



Edited by Luigi Ulgiati, UGL Deputy Secretary, member of the EESC

N. 125 5th of december 2024

THE EESC AND THE FUTURE ENLARGEMENT OF THE UNION

EU enlargement will offer the European Union the opportunity to achieve greater autonomy in food production and to become an even more important global trading partner, while spreading its high standards of social, environmental and economic sustainability. This very stimulating topic was addressed in the Opinion INT/1058 «Single Market/ Future enlargement of the Union», adopted at the meeting of the Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption of the EESC (European Economic and Social Committee), held recently in Brussels and attended by Councillor Luigi Ulgiati. Today, compared to when the foundations of the Single Market were laid, the international scene has changed profoundly and Europe is losing its place in the world order, with its competitiveness declining to the advantage of the United States and

China. With the prospect of a future enlargement, the stages of which for the six western Balkan States have been reactivated after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, in order to increase the EU's productivity, the fundamentals of the Single Market need to be updated and aligned to adapt to a world undergoing a series of structural transformations. "To ensure the success of enlargement - said Ulgiati - broader and more comprehensive reforms are needed so that the economies of the candidate Countries can cope with the competitive pressure of the single market and create competitive and sustainable enterprises. Moreover - added the EESC member - any enlargement must have a strong social dimension that promotes inclusive prosperity, ensuring fair opportunities, workers rights and social protection for all citizens".

EU AND FORCED LABOUR

The reality of forced labour, including child labour, is widespread throughout the world in many sectors such as textiles and mining, agriculture and services. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that there are approximately 27.6 million people in forced labour worldwide, 3.3 million of whom are children. In this context, the EU Council adopted a few days ago a Regulation banning trade in products obtained through forced labour, thus creating the legal framework to combat the problem. The ban covers both imports of such goods onto the European market and exports from the Union. The new rules will allow the European Union to ban and remove a product from the single market if it is proven to have been obtained by forced labour, regardless of whether it is produced within the EU or imported into the EU, thereby strengthening not only consumer confidence, as compliance with human rights standards is ensured, but also the protection of workers' and children's rights. The Regulation, which awaits publication in the Official Journal of the European Union, will enter into force the day after its publication and will apply three years after the date of its entry into force.



EUROSTAT, SAFETY AT WORK

European occupational safety is still critical. According to the European Statistics on Accidents at Work (ESAW) data collection, recently released by Eurostat, almost 2.97 million non-fatal accidents at work occurred in the European Union in 2022, an increase of 3% compared to 2.88 million in 2021 (+87,139 non-fatal accidents). This increase would seem to be due to the economic recovery in 2022, followed by the general slowdown related to the Covid-19 pandemic. In spite of this, there was a decrease in fatal accidents in 2022, which amounted to 3,286, or 0.1% of all accidents. This is 61 fewer fatalities than in 2021 and 122 fewer than in 2013. By definition, an "accident at work" means an event during work that causes physical or mental harm, and fatal accidents result in the death of the victim within a year. Although non-fatal accidents are less serious, they still cause substantial damage to victims and their families, such as injuries that result in permanent disability. In terms of Countries, Germany tops the list for non-fatal accidents, followed by France, Spain and Italy. Negative record for fatalities for France, followed by Italy, Spain and Germany. The most exposed sectors are construction, transport, manufacturing and agriculture, as well as forestry and fishing, in which more male workers are employed; this explains the gender imbalance in the data. In order to try to stem this phenomenon, a culture of prevention capable of protecting the health and safety of all workers everywhere must therefore be further promoted throughout Europe and beyond.