change does not depend exclusively on their action. EU and national public authorities and other actors have responsibilities in terms of ensuring that there is a framework which encourages and promotes active ageing and the inter-generational approach.</p>	<p>They then point out that they are, of course, not the only actors involved in the field of demographic change. The role of public authorities, as well as other actors, is equally as important and requires partnerships (particularly in the fields mentioned in this paragraph).</p>

AIMS

TEXT OF AGREEMENT	INTERPRETATION/COMMENT
<p>With this autonomous agreement, European social partners establish a general action-oriented framework, aiming at:</p>	<p>This agreement must be seen as an action-oriented reference document that can be used and adapted by social partners at all levels according to their agendas, needs and problems. Trade unions clearly believe it's necessary to not simply put words on paper, but to practically implement the agreement, i.e. to 'act'.</p> <p>This paragraph, amongst others, also indicates that Active Ageing policies must be seen as collective issues/challenges and not as something that is solely focused on individual workers or between individuals.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Increasing the awareness and understanding of employers, workers and their representatives of the challenges and opportunities deriving from demographic change; B. Providing employers, workers and their representatives at all levels with practical approaches and/or measures to promote and manage active ageing in an effective manner; 	<p>Awareness raising and better understanding of the AAIA issues are certainly key for trade unions, for employers and also for society. But this aim has to be considered as a first step and is obviously not enough. Future needs for labour can be met by well-qualified workers who would otherwise have left the labour market.</p> <p>Indeed, concrete policies of promotion and management of active ageing at all levels, but especially in companies/public sector organisations, are the key aim of this agreement. They have to be practical, concrete and effective.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C. Ensuring and maintaining a healthy, safe and productive working environment; 	<p>This aim follows what is described above in the definitions. The collective approach is illustrated by the 'working environment' and the adjectives are also balanced: 'healthy and safe' (which should be interpreted as 'quality') for trade unions and 'productive' for the employers.</p>

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<p>D. Fostering innovative life-cycle approaches with productive and quality jobs to enable people to remain in work until legal retirement age;</p>	<p>As already mentioned, words are important and also symbolic during a negotiation. This specific aim is the result of the last long (and successful) exchange with the employers. Trade unions wanted to have an aim with a clear commitment linked to the quality of employment, which was not at all the objective of employers. The life-cycle dimension is also important and underlined in various parts of the agreement. The European social partners jointly wanted to address the different stages of a career and its possible developments.</p>
<p>E. Facilitating exchanges, mutual cooperation and fostering concrete actions to transfer knowledge and experience between generations at the workplace.</p>	<p>This last aim is linked to the intergenerational dimension and highlights the importance of mutual cooperation and the fact that transferring knowledge and experience goes both ways.</p>

DESCRIPTION

This part of the agreement was negotiated at the end of the process and this agreed wording is the result of long discussions. For this reason the two definitions are general rather than precise, but the objective is that they give a frame to the two key issues of Active Ageing and an Inter-generational Approach.

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<p>Active ageing is about optimising opportunities for workers of all ages to work in good quality, productive and healthy conditions until legal retirement age, based on mutual commitment and motivation of employers and workers.</p>	<p>In this definition, we can identify the key words of both sides: ‘good quality and healthy’ conditions for the trade unions; ‘productive’ conditions for the employers. Here again, the trade unions wanted to focus on the collective approach (the conditions) and the employers on the individuals (motivation). Trade Unions stress once again the fact that the conditions must be good quality and are applicable to all workers.</p>
<p>Intergenerational approach refers to building on the strengths and the objective situation of all generations, improving mutual understanding and supporting cooperation and solidarity between generations at the workplace.</p>	<p>This definition was easier to negotiate. The respective perspectives of employers and unions were quite close and already discussed during the negotiations of the Framework of Actions on Youth Employment. The importance of bridges between generations and the fact that the European social partners do not oppose young people and elderly workers and their interests was a joint concern of employers and trade unions. The reference to solidarity is an important element for trade unions.</p>

SOCIAL PARTNERS' TOOLS, MEASURES AND ACTIONS

This section of the agreement covers five action areas with a description of some tools and measures which could be used to tackle each of the five areas identified.

A - Strategic assessments of workforce demography

TEXT OF AGREEMENT	INTERPRETATION/COMMENT
<p>Social partners recognise the added value of strategic assessments of workforce demography, carried out and periodically updated at the appropriate levels, in accordance with national practices and procedures.</p>	<p>This section is central to how to tackle the demographic challenge which was one of the fundamental drivers behind the agreement. A strategic assessment of the workforce is the starting point in identifying the challenges and opportunities and consequently developing appropriate actions. Such strategic assessments are foreseen at the appropriate levels depending on the industrial relations context at national level. Furthermore, assessments should be undertaken periodically to ensure that the social partners have all the relevant information needed to understand and address the demographic trends in the labour market.</p> <p>The commitment to a strategic assessment by the social partners was a clear demand by the trade unions. A strategic assessment in this context is intended to be more action oriented than a mere report or survey. For these reasons this was the first action area addressed during the negotiation, and the discussions were lengthy in comparison to the time dedicated to the other action areas.</p>
<p>Such assessments by social partners/management should take advantage of already existing activities, thereby avoiding unnecessary reporting requirements and could lead them to develop tools more tailored and adapted to the needs of workers and enterprises, notably SMEs.</p>	<p>The commitment of social partners to undertake a strategic assessment of workforce demography should take into account the outcomes of already existing activities wherever such activities could contribute to the development of better tools.</p>

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<p>These strategic assessments could amongst others include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Current and projected age pyramid, including gender aspects; B. Skills, qualifications and experience; C. Working conditions; D. Job specific health and safety considerations in particular for arduous occupations; E. Developments linked to digitalisation and innovation. 	<p>This is a non-exhaustive list of factors which should be considered when developing joint assessments on workforce demography.</p> <p>These factors were highlighted as the most relevant areas to focus on in order to develop actions in the other 4 action areas below.</p> <p>The strategic assessment should provide a comprehensive overview of workforce demography with a view to identifying action areas as well as to develop better targeted measures. The measures taken should also account for the demands placed on workers to remain longer in the workforce as well as the challenges and opportunities coming from digitalisation.</p>
<p>These strategic assessments would help to provide a basis for employers, workers and/or their representatives, in accordance with national practices and procedures, to evaluate risks and opportunities and take necessary actions to adapt to changing demographics, as set out in the following sections of the agreement. However, many of the actions foreseen in this agreement can be undertaken without the completion of such assessments.</p>	<p>The strategic assessments should provide a basis to identify challenges which need to be addressed. The next step is for employers, workers and/or their representatives to develop the necessary tools to resolve the issues identified, keeping in mind the actions suggested in the other 4 action areas below.</p> <p>While a strategic assessment of workforce demography is a useful tool in identifying challenges and opportunities, social partners can still agree on specific actions without already having undertaken such an assessment. However, trade unions recommend to firstly make an assessment before actions are undertaken.</p>
<p>Social partners have also a role to disseminate information on effective tools within their membership, including based on practice in other European countries, and to transfer the necessary know-how on how to use them.</p>	<p>Social partners play a central role in addressing active ageing, therefore they need to take into account the need to share and promote the tools they develop. Sharing can help to identify best practices.</p>

B - Health and safety at the workplace

TEXT OF AGREEMENT	INTERPRETATION/COMMENT
<p>The social partners at the appropriate levels aim to promote and facilitate action at the workplace based on proper information, identifying for instance the tasks which are particularly physically and/or mentally demanding. This should be done to anticipate, prevent and assess risks for health and safety at the workplace, in accordance with the EU framework directive on health and safety at work (89/391/EEC). This should indicate whether practicable adjustments to the working environment are necessary to prevent or reduce identified excessive physical or mental demands on workers to allow them to be safe and healthy while at work until the legal retirement age.</p>	<p>Health and safety was a fundamental demand of the trade unions during the negotiations. Social partner actions should focus on the anticipation of risks through risk assessments and prevention measures. Alongside the existing legal requirements, social partners should actively seek to develop tools to ensure workers of all ages remain safe and healthy. Social partners are required to take all necessary steps to ensure the health and safety of workers. Even though the text stipulates 'excessive' physical or mental demands, for trade unions, all physical or mental demands can be considered.</p>
<p>Tools/measures to support health and safety at the workplace could amongst others include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Adjustment of work processes and workplaces; B. Re-distribution/allocation of tasks to workers; C. Effective prevention strategies and risk assessment, taking into account existing legislative obligations, including training of all workers on health and safety rules at the workplace; D. Voluntary health promotion including, for example awareness raising actions; E. Knowledge-building of management at the appropriate levels in order to address challenges and possible solutions in this field; F. Health and safety measures taking account of the physical and psychological health of workers; G. Review of health and safety measures between management and health and safety representatives, in accordance with existing legislative requirements. 	<p>As in the other action areas of this section, this is a list of non-exhaustive tools which social partners shall consider when addressing the issue of health and safety in the workplace from the perspective of active ageing.</p> <p>These tools seek to highlight some aspects of work which should be addressed to ensure that workers remain healthy and safe as they progress towards retirement, such as task allocation and workplace adjustment. For example, reducing shift work, reducing night work, slowing the pace of assembly lines, increasing the number of workers during a shift, working time reduction, etc.</p> <p>An important aspect to maintain is the collective approach, which is reflected in the reference to workplaces, work processes, "all workers", etc.</p> <p>Health and safety measures should be designed to ensure that both the physical and psychological health of workers is not negatively</p>

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	<p>impacted. This is particularly important as the health situation of workers may evolve over the course of their working lives.</p> <p>Health and safety representatives should be involved with reviewing the appropriateness of health and safety measures in the workplace.</p>

C - Skills and competence management

<p>The approach should be to support skills development and lifelong learning, thus, fostering workers' employability and maximizing the enterprises' human capital in terms of competences and know-how.</p>	<p>Regarding skills and competence management, a lifelong learning approach is important, along with the perspective of career development.</p>
<p>Regarding skills and competence management, a lifelong learning approach is important, along with the perspective of career development.</p>	<p>Access to training is a key factor to help workers develop their skill levels throughout their career. A broad training offer is required to ensure that workers have every chance to engage in continuing education.</p> <p>This section is central also to the inter-generational approach as all workers should have fair access to training, regardless of age.</p>
<p>Tools/measures to support skills and competences management could amongst others include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Awareness-raising towards management and workers' representatives of skills needs in an age perspective; B. Training for workers of all ages, aiming to maintain and further develop necessary knowledge and competence throughout their careers to remain at work until legal retirement age; C. Facilitate and support personal career development and mobility; 	<p>Social partners have an important role in highlighting the different skills needs as workers progress through their career, and awareness raising can be a good first step to developing actions which address these needs.</p> <p>Training measures should be viewed with the lifelong learning perspective to ensure workers have the opportunity to develop competences and engage in training opportunities throughout their career. This includes the possibility of mobility within a sector as well as from one sector to another.</p>

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<p>D. Motivate and increase participation in training to ensure up-to-date skills in particular digital skills;</p> <p>E. Embedding age management into broader skills development;</p> <p>F. Identifying formal and informal competences that workers have acquired in the course of their working life.</p>	<p>Digitalisation is affecting workplaces and therefore digital skills needs of all workers should be addressed to ensure that they have the means to remain in suitable employment until legal retirement age.</p> <p>As workers progress through their career they gain various skills and competences, and it is important that such formal and informal competences which workers have already obtained are identified so as to make it easier for workers to move to another (better) job or function (be it with their current employer or a new employer), to increase their career opportunities.</p>

D - Work organisation for healthy and productive working lives

<p>The social partners at the appropriate levels aim to support and encourage enterprises to adapt work organisation, in accordance with the needs of enterprises and workers. The purpose is to foster healthy and productive working lives in a life course perspective.</p>	<p>Adapting work organisation in view of active ageing and an inter-generational approach is addressed directly in this section. The specific needs of the workers (and companies) should be taken into account.</p> <p>The wording is carefully chosen to reflect both the perspective of the workers (healthy) and the company (productivity).</p>
<p>Social partners and/or management should facilitate, promote and encourage implementation of adaptable work organisation over the life course. This should be done collectively and/or individually, in accordance with the social dialogue practices at the workplace.</p>	<p>A clear responsibility exists for social partners to implement adaptable work organisation. For example, reducing shift work, reducing night work, slowing the pace of assembly lines, increasing the number of workers during a shift, working time reduction, etc. This should be seen in the context of the previous paragraph to foster healthy and productive working lives. In addition, the life course perspective is highlighted again as a frame for actions addressing work organisations.</p>

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<p>Management in enterprises has a role in identifying possible improvements in terms of task allocation, and to maintain and improve health and safety at work and productivity of the workers they manage.</p>	<p>This paragraph sets out a clear responsibility of management to actively reconsider task allocation to ensure a healthy and safe workplace.</p>
<p>Tools/measures on work organisation for healthy and productive working lives could amongst others include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Fostering the capacity of both young and older workers to better anticipate and adapt to changes in work organisation, to maximise the potential of human resources; B. Working arrangements, including with regard to working time; C. Adapting allocation of tasks between workers; D. Providing necessary means to managers on age related issues; E. Fighting stereotypes related to age, for example by establishing mixed-aged teams; F. Transition measures for older workers towards the end of their working life; G. Recruitment of new staff. 	<p>Once again, this is a non-exhaustive list of tools which can be explored to address issues related to work organisation. Some of the more obvious issues such as working time and task allocation are covered. In addition, the inter-generational aspect is also included through activities such as the need to fight stereotypes related to age and establishing mixed age teams. An important aspect of the agreement is to avoid setting up a dynamic whereby young and older workers are in competition, but rather to find an added value of addressing the needs of both. Lastly, it is important to note the important reference to organising work in such a way as to facilitate the transition towards retirement. This is strongly linked to the trade union demand of being able to retire with dignity. The recruitment of new staff is not only necessary to get young (and older) workers out of unemployment, but also, for example, to be able to increase the number of workers during a shift.</p>

E – Inter-generational approach

<p>The social partners at the appropriate levels aim to achieve a working environment which enables workers of all generations and ages to work together to enhance cooperation and inter-generational solidarity. One means to achieve this is mutual transfer of knowledge and experience between different age groups of workers.</p>	<p>A full action area is dedicated to the inter-generational approach even though some aspects are mainstreamed through the other action areas (e.g. fighting stereotypes related to age, training for workers of all ages).</p> <p>This section seeks to underscore the importance of inter-generational solidarity and to promote actions which benefit both younger and older workers.</p>
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TEXT OF AGREEMENT	INTERPRETATION/COMMENT
<p>All workers should be valued according to their abilities, skills and knowledge, irrespective of age, avoiding stereotyping and overcoming barriers between age groups, where they exist.</p>	<p>Another reference to the need to avoid stereotyping reinforces the overall theme that workers should not be judged based on their age.</p>
<p>Tools/measures to achieve inter-generational solidarity could amongst others include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Distributing tasks according to ability/skills/knowledge; B. Tutoring/mentoring/coaching schemes to welcome and introduce younger workers to their working environment, including paths to allow them to fulfil their potential; C. Knowledge/skills transfer programmes, both younger towards older workers and older towards younger workers, including IT and digital skills, transversal skills, customer relations skills, as appropriate; D. The creation of knowledge banks to capture specific know how and professional intelligence developed in-house and pass it on to newcomers; E. Awareness-raising on the importance of being age positive and promotion of age diversity including considering different possibilities regarding the balance between ages within teams; F. Collaboration with education institutions or public employment services to ease transitions into and within the labour market. 	<p>This last action area follows the same method by providing a non-exhaustive list of tools and measures which are aimed at addressing the most prominent aspects of the inter-generational approach.</p> <p>Skills transfer programmes from younger to older workers and vice versa are a good example of the inter-generational approach. These skills transfers should include, amongst others, transversal skills which can be relevant throughout a worker's career.</p> <p>A good first step to supporting the inter-generational approach is awareness raising on the importance of being age positive. Age diversity within the workplace and ensuring mixed age teams</p> <p>Making the transition from education into the workplace can be a difficult step for many young workers, actions to address this could be mentoring schemes and career path development.</p> <p>Lastly, other actors, apart from the social partners, may have an important role to play in facilitating the transition into the labour market, and social partners should make efforts to collaborate with education providers and public employment services.</p>

IMPLEMENTATION AND FOLLOW-UP

TEXT OF AGREEMENT	INTERPRETATION/COMMENT
<p>This framework agreement is an autonomous initiative and the result of negotiations between the European social partners as part of their fifth multiannual work programme for 2015-2017 on “Partnership for inclusive growth and employment”.</p>	<p>This paragraph recalls that this framework agreement consists of a clear result of the autonomous social dialogue as foreseen under the 5th joint work programme 2015-2017.</p>
<p>In the context of article 155 of the Treaty, this autonomous European framework agreement commits the members of BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC (and the liaison committee EUROCADRES/CEC) to promote and to implement tools and measures, where necessary at national, sectoral and/or company levels, in accordance with the procedures and practices specific to management and labour in the Member States and in the countries of the European Economic Area.</p>	<p>The implementation of the autonomous agreement is thus binding for all member organisations of the signatory parties. Therefore it contains a clear engagement on the part of the member organisations to commit themselves to implementing the framework agreement. Compared to the first autonomous agreements the words “to promote” were added and the engagement relates thus not only anymore to the implementation but also the promotion. The dissemination and the awareness raising of the framework agreements are a pivotal step in ensuring an effective implementation.</p>
<p>The signatory parties also invite their member organisations in candidate countries to implement this agreement.</p>	<p>Hereby, reference is made to member organisations in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania and Turkey, and of course any other country which will be accepted as a candidate country to the European Union in the future.</p>
<p>The implementation of this agreement will be carried out within three years after the date of signature of this agreement.</p>	<p>This thus means that the final deadline for implementation is 7 March 2020.</p>
<p>Member organisations will report on the implementation of this agreement to the Social Dialogue Committee. During the first three</p>	<p>Concretely, the reporting system entails the provision and adoption of a yearly overview on the implementation process to the Social</p>

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<p>years after the date of signature of this agreement, the Social Dialogue Committee will prepare and adopt a yearly table summarising the on-going implementation of the agreement. A full report on the implementation actions taken will be prepared by the Social Dialogue Committee and adopted by the European social partners during the fourth year.</p>	<p>Dialogue Committee in 2018, 2019 and 2020. This offers also a yearly opportunity to look at and where necessary discuss problems of implementation in the Social Dialogue Committee. A joint final implementation report is foreseen in 2021.</p>
<p>In case of no reporting and/or implementation after four years and after evaluation in, and when supported by, the Social Dialogue Committee, the European social partners will engage in joint actions together with the national social partners of the countries concerned in order to identify the best way forward in implementing this framework agreement in the national context.</p>	<p>This paragraph is a completely new initiative of the European Social Partners, inspired by the Framework of Actions on Youth Employment. This new commitment means that EU SPs will propose joint possible actions after the 4 year-period in order to continue to support our affiliates where needed.</p>
<p>The signatory parties shall evaluate and review the agreement any time after the five years following the date of signature, if requested by one of them.</p>	<p>Furthermore, an evaluation and a review of the autonomous agreement can be made after 5 years, if requested by one of the signatory parties</p>
<p>In case of questions on the content of this agreement, member organisations involved can jointly or separately refer to the signatory parties, who will jointly or separately reply.</p>	<p>As in previous agreements, the European social partners have the possibility to jointly or separately reply to questions on content and interpretation which are addressed to them.</p>
<p>When implementing this agreement, the members of the signatory parties avoid unnecessary burdens on SMEs.</p>	<p>While recognising the need to avoid unnecessary burdens for SME's, the agreement must thus also be implemented in these companies</p>

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<p>Implementation of this agreement does not constitute valid grounds to reduce the general level of protection afforded to workers in the field of this agreement.</p>	<p>This so-called “non-regression” clause ensures that neither the transposition nor the application of the framework agreement can constitute valid grounds for reducing the general level of protection afforded to workers. In other words, social partners and/or Member States cannot use the transposition or application of the directive as a pretext for reducing the level of protection acquired prior to the transposition of the framework agreement.</p>
<p>This agreement does not prejudice the right of social partners to conclude, at the appropriate level, including European level, agreements adapting and/or complementing this agreement in a manner which will take note of the specific needs of the social partners concerned.</p>	<p>There is a right for social partners at all levels to conclude agreements adapting and/or complementing this agreement in order to take account of the specific needs of the social partners. It is not allowed in such a process to agree on changes that would put into question the equality principles contained in the European agreement for workers.</p>

This ETUC interpretation guide was edited by Peter Scherrer (ETUC Deputy General Secretary and ETUC Spokesperson during the negotiations), Juliane Bir (ETUC Senior Advisor), Ruairi Fitzgerald (ETUC Advisor) and Stefan Clauwaert (ETUI Senior Researcher) (all members of the ETUC's "Active Ageing and Intergenerational Approach" negotiation delegation).



ETUC - European Trade Union Confederation
CES - Confédération européenne des syndicats

Boulevard du Roi Albert II, 5
B - 1210 Brussels
Tel +32 (0)2 224 04 11
E-mail etuc@etuc.org
www.etuc.org