Edited by Luigi Ulgiati, UGL Deputy Secretary, member of the EESC N. 188 28th of September 2026

EESC: ULGIATI ATTENDS SEPTEMBER PLENARY SESSION

The 608th Plenary Session of the EESC (23–24 September), the first since the summer recess, concluded a few days ago. Councillor Ulgiati took part in the Session, during which a number of stimulating debates took place, all of great interest, such as the one featuring Raffaele Fitto, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission for Cohesion and Reforms, on the modernisation of cohesion policy, in relation to the adoption of the Opinion NAT/982 on the rural review. This term refers to the systematic assessment of how policies affect rural areas, followed by adjustments aimed at ensuring equity and territorial balance. This horizontal assessment tool, based on transparent methodologies, aims to ensure that all sectoral policies are examined from a rural perspective ("think rural"), in the belief that agricultural and rural policies underpin the provision of essential public goods for all citizens. However, their benefits are undermined where rural communities lose access to basic services such as transport, housing, healthcare, education and internet connectivity. This erosion of well-being affects women, young people and those belonging to vulnerable groups in particular, undermining their right to remain in and return to rural, remote and mountainous areas. According to Councillor Ulgiati «rural areas play a crucial role in Europe, not only in the cultivation of higher-quality produce with a lower environmental impact, but also in the creation of highly sustainable ecosystems that also benefit neighbouring areas. In order to ensure greater development of rural areas - he continued - we need to "think rural" by devising new policies that guarantee adequate transport, access to housing, healthcare facilities, education and employment support. Through these measures – Ulgiati concluded – we could prevent the exodus from rural areas, which are so precious, of young people and women, who are precisely the most vulnerable groups».

EU: A MAP OF THE EUROPEAN LABOUR MARKET

Having access to a reliable map of the European labour market for the coming decade: this is what the recent update to the "Skills Forecast", published by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), offers. By analysing trends up to 2035, this tool helps everyone – from individual jobseekers to large companies – to prepare for changing skills requirements and new opportunities. European labour markets are undergoing transformation due to digitalisation, an ageing population and the green transition. As these changes unfold over decades, education and training systems need reliable, long-term information to be able to respond in a timely manner, adapting provision, anticipating shortages and guiding learners towards sustainable careers. The new Forecast presents quantitative projections on employment trends up to 2035 by Country, sector and occupation across the EU-27, as well as in Iceland, Norway, the Republic of North Macedonia, Switzerland and Turkey, supporting more coherent policy-making at European, national and sectoral levels. The 2026 version of the document introduces two significant improvements: a specific analysis of replacement demand (the need to fill vacancies left by workers leaving a profession, mainly due to retirement) and a breakdown of intermediate-level qualifications into vocational and general education pathways, providing a more detailed picture of the skills landscape in Europe. It is forecast that between now and 2035, the number of jobs in the EU will increase by more than 4% overall. However, this growth is not evenly distributed. Much of the demand in specific sectors is driven by the expansion of green and digital technologies, whilst jobs in the fossil fuels sector are declining, with employment in the coal sector forecast to fall by 10.7 per cent per year. Finally, the picture is further complicated by demographic factors, with the workforce aged between 30 and 54 shrinking, replaced by a steadily growing proportion of over-65s, increasing by more than 7 per cent a year. Unfortunately, this rise in retirements risks leaving key positions unfilled, creating a severe shortage of highly skilled workers, particularly managers and healthcare staff.