



*Employers entrusted to deliver
Sustainability Growth Innovation*

Opinion

European Quality Jobs Roadmap

Adopted on 25 June 2025

Executive Summary

- As the European Commission prepares its Quality Jobs Roadmap (QJR), SGI Europe reaffirms its commitment to contribute to its inception constructively. Representing employers of services of general interest (SGIs), we bring the perspective of sectors that are essential to the daily lives of citizens and the resilience of Europe's social and economic model.
- The roadmap must avoid rigid interpretations of job quality and instead support the role of social partners in shaping employment conditions adapted to diverse national, local and sectoral realities. SGI Europe stresses that quality jobs are best developed through structured dialogue, shared responsibility, and context-sensitive frameworks. A successful QJR must reconcile social ambition with economic and operational realities while fostering mutual trust, responsibility and a competitive Europe.

The quality jobs roadmap should aim at the following:

- Promoting flexible, multi-dimensional frameworks over fixed definitions.
 - Contributing to addressing the transversal labour market challenges related to labour and skills shortages, administrative burden and of improving productivity, resilience and competitiveness.
 - Empowering social dialogue and acknowledge existing efforts both at national and local level, including at sectoral level.
 - Supporting employers in SGI sectors who face specific challenges related to labour and skills shortages, funding, and around-the-clock operations.
 - Prioritising practical tools and capacity-building over regulatory expansion. Here, the EU can play an important role to support social partner work through adequate funding.
- The roadmap must enable all labour market actors, including SGI employers, to build fair, attractive, and sustainable jobs aligned with high-quality service provision. The roadmap should be created throughout meaningful, inclusive, and structured consultation process.

Introduction

The Quality Jobs Roadmap, announced in the mission letter of President von der Leyen to Executive Vice-President Mînzatu and reaffirmed through the Competitiveness Compass and the Pact for European Social Dialogue, reflects the growing recognition that job quality is central to Europe's future. As the EU faces a triple transition – green, digital, and demographic – ensuring access to both quality employment and quality services is not only a social priority, but a precondition for economic resilience and democratic legitimacy.

For SGI Europe, the issue of job quality is not new. It has long been at the core of both **European and national social dialogue**, as demonstrated by the numerous **framework agreements** negotiated over the years on work-related stress, inclusive labour markets, digitalisation, and active ageing. These joint outcomes have shown that quality jobs are best shaped **through social dialogue**.

SGI Europe represents employers delivering services of general interest – both public and private – in key sectors such as energy, water, transport, education, healthcare, waste, housing, and social care. Our members ensure high-quality, affordability and accessibility in services that are vital to European citizens and territorial cohesion. We therefore bring a specific and essential voice to the Roadmap process: one rooted in the daily realities of essential service delivery and committed to balancing social and operational imperatives.

We fully recognise the Commission's intention to engage social partners in shaping this initiative, and we are committed to participating actively and constructively. As employers, we share the ambition to ensure good working conditions in Europe, and we believe this can only be achieved through a **realistic, balanced, and inclusive approach** that reflects the diversity of labour markets and the complexity of SGI provision.

Guiding principles for a meaningful roadmap

As the Commission develops the Quality Jobs Roadmap, it is essential to ground the initiative in a set of clear, workable principles that ensure both relevance and credibility. For SGI Europe, the Roadmap should serve as a strategic compass guiding efforts to improve the quality of jobs without imposing rigid models disregarding sectoral and national specificities.

First, the Roadmap must avoid attempts to define quality jobs through a single, prescriptive EU-level standard. The diversity of labour markets, regulatory systems, and SGI delivery models across Member States makes such an approach neither feasible nor desirable. Even within individual workplaces, perceptions of what constitutes 'job quality' can vary between workers, managers, and other stakeholders. Instead, the Roadmap should promote a shared understanding of core dimensions, while allowing for differentiated implementation based on local realities.

Second, the initiative should be firmly anchored in the principle of subsidiarity. Many levers for improving job quality lie at the national, regional or sectoral level. The EU should enable, support and coordinate, while avoiding over-regulation or duplication of existing frameworks. In this respect, the Commission should prioritise policy coherence, the implementation and enforcement of already existing legislation, funding mechanisms, and exchanging good practices over legislative initiatives.

This principle has also been reaffirmed in the 2023 Council Recommendation on strengthening social dialogue in the European Union. SGI Europe believes that the implementation of this Recommendation should form an integral part of the Roadmap process, ensuring that quality jobs are developed in close partnership with social partners.

Third, social dialogue must be the foundation of the Roadmap. Quality jobs cannot be delivered without the active involvement of both employers and trade unions, at the right level. Strengthening and facilitating the local day-to-day cooperation between employees and employers is particularly important in this context. The Roadmap should reinforce this principle, acknowledging the key role of autonomous social partners in shaping employment conditions, particularly through collective bargaining and framework agreements.

Finally, the Roadmap must speak to both sides of the labour market. Too often, discussions on job quality focus exclusively on employee rights, without considering the conditions that employers need to provide stable, meaningful and sustainable work and deliver services to citizens that are both efficient and high quality. A successful strategy must reconcile social ambition with economic and operational realities while fostering mutual trust, responsibility and a competitive Europe.

Dimensions of job quality: The perspective of SGI employers

SGI Europe cautions against attempts to impose a rigid or uniform definition of job quality at EU level. The diversity of labour markets, institutional settings, and SGI delivery models across Member States makes any centralised model difficult to apply.

We acknowledge that analytical efforts such as **Eurofound's job quality framework** have contributed to structuring the policy debate. However, we note that these approaches are often **primarily centred on the worker's experience** and do not sufficiently reflect the **realities, constraints, and responsibilities of employers**. This is particularly true in services of general interest, where high-quality, accessibility and affordability must be balanced with workforce expectations.

For SGI Europe, job quality is not a fixed standard, but a **contextual and evolving process** shaped by the interaction of multiple factors:

- The **societal value and purpose of work**, especially relevant in SGIs;
- **Supportive workplace environments**, developed through mutual trust, clear roles, and effective leadership;
- **Access to skills and professional development**, with training opportunities adapted to operational needs and delivery constraints;
- **Organisational autonomy** for employers to design jobs that are both effective and meaningful.

These dimensions are not easily captured by universal indicators. What matters is the **capacity for ongoing dialogue and adjustment**, tailored to specific sectors, local contexts, and institutional mandates. Our members already engage in such processes, often through social dialogue, staff engagement practices, or adapted workforce planning, which cannot be replaced by EU-level instruments.

While discussions on job quality often reference broad EU-wide surveys such as **Eurofound's European Working Conditions Telephone Surveys**, SGI Europe underlines the need for careful interpretation. These surveys mostly reflect employee perceptions, and often show relatively positive assessments in areas such as autonomy, job satisfaction, or work-life balance. Such a view risks overlooking the **pressures on employers** to maintain and improve quality in challenging environments, especially under resource constraints or demographic shifts.

As digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) increasingly shape how work is organised and delivered, SGI Europe recognises that these tools can either enhance or challenge job quality, depending on how they are introduced and governed.

At the same time, AI can support more efficient operations and reduce physical or cognitive strain in certain tasks. SGI Europe believes that the integration of AI should be guided by **social dialogue, sectoral realities, and voluntary adaptation**. SGI Europe believes that this integration relies on a number of factors at the national and local levels. We encourage the Commission to focus on **knowledge-sharing, upskilling initiatives, capacity-building and most necessarily funding** around responsible, human-aware uses of AI while avoiding uniform standards or regulatory obligations. The Quality Jobs Roadmap should remain focused on enabling frameworks, leaving room for context-specific solutions in this rapidly evolving field.

SGI Europe also notes growing concern among employers regarding the inclusion of access to telework as a potential universal criterion for defining job quality. While remote work arrangements can be relevant in certain contexts, they are not applicable or operationally viable in many roles. Attempts to treat ‘teleworkability’ as a standard of job quality risk creating artificial inequalities between sectors, and do not reflect the diverse nature of professional responsibilities in SGIs. A flexible and realistic approach is therefore necessary.

In this context, SGI Europe firmly believes that quality jobs should be promoted through **shared responsibility**, and not through static definitions or abstract benchmarks. This means reinforcing the role of **social partners**, particularly at the sectoral and organisational level, in defining, monitoring, and improving job quality in ways that reflect real working and SGI’s delivery conditions.

Specific challenges for SGI employers in the context of the Quality Jobs Roadmap

For employers delivering services of general interest (SGIs), the pursuit of quality jobs is inseparable from the **structural realities of SGI provision**. These employers ensure high-quality, accessibility, and affordability in vital sectors such as health, care, education, energy, water, housing, and transport – all while responding to mounting societal expectations and operating within constrained financial and regulatory frameworks.

The Quality Jobs Roadmap must acknowledge that **SGI employers face a unique set of challenges in creating and sustaining quality jobs**. These include:

- **Around-the-clock services’ obligations;**
- **Staffing and skills shortages** that directly impact working conditions;
- **Budgetary frameworks** that may limit the capacity to improve pay or invest in training;
- **Need to reconcile multiple public objectives** while operating in complex European and National legal environments from affordability and environmental goals to digital transformation and territorial cohesion.

In many cases, improving job quality is a matter of intent and of feasibility. Employers must constantly navigate trade-offs between service continuity, quality, sustainability and workforce wellbeing. This is particularly the case in sectors where labour intensity is high.

As highlighted in the recent A.C.C.E.S. project, SGI providers are developing integrated approaches to workforce resilience by linking service planning with training partnerships, career development, and inclusive

hiring strategies. However, these initiatives often remain **under-supported and fragmented**. The report confirms that while employers are proactive, they often lack the policy and financial tools to scale up efforts.

The Roadmap must also reflect the findings of the EMCO tripartite discussions: effective action on labour and skills challenges **requires coordination with education systems, social partners, and public authorities at local and national levels**. In this regard, while SGI employers often serve as stabilising anchors in their communities, their role is not always adequately recognised in policy design or funding priorities.

SGI Europe therefore urges the Commission to ensure that the Quality Jobs Roadmap:

- **Recognises the specific institutional and operational challenges** faced by SGI employers;
- **Avoids prescriptive approaches** that disregard SGIs' realities or impose administrative burdens;
- **Supports workforce resilience strategies**, especially in sectors facing critical shortages;
- Promotes a vision of job quality that is **realistic, sustainable, and service-aware** and empowers essential services' employers.

Ultimately, **quality jobs in SGIs require quality frameworks** that give employers the margin and means to deliver better working conditions, support staff development, and maintain high standards of services. There are several tangible examples of social partner-led action in this area such as the EU social partners framework agreements on active-ageing and an intergenerational approach (2017), the digitalisation agreement (2020) (for more examples see annexes).

Psychosocial risks, increasingly recognised at EU level, notably in the Commission's 2023 Communication on Mental Health, are relevant to many essential services, including SGIs. SGI Europe supports EU efforts to promote awareness, training and good practice exchange in this field. However, we caution against attempts to harmonise responses through rigid frameworks. Effective prevention must remain rooted in dialogue, subsidiarity, proportionality, and respect for sectoral diversity, to ensure improvements in working environments.

Recommendations to the European Commission

To ensure that the Quality Jobs Roadmap delivers tangible and sustainable results, SGI Europe calls on the European Commission to adopt an approach that is **enabling, inclusive and grounded in reality**.

First, we strongly recommend that the Commission **refrain from introducing a fixed or prescriptive EU-level definition of a "quality job"**. The diversity of sectors, national systems, and institutional frameworks across Europe requires flexibility. The focus should be on enabling improvement through **tailored approaches**, considering operational constraints or service-specific realities.

Second, we urge the Commission to **fully integrate the voice and role of social partners** in shaping the Roadmap. This includes cross-industry and sectoral organisations at both the EU and national levels. SGI Europe considers that **social dialogue is the most legitimate and effective avenue** for assessing, defining and enhancing job quality. The EU can play an important role to support social partner work through adequate funding.

Third, we call on the Commission to ensure that the **consultation process is meaningful, inclusive and structured**. Timelines should allow for genuine input particularly from sectoral employers and SGI providers.

Contributions should be transparently reflected in the final communication, and feedback loops should clarify how social partner views are integrated.

Fourth, the Roadmap should offer **practical support over regulatory expansion, as no further EU legislative action is appropriate or desirable in this area.** The Commission can play a valuable role by facilitating mutual learning, supporting capacity-building for social partners, improving data availability (particularly at the sectoral level), and encouraging voluntary tools to monitor progress. Where legislation is considered, it must respect subsidiarity and be developed in close cooperation with social partners. Clear coherence will be needed between the Quality Jobs Roadmap and the European Pillar of Social Rights and related action plans, as both are presented as strategic compasses for EU social policy, which risks creating confusion.

Finally, the Roadmap must explicitly recognise the link between **job quality and services' sustainability**, particularly in SGI sectors. Employers need stable and predictable frameworks to invest in their workforce and provide quality services. The Commission should support Member States in addressing labour and skills shortages, fostering career attractiveness in essential services, and ensuring active support to decent work without creating unmanageable administrative obligations.

Conclusion

SGI Europe intends to work constructively with the Commission's intention to address job quality as part of its broader agenda for a fair, competitive, and resilient Europe. SGIs are at the heart of European societies, and the quality of the jobs within them is inseparable from the quality of the services themselves.

For the Quality Jobs Roadmap to be effective, it must reflect the **diversity of labour markets, the specific operational realities of SGI providers, and the crucial role of social partners.** This means moving away from top-down definitions and a regulatory approach and focusing instead on supporting what works: partnership, capacity-building, and tailored solutions.

SGI Europe stands ready to contribute constructively to this process. We believe that better jobs – more attractive, sustainable, and purposeful – can be achieved when policy is grounded in **trust, realism, and shared responsibility.** The Roadmap must enable all actors, including SGI employers, to play their part in shaping the future of work for the benefit of workers, services, and society at large.