

HOW DO WE IMPROVE DECISION-MAKING IN EU SOCIAL POLICY?

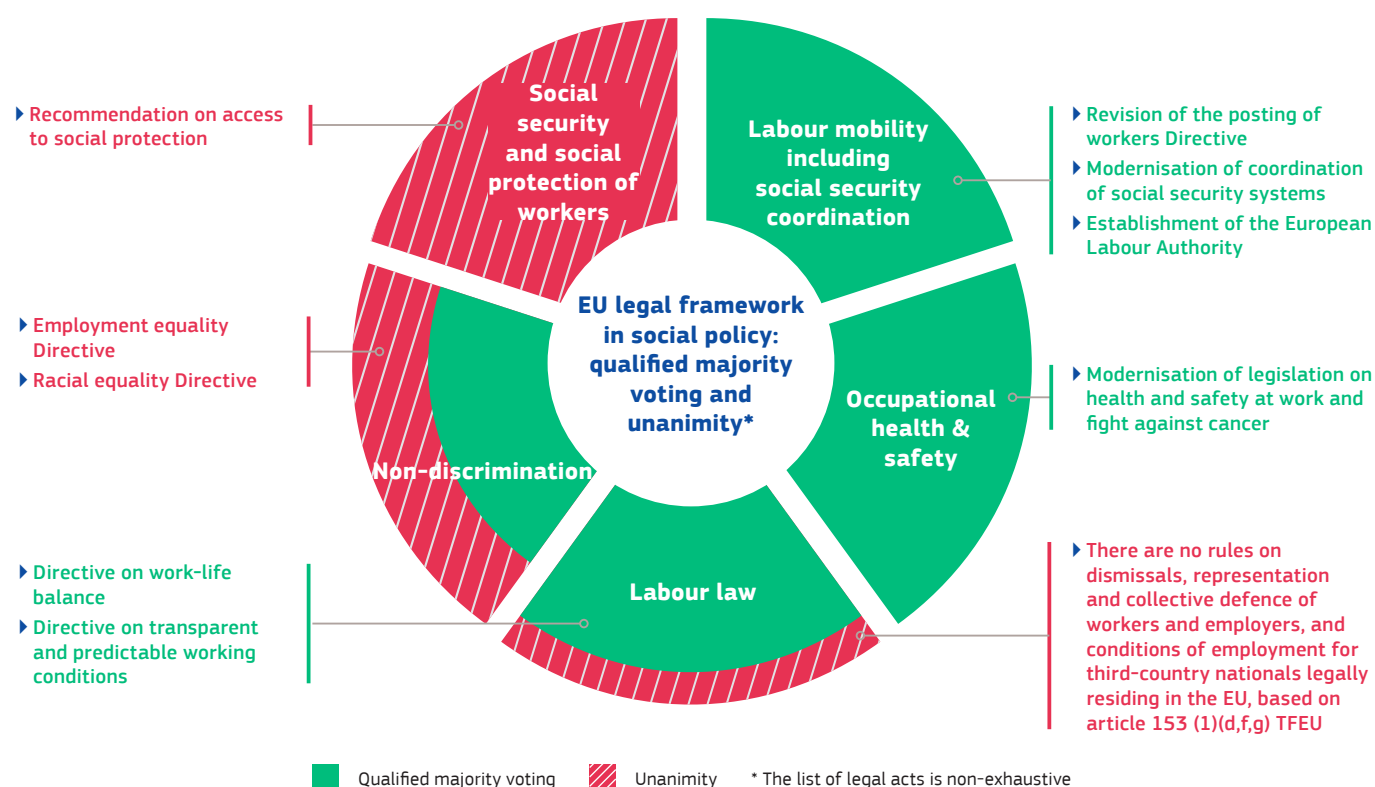


Most social policy areas, where the EU has powers to act, are already subject to qualified majority voting. This has allowed putting in place a comprehensive social «acquis» over the years, with [significant further steps under this Commission](#). However, today there are still a number of social policy matters where decisions by the Council must be taken with unanimous agreement, with the European Parliament often only consulted. These areas are:

- ▶ non-discrimination based on different grounds (gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, and sexual orientation);
- ▶ social security and social protection of workers (outside cross-border situations);
- ▶ protection of workers against dismissals;
- ▶ representation and collective defence of the interests of workers and employers;
- ▶ conditions of employment for non-EU nationals legally residing in the EU.

To make decision-making more efficient and fair, to the benefit of citizens, the Commission is launching a debate on making more use of qualified majority voting, in particular in the areas of non-discrimination and for the adoption of recommendations on social security and social protection of workers.

OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL POLICY UNDER UNANIMITY AND UNDER QUALIFIED MAJORITY VOTING



HOW DOES QUALIFIED MAJORITY VOTING WORK?

Qualified majority voting goes beyond the simple majority rule that requires reaching more than 50% of the votes cast. To reach a qualified majority, two conditions need to be met:

1. 55% of EU Member States vote in favour; and
2. these Member States represent at least 65% of the total EU population.

4 REASONS FOR AN ENHANCED USE OF QUALIFIED MAJORITY VOTING DECISION-MAKING IN SOCIAL POLICY

1 Better protect citizens against discrimination

In the EU, people are protected against discrimination on grounds of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation, as this is enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. But due to constraints related to unanimity voting, this principle of equal treatment is not ensured to the same degree across all grounds, areas of life and all Member States.

Around **1 in 5 people in the EU** say that they have experienced discrimination or harassment in the previous 12 months.

62% of Europeans say that new measures should be introduced to raise the level of protection for groups at risk of discrimination. Qualified majority voting will help us to answer this call.

2 Keep pace with evolving social challenges

The EU and its Member States face common challenges as regards the rapid pace of technological change and new forms of work, rising competition in a globalised economy and demographic trends such as ageing. We need to take full advantage of the opportunities brought about by these changes; this requires our collective and determined action. Taking decisions by qualified majority would help addressing these challenges and keep pace with economic and societal developments.

Efficient and flexible decision-making through qualified majority voting has allowed the EU to become a global reference in policy areas such as health and safety at work. During this mandate, the Commission has further improved the protection for millions of workers, helping to save the lives of more than 100,000 workers over the next 50 years.

60% of EU citizens support more EU-level decision-making in dealing with health and social security issues.

3 Foster a culture of compromise

Qualified majority voting is based on a culture of compromise and allows for outcomes that reflect the interests of the Union as a whole. It encourages all actors to find an outcome that is acceptable to all and makes a positive difference in citizens' lives.

4 More democratic decision-making

In the social policy areas still subject to voting by unanimity, the European Parliament does not have an equal role as co-decision maker. However, Members of the European Parliament are elected by EU citizens who are directly benefiting from EU social policy. Giving a stronger voice to the European Parliament would improve our decision-making.

HOW CAN WE CHANGE FROM UNANIMITY TO QUALIFIED MAJORITY VOTING?

Changing from unanimity and the special legislative procedure to qualified majority voting or the ordinary legislative procedure is possible using the so-called 'passerelle clauses' in the Treaties. The general 'passerelle clause' in the Treaty on European Union could be used in the near future to facilitate decision-making on non-discrimination and on the adoption of recommendations on social security and social protection of workers. In practice, this means that the European Council would have to decide by unanimity to make this procedural changes, with no objection from national parliaments, and with the European Parliament's consent.

Art. 48(7) Treaty on European Union - general passerelle clause

