

Decision No 76 of the Management Board of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) on the Multiannual Research Programme 2025-2028

THE MANAGEMENT BOARD OF THE EUROPEAN FOUNDATION FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS (hereinafter referred to as 'Eurofound' or 'the Agency'),

Having regard to Regulation (EU) 2019/127 of 16 January 2019 establishing a European Foundation for the improvement of living and working conditions (Eurofound) and repealing Council Regulation (EEC) No 1365/75¹ (hereinafter referred to as 'Eurofound's Founding Regulation'), and in particular Articles 5(1) points (a), (b), and 6 (3),

Whereas:

- (1) The Management Board provides strategic orientation for Eurofound's activities;
- (2) A multiannual programme should be provided by the Executive Director to the Management Board for adoption;
- (3) The Multiannual Research Programme 2025-2028 does not provide all elements required by Article 6(3), and, therefore, does not replace the multiannual programme as per same article;
- (4) The Multiannual Research Programme 2025-2028 provides the necessary orientation in the area of research for the period 2025-2028 and, therefore, reduces the need for repetition of that section in the annual Programming Document;
- (5) The annual Programming Document will provide the multiannual resource programming and other elements provided for in Article 6(3).

HAS ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

Article 1 – Adoption

The Multiannual Research Programme 2025-2028, as annexed to this Decision (Annex), is hereby adopted.

Article 2 – Entry into force

The present Decision shall enter into force on the day following that of its adoption by the Management Board. It shall be published on Eurofound's website.

Done in Dublin, on 17 November 2023

For the Management Board

[S. Rossi]

The Chairperson

¹ OJ L 30, 31.1.2019, p. 74–89.



Annex: Multiannual Research Programme 2025-2028

Multiannual research programme 2025–2028

Responding to Europe's new opportunities and challenges



Multiannual research programme 2025–2028

Responding to Europe's new opportunities and challenges

Overview

The priorities for the multiannual work programme for the period 2025–2028 are shaped by the opportunities and challenges arising from four mega-drivers: Climate change; demographic change; technological change; and re-globalisation and geopolitics. They reflect the uncertainty linked to how the mega-drivers will impact the EU as well as the unpredictability of the context and climate of polycrisis. This uncertainty is compounded by the expected change in policy agenda that may occur after the European Parliament elections in 2024 and the election of a new College of Commissioners in the European Commission. In light of this, Eurofound must, while setting out a path for its research activities for 2025–2028, build ongoing flexibility into its work programme and adjust its multiannual work programme to an evolving global context, a changing policy agenda as well as a new financial reality.

Drawing on lessons learned from the two previous programming periods, Eurofound will focus on policy areas as mandated by the Founding Regulation¹ – working conditions, industrial relations, employment and living conditions – to continue to support its stakeholders by providing evidence to support their policy actions. While focusing on its core expertise, Eurofound will adopt a systemic approach to its analysis and ensure that identified priorities are treated in a transversal manner. In other words, when constructing the work programme (both multiannual and annual) Eurofound will apply a matrix where each mega-driver is analysed and understood from the point of view of its impact on the four policy areas mentioned above, thereby providing a holistic response to the issues at hand.

This approach seeks to understand the transformative changes the above-mentioned mega-drivers are having on employment, working and living conditions, as well as continuous and new policy challenges they are posing. Industrial relations are responding to these changes and thereby shaping how mega-drivers are impacting the other three policy areas.

The impact of **climate change**, as well as policies adapting to, and mitigating its effects, have become more visible over the past five years. Europe is experiencing more and larger wildfires every year, floods are intensifying and heatwaves are prolonged. The year 2022 was the second hottest year on record in the past two thousand years. The change in the climate and environment will have many effects, including the potential of inducing climate-driven migration as well as increasing climate

¹ Regulation (EU) 2019/127 of 16 January 2019 of the European Parliament and the Council establishing the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) and repealing Council Regulation (EEC) 1365/75

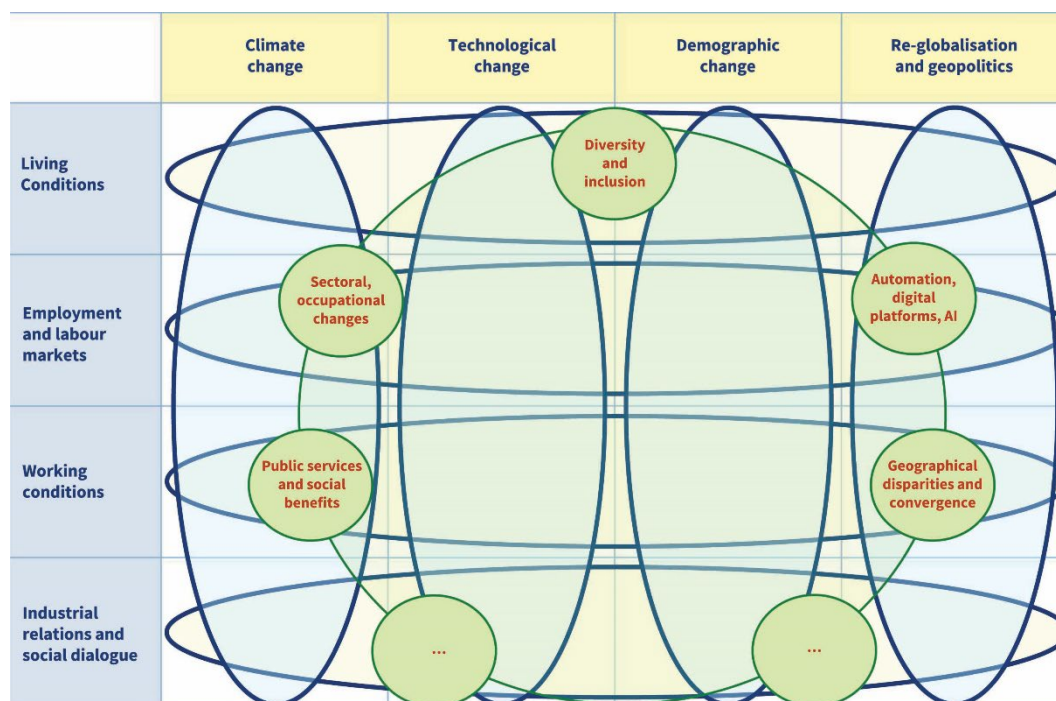
anxiety. The European Green Deal sets out a path towards a carbon-neutral society by 2050. Both the ambitious agenda to transform the economy and society as well as the need to adapt to climate change will pose broader opportunities and challenges to working and living conditions and will have a profound impact on the structure of the economy, competitiveness, job structure and the way we live. The impact of climate change and the green transition as a policy-driven transition, rely on measures and actions taken by government, social partners and business, as well as widescale public support.

Technological change, referred to here as digital transformation, has leapfrogged during the COVID-19 pandemic. The continuous automation and digitalisation of services, and the growing introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the workplace will continue to change the nature of work, skills needs, and how tasks are allocated, performed and assessed. It will also impact on living conditions and society at large, as AI will go well beyond the workplace, modifying the nature, quality and accessibility of public services. It will change the structure of society, the economy and hence the labour market giving rise to changing inclusion and social protection needs. Governments, social partners and the EU are working in different ways to shape these transformations, introducing technology and managing change in working and living conditions.

Underlying the above mega-drivers is **demographic change**. Demographic changes are typically characterised by long-standing trends such as – in the context of the EU – increases in life expectancy and a decrease in birth rates, leading to an ageing population and workforce. Over the past four years, other more temporary phenomena have also altered the demographic landscape of Europe. COVID-19 sparked excess mortality and a temporary decrease in life expectancy, birth rates and migration. Brexit has led to a large number of EU migrants heading back home and in the aftermath of COVID-19 and the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine there has been a large inflow of non-EU citizens in a relatively short time. In addition, migration from Syria, Afghanistan and Sub-Saharan Africa has turned into a constant flow. These demographic changes have large implications for how society is organised, how to ensure all groups are actively included in society and how workplaces can be inclusive and cater to a more diverse workforce.

Re-globalisation and geopolitics are calling into question the current set-up in terms of globalisation and the sustainability of supply chains. The COVID-19 pandemic initially demonstrated the weakness of the EU in terms of being able to procure vital goods in times of crisis and sparked the agenda of strategic autonomy. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as the recent US industrial policy initiatives, the US Inflation Reduction Act, and increasing pressure on China, have proved that geopolitics still play a pivotal role in global developments. This has led to a reassessment of globalisation (re-globalisation) and has implications for the geographical distribution of the production of goods, for the economic fabric of the EU and its ability to grasp the opportunities that this repositioning is bringing, as well as for sustainability of supply chains and due diligence requirements for decent work and labour standards, which is an important aspect of trade between the EU and third countries. This in turn could have implications for labour markets, types of jobs created and social dialogue and collective bargaining activities.

Figure 1: The matrix approach



Note: The empty circles symbolise Eurofound’s capacity to be agile and its commitment to respond to yet unforeseen events and contexts during the programming period.

Source: Eurofound

While the four mega-drivers impact individually on work and life, many of the opportunities and challenges faced by today’s societies and companies are due to a **compounded impact by all four mega-drivers** that are difficult to disentangle. In addition, while all four drivers will have an impact, some pose greater challenges than others. For policymakers to address these compounded challenges in a holistic way, they have to be examined from different angles: How do they impact on living conditions and quality of life? How do they impact on employment and the labour market? What are the implications for working conditions? How are industrial relations affected? How can social dialogue help to find solutions?

These compounded effects will be particularly visible across five key dimensions:

1. diversity in the population and the workforce and the need for inclusion
2. sectoral and occupational changes
3. automation, use of digital platforms and AI
4. public services and social benefits
5. geographical disparities, with implications for upward convergence and cohesion

The mega-drivers are contributing to greater **diversity in the population and the workforce and more need for inclusion**. Research should contribute to a better understanding of the nature and implications of this growing diversity, how its benefits can be maximised and how any arising challenges can be addressed. Climate change and geopolitical developments drive migration flows within and between Member States and from third countries, and have varying impacts on the living and working conditions of different groups in society. Demographic change is reducing labour supply, and placing greater emphasis on ensuring the sustainability of pension and social protection

systems, the expansion of high-quality long-term care systems, the full participation of women in the labour market, the retention and effective reintegration of older workers and other under-utilised groups into the labour market, including migrants, persons with disabilities and NEETs (young people not in employment, education or training). To manage successful integration, greater emphasis must be placed on sustainable working conditions, effective active labour market policies, tax, benefits and social protection systems, and care and other relevant public services which encourage societal and labour market inclusion while protecting the most vulnerable who are unable to participate. Technological change on the one hand poses the risk of contributing to growing inequalities, while on the other hand provides opportunities for inclusion in the workplace, offers access to services and facilitates participation in wider society.

Also common to the above-mentioned mega-drivers is the impact on the employment structure via **sectoral and occupational changes**, which is in a state of constant transformation. Secular trends in labour market composition indicate that an increasing share of employment will be in professional occupations requiring higher levels of human capital. At the same time, the ongoing 'services shift' in advanced economies means that around three in four workers will be employed in sectors providing services rather than producing goods or products. Though participation in paid work is increasing, the digital and green transition inevitably entails both the creation, as well as the contraction, of employment as well as redefinition of tasks in some types of jobs, with important consequences for many workers and households. Re-globalisation has the potential of job creation under the right conditions. Social dialogue and policy will continue to play an important role in ensuring that adjustments and restructuring takes place in an economic and socially sustainable way. A focus of employment policy will continue to be the reduction of unemployment, but this will increasingly be matched with a focus on boosting labour supply in order to meet the challenge of labour shortages in, for example, sectors providing services of general interest or jobs that advance the twin transition. The sectoral and occupational changes will also pose a challenge to skills matching.

Automation, digital platforms and AI are evolving at a fast pace, transforming the world of work as well as living conditions and the governance of our societies. Current developments already point towards significant consequences for work and employment, such as productivity, occupational structures, composition of skills, the type of tasks that workers perform, working conditions and the complexity of jobs. The impacts are likely to vary substantially across sectors, regions and countries. Automation and the use of AI and related technologies in the public services impacts on the delivery and quality of public services, potentially improving citizens' access to these services but also posing challenges with regard to the digital divide and quality of service. Furthermore, the use of digital platform and AI could, if not well managed, have broader social implications, challenging citizens' right to privacy and other personal freedoms and rights while posing risks for the European way of life, social cohesion and democracy. Finally, digital technologies can be a catalyst for the green transition by improving the management of resources, increasing productivity, enabling recycling and optimising monitoring systems. The positive socioeconomic outcomes of digitalisation will be mediated by the regulatory frameworks in place and the involvement of social partners in ensuring that new technologies are implemented in a way that safeguard people's dignity, security and equal opportunities.

Demographic change alters the needs and preferences for **public services and social benefits**. It challenges their sustainability in terms of both financial and human resources, with workforce shortages in healthcare and long-term care. Technological change in public services impacts on access and working conditions. The digitalisation of public services implies privacy-related risks. The green transition will result in huge societal changes, impacting living conditions differently for different groups, for instance by the reconfiguration of living spaces and different opportunities in terms of employment and working conditions. Access to transport and affordability of utilities is impacted by reduced reliance on fossil fuels. Affordable and high-quality public services as well as social benefits can contribute to mitigating the impact, with a key role for reskilling. Such mitigation is a factor in public support for the transition. Changes in the world of work will continue to require adaptation of social protection systems, in order to reinforce their coverage as well as their sustainability. The geopolitical context is putting pressure on the EU's social contracts and values, with challenges for social cohesion. There is a role for public services and social benefits in maintaining cohesion and reducing geographical disparities.

The opportunities and challenges associated with the four mega-drivers are not distributed evenly across regions in the EU and could lead to narrowing or increasing the **geographical disparities, with implications for upward convergence and cohesion**. New challenges for Europe's regions arising from the green and digital transition, as well as re-globalisation, compound the underlying structural imbalances in terms of long-term economic decline and de-population trends in remote and least developed areas. Within fast growing Member States, internal territorial disparities have been widening, with capital cities and other urban regions recording higher population and employment growth, notably for high-skilled workers. While demographic change, notably ageing, will affect all regions, rural areas will be particularly impacted as they are already shrinking. Sluggish or declining economic and social opportunities have fuelled growing discontent among citizens, threatening cohesion and trust in institutions, and potentially leading to increased polarisation.

While mega-drivers are influencing the behaviour and preferences of citizens and workers, likewise preferences and behaviour will influence the impact of mega-drivers as well as how the impact is perceived, for example, in changes to transport mode and housing models, remote working, working longer or shorter hours and changes in food consumption. Along with these transformational changes, preferences with regards to work and lifestyle can be expected. It is important to understand these changing preferences and behaviours in order to appreciate the impact of policy measures, as well as adherence to, and trust in, the actors and institutions managing the transitions.

Likewise, the mega-drivers are likely to change the way companies operate, how production cycles are organised, the demand of different types of goods and services and the way services are provided.

The challenges and responses to the challenges are also likely to have distributional effects in terms of income, wages, access to employment, cost of living and access to services and so on. For this reason, understanding the distributional impact, and hence the impact on inequalities, of the challenges as well as the policy interventions will lie at the heart of the work programme. A fair transition is key to the European Green Deal, and the European Pillar of Social Rights provides an agenda to ensure that nobody is left behind. The green transition, the digitalisation of society and work, re-globalisation and demographic change are all transitions that have the potential to redistribute gains and losses and either widen or decrease inequalities. Eurofound will aim to include this aspect in the five dimensions listed above.

The above dimensions will not play out equally across the EU nor across the population and companies. Eurofound will continue to ensure that its analysis has a focus on specific groups as well as the intersectionality of groups in society. Gender will be mainstreamed in its analysis where relevant, and particular focus will be put on young people, older workers and migrants. Eurofound will conduct specific projects on these groups but will also present data and findings for these groups in projects examining a broader section of society. Eurofound will ensure that people with disabilities are included in the research programme where data allows for it.

Eurofound will continue to rely on its ability to gather high-quality, policy-relevant data and monitor developments. The European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) will have been fielded in the previous programming period, and during this programming period the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) will be fielded and preparations for the European Company Survey (ECS) will take place pending implementation in 2028/2029. In addition, the e-survey will continue to provide up-to-date context relevant data and the EU PolicyWatch will include policy measures including the form of social partners' involvement. The European Restructuring Monitor (ERM) will provide information on restructuring and be used to capture emerging changes across key economic sectors, and both the European Jobs Monitor (EJM) and the Platform Economy Repository will continue to monitor developments. Eurofound will continue to investigate alternative data sources as well as improving data storage and visualisation.

Eurofound will carry out both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The Network of Eurofound Correspondents will continue to provide up-to-date data on a host of topics and in particular ensure that social partners' perspective is captured. The research questions will drive the methodology and hence the choice of qualitative or quantitative methods, or a combination of both. Particular attention will be given to incorporating forward-looking methodologies such as foresight and future studies. While measuring, understanding and assessing the past is vital to assess appropriate ways forward, likewise projecting the future can provide insights that provide options that are relevant for policy, in particular in periods of uncertainty and great transformations.

Cooperation and collaboration with other EU agencies like the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), the European Union information agency for occupational safety and health (EU-OSHA), the European Training Foundation (ETF), the European Labour Authority (ELA), the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the European Environment Agency (EEA) will be key in addressing these challenges. Similarly, Eurofound will continue to build on its cooperation with the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Work programme based on Eurofound's key policy areas

In light of the challenges arising out of the mega-drivers for the EU and Eurofound's mandate, Eurofound proposes organising its research programme around the four policy areas adopting a matrix method with regards to the mega-drivers (as illustrated above in Figure 1) in order to ensure a holistic approach. This will ensure that identified relevant projects incorporate the four policy areas in its analysis, thereby guaranteeing a holistic approach. In addition, Eurofound will continue to collect survey data and ensure that the programming and ability to be flexible and engage with new and emerging issues be maintained and incorporated in its work programme. The research programme is organised in five Activities set out below.

Working conditions

Since 1990, the Agency has maintained a unique monitoring tool, the **European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS)**, which allows Eurofound to add value by presenting comparative data and analysis on the evolution of quality of work across European countries. Data collected in the EWCS 2024 will be the starting point for investigating – from the perspective of working conditions and job quality – the challenges deriving from the combined impact of the four mega-drivers outlined above. This will be complemented by evidence on measures – introduced through public policies and legislation, through the intervention of the social partners and through practices at workplace level – to improve working conditions. By applying forward-looking methodologies, emerging changes will be captured, for example as regards preferences on how people want to work in the future and if and how the role of work in people's lives is changing.

Eurofound will assist policymakers in meeting the challenge of including more people with increasingly diverse backgrounds, circumstances, needs, and abilities in the workforce through providing evidence from its EWCS on the link between job quality and sustainability of work and how different groups of workers, for example women, migrant workers, young people or people with disabilities, fare as regards these factors.

Over the programming period, the mega-drivers will impact on the sectoral and occupational structure of the EU economy. From a working conditions perspective, it will be important to provide evidence as to whether job quality will benefit from these shifts or whether the changes will lead to a net increase of poor-quality jobs. Eurofound will explore the quality of jobs as part of its investigation of the impact of the twin transition on selected sectors. The expected sectoral and occupational shifts will impact on skills requirements and require reskilling and upskilling of a substantial share of the workforce. Eurofound will investigate the link between work organisation and continuous learning and upskilling, using data from the EWCS.

The challenge of how to ensure sustainable public services requires a review of the working conditions in services in which increased demand can be expected because of demographic change: health care, long-term care and childcare. Public administration, because of its role in managing redistribution and ensuring that support reaches those disadvantaged by, for example, the effects of the twin transition, is also a sector for which good working conditions are required to ensure that motivated and engaged staff can be attracted and retained and provide the high-quality service that citizens expect. Good job quality is also associated with higher levels of engagement at work which, in turn, is linked to innovation and productivity. Eurofound will provide evidence on working conditions in these sectors and investigate if and how job quality is linked to the quality of services provided, as a contribution to a wider investigation of the quality, availability and use of sustainable public services of general interest.

In some of the above-mentioned sectors, but also in many other parts of the economy, automation and the use of AI will have a tangible impact on working conditions. New technologies enabled by AI and machine learning are leading to the emergence of new business models, changes in work organisation and skills needs. Digital management practices – currently associated with the platform economy – are spreading into traditional workplaces. Eurofound will investigate the job quality of jobs where AI is used to support workers in their tasks, but also where it is replacing interaction between management and workers in the monitoring of work and performance assessment. Over the last decade, digitalisation has also enabled new employment forms, such as platform work and ICT-based mobile work. In the face of their expansion, Eurofound will continue monitoring the prevalence of these new forms of work and investigate the implications for working conditions,

including the impact on working conditions arising from emerging forms of subcontracting and outsourcing.

The differences in working conditions and job quality across the EU Member States are well-documented in the analysis of the different waves of the EWCS. The mega-drivers warrant a closer look at regional disparities. Exposure to risks associated with climate change (heat, cold, extreme weather events) is likely to differ substantially for workers in different regions of the EU. But also mitigating measures will affect regions differently and Eurofound can provide comparative evidence on the development of job quality in regions and the effect of those mitigating measures on job quality, shedding light on the impact of the twin transition on the convergence of working conditions.

Industrial relations and social dialogue

Eurofound's work in industrial relations and social dialogue will continue to support the social dialogue at EU and national level with a range of monitoring products and analytical research, with a particular focus on the tripartite approach. The role and actions of social partners and social dialogue in responding to the key challenges identified as part of this programme will be the object of research of this activity.

This could include the following areas: social partners' role in achieving good working conditions, creating employment, protecting and enabling workers and companies, thus reducing inequalities in society and the labour market, including income and pay gaps; social dialogue on anticipating and managing structural change in general and related to the twin transition, as well as social partners' and governments' role in managing and shaping the twin transition and cushioning the impacts of associated negative effects for businesses, workers and citizens; and social partners' role in contributing to the reform and management of social welfare systems and benefits. This will be done as part of larger projects, which stretch holistically across several of Eurofound's activities.

A substantial part of the financial and human resources available for this Activity is dedicated to the regular monitoring and reporting tools, so the scope to add additional new research is limited.

In general, the Activity will consider developments concerning the actors themselves (social partners and their representativeness, governments and related institutions), the processes they are involved in (social dialogue, collective bargaining and the regulation and promotion of these) at different levels including the EU, national, sectoral and – as far as feasible – company level; and it will focus on selected outcomes they generate, such as the development of wages and working time, or other topics beyond these core outcomes of social dialogue and collective bargaining.

In the new programming period, the **representativeness studies** will continue based on an adapted methodology. Contextual information on national industrial relations – the actors and institutions, processes and some outcomes – is contained in the **national working life profiles**, which will continue to be updated every second year. The degree and form of social partner involvement in national policymaking will continue to be researched, based on the monitoring of policies within the **EUPolicyWatch database** together with the annual national papers on developments in working life. Eurofound will also continue to monitor how national governments involve the **social partners in policymaking in the context of the EU Semester** in the Resilience and Recovery Facility. Monitoring of the developments and regulation of working time will be ongoing in light of the challenges arising from the four mega-drivers and the reporting on **minimum wages** will be closely related to the Adequate Minimum Wages Directive. Eurofound will continue to promote **capacity building** for social partners, through organising – possibly in cooperation with other agencies – a tripartite

exchange seminar on a bi-annual basis, but also via other projects through focus groups with social partners or including social partner representatives in expert meetings or organising virtual visits.

In a first strand of research, the activity will focus on researching the **actors and institutions**: the extent to which industrial relations change in response to the mega-drivers. This could include how social partners are involved in the governance of working life-related institutions, and map, via the next ECS wave to be prepared during this programming period, the developments of employee representation structures at company level. The role of social partners in responding to the multiple challenges will also be investigated as part of larger projects, for example the proposed project on long-term care.

A second multiannual research project strand aims to review Eurofound's approach to monitoring the **evolution of social dialogue** and how it contributes to, and is shaped by, the transitions faced by economies, labour markets and societies. The purpose of this project is to provide a conceptual framework in the first year to monitor developments in social dialogue at national, sectoral and company level based on areas of interest linked to structural changes posed by the four mega-drivers. Based on this conceptual framework, this strand of work will subsequently explore the adaptability of both tripartite and bipartite social dialogue at various levels to accompany and contribute to structural reforms to optimise stakeholder voice regarding transformations in the economy and society. This research strand will, where possible, be closely aligned to the European Commission proposal for a Council recommendation on strengthening social dialogue and collective bargaining at national level, as well as those related to the European Commission's Communication on reinforcing and promoting social dialogue at EU level.

Collective bargaining developments will be given special attention in a third multiannual research strand. Eurofound will aim to provide evidence for social partners and governments on how increasing bargaining coverage rates can be achieved and to contribute to a better understanding of what factors promote a high and stable or increasing collective bargaining coverage rate. The strand will also contribute to preparing the mapping of the prevalence of different types of collective wage agreements for the next wave of the ECS, with a view to improving the ECS-based estimates of collective wage bargaining coverage.

Employment and labour markets

Several developments are likely to shape both the extent and modes of employment in Europe in the next decade. The policy-driven green transition may eventually grow into a mainstream phenomenon in terms of technologies used, skills applied and consumption patterns. Together with broader technological change, digital transformation, and the global reconfiguration of supply chains, this could lead to impacts both at sectoral level as well as the occupational structure at large. Eurofound will extend its expertise in analysing restructuring, company practices, and social partner involvement in the process of these changes to add evidence for assessing the EU's competitive challenges and economic and social resilience. Sector-focused studies will assess the risks and potential in the most affected or emerging ecosystems (clusters of sectors) of economy. In consultation with stakeholders, particular sectors will be shortlisted for sectoral overviews in 2025–2028. Information from Eurofound's knowledge sources on the structure of jobs and working conditions, as well as policy measures supporting change, will be integrated in such studies. The **European Jobs Monitor** and the **European Restructuring Monitor** tools will be employed to shed light on emerging trends in the labour market. Preparations will start on the ECS.

New forms of employment and new forms of work are at the frontier of the transforming economy as well as harnessing technological progress. The ever-expanding applications of AI and the advancement of automation are changing the *modus operandi* for many jobs beyond the platform economy as known so far, and this will have implications for the management of work, employment relations and social protection. In the case of changes in the public sector and public services, the impact of the transformation extends to various groups of citizens. In particular, Eurofound will research how the take-up of digital technologies, including AI, and changes in productivity impact on services of general interest, including essential services and the care sector; the ways to capture productivity changes in services will be explored. For selected services sectors, Eurofound will produce research addressing the implications of AI, digital platforms and automation for the structure of employment and for actual practices in work organisation, exploring company, job, including task and skills, level. It will also assess the balance between risks of deterritorialisation and the potential of distance-spanning solutions for improving access to and take up of services by those in need.

Eurofound will further develop its analysis of the platform economy and will exploit its own and other survey research to highlight the features of the labour force and the sectors and services involved in the platform economy. The **Platform Economy Repository** will continue to monitor initiatives. It will also contribute to understanding the evolution of new forms of work by comparing the trends across various recent and not so recent forms, such as temporary agency work, dependent self-employment and other emerging forms of new work.

Eurofound will continue to focus on the challenges of labour demand and supply and will provide analysis on labour shortages during the next programming period. Understanding the drivers behind shortages, policy measures, as well as pathways to and within the labour market are essential for building a vibrant and inclusive economy. Eurofound's research will update knowledge on the inactive population, labour market slack and the ways of tapping into the potential of diverse working age groups and possibly older age groups. In addition, and taking into consideration Cedefop's work on skills, Eurofound will analyse the working conditions attached to the occupations and sectors with labour shortages, including the impact of factors such as wages and the availability of child-care. The role of specific factors in facilitating labour market prospects for groups of the population currently underrepresented will be explored, including topics of transition to and back from inactivity and the role of supported employment.

Living conditions

During the next multiannual period, Eurofound will continue its regular monitoring activities in the field of living conditions, cohesion and convergence.

Launched for the first time in 2003, the European Quality of Life survey will be fielded again in 2026. The data collected will be central to research work in the area of living conditions and will be instrumental for policymakers to compare living conditions in the EU and its Member States, and to understand the combined impact of the four mega-drivers and their implications for the social situation of citizens in the EU.

Overall, it is envisaged that the four mega-drivers and the accompanying opportunities and challenges will impact the population in very different ways. Promoting the inclusion of everyone in society is a priority for a more cohesive and resilient Europe. In this regard, demographic change and climate change, with the transition to a climate neutral economy, calls for Eurofound to provide policymakers with new evidence about the living conditions and social situation of different groups

(such as children, young people and NEETs, men and women, older people, migrants and people with a disability) and assess their needs for housing, services, care and social protection to ensure adequate living conditions.

The quality, availability and adaptability to changing needs of the citizens and the effectiveness in delivery and use of sustainable public services of general interest, such as childcare, healthcare, long term care, employment services, transport and so on, will represent a central area of research for this activity. The implications for social cohesion and trust of EU citizens will likewise be a focus in the programming period.

Eurofound will also provide new evidence on the social impact of the twin transition, identifying opportunities as well as challenges, and assessing the potential of these transitions to increase or decrease inequalities both geographically and between groups. Policy measures put in place to manage the impact of the twin transition will be analysed. To be successful, the transition to a climate-neutral economy needs to be human-centred, just and inclusive. Eurofound will investigate the social implications of climate neutrality in terms of acceptance and adoption of sustainable behaviour as well as its impact on the cost of living, housing and transport – and on energy poverty – through the possible impact of renewable energies. Particular attention will be placed on the distributional effect of the green transition, highlighting the impact on the most vulnerable and the implications for social cohesion, which is critical for public support for the green transition to be maintained.

Eurofound will also investigate the social side of technological change, and specifically the challenge brought about by the increase in automation, the widespread use of digital platforms and the use of AI. The social impact of AI in European societies will be investigated as well as the possible accompanying behavioural changes. The living conditions and social protection needs of platform workers and others in new forms of work will be investigated. The use of Eurofound surveys will be explored with regard to the access to and adequacy of social protection systems. The role that the digital divide may play in amplifying or decreasing economic, social and intergenerational disparities and the impact of this on territorial and social cohesion will be further investigated. Emphasis will also be placed on how digitalisation of public services and the adoption of AI systems may impact on the quality, delivery of and access to public services as well as impact on the user's well-being, including healthcare, care, education and employment services and their non-take-up. Technological change and telework also has the potential of providing greater freedom to realise individual lifestyles and lead to a shift in work-life balance and living conditions more generally.

Over the next programming period, Eurofound will continue to monitor developments in the field of convergence in the EU. It can be expected that the four mega-drivers will impact differently on various geographical areas of Europe, and disparities among Member States, their regions, and rural and urban areas could become a destabilising force that Europe may face in the years to come. For this reason, in addition to continue to build on the indicators of the Social Scoreboard, new analytical work will be produced on upward convergence and inequalities. Expanding beyond the traditional economic, social and institutional dimensions, new evidence will be produced on the social and human capital, environmental and digital dimensions as well as on various sociodemographic groups of society. Special attention will be given to the role of re-globalisation with respect to cohesion and convergence, as well as to the role of economic and social inequalities in generating discontent. In this regard, the methodological and computational work on convergence and the accompanying ConvergeEU app will be further developed and refined.

Survey management and development

Eurofound surveys cover a broad range of policy-relevant areas within Eurofound's strategic priorities and feed into a substantial part of the multiannual work programme. The Agency has been conducting three Europe-wide surveys over many years (EWCS since 1990, EQLS since 2003 and ECS since 2004) and has fielded an e-survey since 2020 on specific issues such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of the war in Ukraine.

Eurofound has been preparing a long-term strategy aimed at making the surveys future-proof and financially sustainable. The frequency of the surveys has been reviewed, new data collection modes have been tested and explored and different procurement models have been examined. The future-proofing of the surveys will ensure that Eurofound continues to collect high-quality data that are comparable across the EU Member States and over time. The Activity has three strands of work:

- Collecting high-quality comparable survey data: Preparing and fielding the surveys
- Making the surveys future-proof: Methodological survey development
- Improving the organisation of the surveys

For the period 2025–2028, Eurofound plans to implement several actions.

- Building on the lessons learnt from the 2024 EWCS, Eurofound will continue to develop the long-term survey strategy, which includes an examination of the viability of different data-collection modes, and an assessment of different options for the way the surveys are organised in terms of in-house survey management, procurement and contracting. Fielded in 2024, the EWCS face-to-face fieldwork and push-to-web test will be evaluated to assess the quality implications if transitioning from face-to-face to online data-collection. The steering group on the future of the surveys, with representatives from the Management Board, will monitor the evaluation, based on the results from the EWCS 2024. The results of the evaluation will be presented to the Management Board and serve as a basis for further decisions.
- Further developmental work will include the continued investigation of potential complementary sources of data options and efforts to improve the quality of the e-survey as a timely and complementary data collection tool.
- The evaluation can also provide further insight for the EQLS regarding survey efficiency and data quality. During the multiannual period, the EQLS will be assessed and adapted to be able to capture the new social situation in Europe. The survey measures the living conditions of people in Europe by investigating a range of factors, including employment and work-life balance, health and mental well-being, housing and public services, insecurity, social inclusion and trust. The EQLS will be fielded in 2026.
- Preparations of a new round of the ECS will take place during the programming period with a view to fielding the survey in 2028/2029.
- The e-survey will be fielded on an annual basis capturing data on emerging issues.

Exploitation of the data of previous surveys will also continue during the multiannual cycle.