

EPSU response to the European Commission's public consultation to the 2050 emissions reduction strategy

On 17 July 2018, the Commission launched a public consultation on its upcoming proposal of a strategy for a long-term EU greenhouse gas emissions reduction. This follows the Council's and Parliament's requests to the Commission to present a proposal for a 2050 emissions reduction strategy within the first quarter of 2019. The strategy will contribute to the EU's efforts to achieve its commitments under the Paris Agreement.

The European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) welcomes the Commission's initiative to formulate a long-term emissions reduction strategy, recognizing its utmost necessity for the EU's compliance with the Paris Agreement.

EPSU welcomed the international commitments under the Paris Agreement. Firstly, to keep global average temperature rise well below 2°C compared to pre-industrial levels, and continue efforts to keep the rise under 1.5°C. Secondly, to reach net-zero emissions within this century on the basis of equity and in view of pursuing sustainable development.

EPSU, as recognised European Social Partner in the electricity sector, advocates for rapid and coherent action to decarbonise the economy, in order to tackle climate change and its negative impacts on environment, society and economy. Within this context, EPSU emphasizes the reference made in the Paris Agreement to a just transition, where governments commit to contribute to economic growth and the creation of sustainable high-quality employment in Europe.

For EPSU, the only acceptable long-term strategy is one based on a fair, inclusive and just transition, that leaves nobody behind, including workers in carbon-intensive industries and the many Europeans affected by energy poverty. A just transition implies solid public investment, strong public policies and regulatory frameworks. Furthermore, a just transition truly addresses the urgent issue of energy poverty, which EPSU is tackling as part of the Right to Energy Coalition.

EPSU, as an organisation affiliated to the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), supports the ETUC Resolution for a long-term EU greenhouse gas emissions reduction strategy. This clearly outlines that the EU long-term strategy must provide a political vision of the future EU economy and address investment needs, technological developments, and skills development policy. It also needs to include trade policy, which should make climate change commitments mandatory in trade agreements.

EPSU highlights that the long-term strategy needs to clearly specify the role of public services and local communities in the future low-carbon economy. EPSU continues advocating for public ownership and democratic control of energy production and distribution as the most effective way to meet decarbonisation and Energy Union's objectives

The EU must become a net-zero emitter by 2050

Complying with the 2°C/1.5°C targets of the Paris Agreement requires urgent action from the EU, which needs to become much more ambitious in the goals it sets for itself for 2050 and more clear about its strategy for achieving them.

EPSU argues for the inclusion of a legally binding deadline by 2050 latest for the EU and member states to become net-zero emitters. Therefore, the long-term strategy needs to develop a pathway for the achievement of this net-zero emissions goal by 2050, which should include a calendar with credible milestones for 2030 and 2040.

EPSU emphasizes that no country should be allowed to overpass the 2050 deadline for becoming a net-zero emitter. This can have irreversible consequences on the environment, harming climate change mitigation actions and the ability of future generations to cope with it.

However, EPSU recognizes that the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC) needs to be respected. This means that decarbonisation needs to occur in each EU country at a differentiated pace, depending on its capabilities.

EPSU outlines that the CBDR-RC principle and the 2050 deadline are fully compatible, as long as sufficient public funding is made available and member states cooperate, especially through the exchange of best existing green technologies and practices.

In order to ensure the achievement of the 2050 deadline, it is essential to develop the long-term EU strategy in accordance with the current available technologies, and not with future (potential) technological innovations. The strategy should be however subjected to regular updates taking into consideration technological breakthrough. Furthermore, renewable energy sources and energy efficiency need to become central elements of the energy supply strategy of the EU.

Strong public services and solid public investments

EPSU highlights that the transition towards a net-zero emissions economy can only be successfully achieved by strengthening the public service dimension of energy production and distribution, and through larger public investments.

The long-term strategy must be precise and mention the costs of the investments required in order to achieve a net-zero emissions economy. In accordance with these costs, the long-term strategy needs to establish a EU public investment plan, which includes all EU financial instruments and institutions. This plan needs to establish a dedicated EU just transition fund, which should address the social dimension of transition.

Additional financial resources will have to be mobilized under the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), in order to support regions and local communities that rely on carbon intensive sectors. They will need special support in their adaptation processes and low carbon

investments, as well as in the creation of green jobs. Just transition also needs to be mainstreamed in the MFF in order to ensure that the workers from these regions are supported.

A fair, inclusive and just transition, that leaves nobody behind

EPSU outlines that the transition to a low-carbon economy will have deep effects on the labour market. On the one hand, it will create new opportunities for workers through new jobs and new occupations. On the other hand, it will also create new challenges and risks, as some existing professions will disappear or will need to be replaced by others which require new skills and competences.

EPSU emphasizes that the only acceptable long-term strategy is one based on a just transition for workers and local communities, which takes the social dimension into account while implementing decarbonisation policies.

In order to reach a just transition, EPSU outlines that the long-term strategy needs to clearly address the carbon-intensive sectors and regions, and to offer them plausible and just solutions for their future. This requires sectorial roadmaps, which need to be developed together with social partners and the democratic participation of the population and of local communities.

- The sectorial roadmaps need to include skills development schemes which identify the skills needed for a future low-carbon and circular economy, and design and implement greening skills initiatives. The long-term strategy must also maximise the number of jobs created in the low-carbon economy, ensuring that these are quality jobs.
- Moreover, the long-term strategy needs to include provision which better support workers from carbon-dependent regions and sectors. EPSU welcomes the EU Platform for coal regions in transition as a good initial step, but more concrete European support through a clear strategy and dedicated public funds are urgently needed. The long-term strategy must lead utility companies to create quality jobs, especially in regions and sectors heavily impacted by the transition, in accordance with their corporate social responsibility.
- Finally, the strategy must identify concrete means to strengthen the social dialogue at all levels on decarbonisation policies and their consequences on the labour market and on the future of the EU economy.

A circular economy with quality jobs

The 2050 decarbonisation goal can only be achieved if the current linear economy is replaced with a circular one. EPSU stresses that one of the key objectives of the long-term strategy needs to be the transition towards a circular economy. The strategy needs to present a clear pathway which should outline how this goal will be achieved at EU level and in member states.

EPSU is a strong supporter of a circular economy based on waste reduction, re-use, repair and recycling. A circular economy should be based on public service principles like universality and access, equality, solidarity and affordability, and should ensure a just transition for workers.

EPSU recognizes the potential of a circular economy to create jobs, but also notes that it will have deep effects on the existing labour market, which need to be addressed through a just transition for workers as presented above.

EPSU stresses that the long-term strategy needs to address and overcome the shortcomings of the Commission's current circular economy package "Closing the Loop." Even though the Commission argues that the circular economy will require a qualified workforce and social dialogue, its package lacked any concrete proposals to protect workers from low-skilled and low-wage employment, and poor health and safety standards.

EPSU regrets that during the legislative procedure, both Parliament and Council failed to address these points and to include a social chapter that guarantees quality, decent, skilled jobs and a clear role for trade unions. The future long-term strategy needs to deliver more.

Ending energy poverty and ensuring the right to energy

A fair, inclusive and just transition, that leaves nobody behind, also addresses the urgent issue of energy poverty, due to which 1 in 10 Europeans cannot keep warm in winter and 1 in 5 cannot keep cool in summer. The long-term strategy must propose concrete measures to eradicate energy poverty in Europe and to ensure a right to energy for all in Europe.

EPSU has been fighting energy poverty as part of the Right to Energy Coalition, which brings together unions, and social, environmental and health organisations. EPSU believes that the long-term strategy needs to include the demands of the Right to Energy Coalition, in order to effectively address and end energy poverty.

In accordance with these demands, the long-term strategy must ensure that European legislation will: ban disconnections at all times, establish a EU-wide definition of energy poverty and criteria to measure it, and ensure that member states establish national action plans to end energy poverty. EPSU also argues for maintaining price regulations to ensure the affordability of energy for all citizens