

Britain in the world



This is a critical year for Labour to set out the case for change: for a fairer, greener and more dynamic Britain, where aspiration is rewarded, where working people succeed and where communities control their own destiny.

There can be no doubt that Britain faces serious challenges, nor that 13 years of Conservative government have left our country, our economy and our public services on their knees and vulnerable to those challenges. But there should also be no doubt that we can rise to them.

We believe in our country and our people. What they lack is a government that shares their ambition.

We need to show people that Labour would be that government. Show not just what the Tories have done to Britain but the Britain that Labour can build. A country run in the interests of working people, and where politics is once again a force for good.

This requires a bold and credible policy agenda – and the National Policy Forum plays a critical role in getting us there.

These will be the final NPF consultations before Labour finalises our manifesto for the next election, and they are a vital opportunity for us to hear from voices across the labour movement and country on some of the most pressing policy issues facing an incoming Labour government.

They look at the ways Britain can prosper by ensuring growth in every part of our country, by forging new, ethical trading relationships and by improving our everyday economy. They consider how better public services, focused on prevention and early intervention, can make us happier, healthier and safer. They look at how we can support families in all their wonderful diversity, and how by pushing power out of Westminster we can make our neighbourhoods and communities more cohesive and prosperous.

Please do contribute your thoughts and ideas. The strength of our movement is its diversity, and that is nowhere more apparent than in our democratic policymaking process. It is important that we are able to draw on the thoughts and experiences of our members, affiliates, stakeholders and supporters.

Together we can give Britain the fairer, greener future it deserves.

Keir Starmer
Leader of the Labour Party

Anneliese Dodds
National Policy Forum Chair

Thank you for taking part in the Labour Party's 2023 National Policy Forum (NPF) consultation. This is the final of four annual consultations before the next general election and will form a key input to the manifesto-drafting process.

As we further develop our policy platform, it is particularly important that we hear from people across the labour movement, including from local Labour Parties and affiliated trade unions. We also encourage external organisations, such as charities, think tanks, businesses and civil society bodies to submit their ideas.

Members should contribute to discussions and submissions through their constituency or branch party, as the commissions will not be accepting submissions directly from individuals in this final year.

The Labour Party is publishing six consultation documents this year. Each asks a set of seven questions on a specific policy area, followed by detail on the context and the challenges we face.

After the consultation closes on 17 March, all of the submissions from the four years' worth of consultations will be used to develop final year policy documents. Those documents will then be debated, amended and agreed by the NPF representatives in a final meeting on 21-23 July.

You may wish to look at the work of the Labour Party's policy roadmap, Stronger Together, which produced a final report, structured around the same six policy themes, in 2022: www.labour.org.uk/stronger-together.

Alongside Stronger Together, the party commissioned three independent reviews which reported over the last year, which may be helpful to refer back to as you consider your responses:

1. *A New Britain: Renewing our Democracy and Rebuilding our Economy*, the final report of the Commission on the UK's Future, chaired by former Prime Minister Gordon Brown, which made recommendations to reignite Britain's economy, rebuild trust in politics and reunite the country: www.labour.org.uk/page/a-new-britain;

2. *Start-Up, Scale-Up*, the final report of the Start-Up Review led by Lord Jim O'Neill, which explored what is needed to make Britain the best place in the world to start and grow a business: www.labour.org.uk/startupreview; and

3. *Learning and skills for economic recovery, social cohesion and a more equal Britain*, the final report of the Council of Skills Advisers, chaired by former Education Secretary Lord David Blunkett, which detailed how Labour's further education and skills agenda could improve growth, deliver quality jobs and prepare people for the future of work: www.labour.org.uk/skillsreport.

You don't need to answer every one of the questions in this document, nor answer them in a specific way. We suggest using the questions to help structure your response and act as a prompt for your thoughts on the policy area.

You can submit a response on behalf of your local party, at branch or Constituency Labour Party level. You can also respond as an organisation, such as an affiliated trade union, socialist society or external stakeholder.

Once you have drafted your response, please submit it to us through the Labour Policy Forum: www.policyforum.labour.org.uk. For more information on how to make a submission, see www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/consultation-submission-guide.

You can find all six consultation documents on the website, and explore other ways to get involved in the consultation such as online members' events, which you can find at labour.org.uk/npf23/.

Thank you again for taking the time to contribute to the NPF. It is through the contributions of members, supporters and stakeholders that Labour will develop the policy platform that will build a fairer, greener, more dynamic future for Britain.

Want to know more about how Labour makes its policy?

You can learn more about the Labour Party's policy-making processes on our website: www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/resource-hub.

You can also follow us on Twitter [@labpolicyforum](https://twitter.com/labpolicyforum) for policy development news and information on members' events.

Accessible Materials

The Labour Party is an inclusive, member-based organisation that prides itself on being accessible to all who share its values. If you would like an accessible version of these documents, please email us at **policydevelopment@labour.org.uk** to discuss how we can best accommodate your requirements.

Labour's progressive trade policy

Introduction

The National Policy Forum (NPF) is entering the final year of the current policy cycle, which will culminate in a full, in-person meeting of the NPF to determine Labour's policy platform. That platform will in turn contribute towards an election-winning manifesto for the next general election.

The Britain in the World policy commission and its predecessor commissions have consulted on a range of policy topics over the previous three years:

- In 2020, on championing internationalism in the post-coronavirus world;
- In 2021, on a strategy for veterans; and
- In 2022, on protecting our national interests and promoting Labour values abroad.

For this fourth and final year, the Britain in the World policy commission has chosen to focus on Labour's progressive trade policy. We welcome submissions on this issue – and specifically the seven consultation questions set out below – from Constituency and Branch Labour Parties, affiliated trade unions and socialist societies, as well as contributions from expert third party organisations such as charities, think tanks, businesses and civil society. Full details on how to make a submission can be found on www.policyforum.labour.org.uk.

The outcomes of all four consultations will then be taken into account when the commission produces its draft policy document for consideration at the full NPF meeting in July 2023.

Questions

1. What is the role of international trade in promoting domestic economic growth, boosting jobs and driving up wages?
2. How can Labour ensure the UK's international trade policy promotes growth and investment across the nations and regions of the UK?
3. How can Labour build resilience into the international trade system and better ensure the security of essential supply chains?
4. How will a Labour government's trade policy reduce poverty and global inequality whilst promoting (a) human rights, (b) workers' rights, (c) fair trade and (d) global peace and security?
5. How can Labour use trade policy to deliver environmental protection and help drive the world to net zero?
6. What are the specific implications of policy proposals in this area for (a) women, (b) Black, Asian and minority ethnic people (c) LGBT+ people, (d) disabled people and (e) all those with other protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010?
7. What consideration would need to be given to policy proposals in this area when collaborating with devolved administrations and local governments in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?

The context

Britain's trading relationships with the world are a key component of its foreign policy, providing an opportunity to boost economic growth at home while promoting British values and interests abroad. Yet as we approach the next general election, global trade faces a set of unprecedented challenges.

The outbreak of Covid-19 sent shockwaves across the international economic system, and global supply chains have struggled to recover from the disruption of national lockdowns, including the dramatic contraction and subsequent resurgence in demand for goods and services. This is not something that has been and gone; many countries continue to deal with outbreaks of the virus in 2023.

Meanwhile, Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine has led to soaring energy costs across Europe and driven a global food crisis. Manufacturing costs have increased and household budgets have been squeezed, placing significant strain on the everyday lives of working people.

In Britain, the challenges of global trade have been exacerbated by almost 13 years of Conservative mismanagement, recklessness and neglect.

Having overseen our withdrawal from the European Union, the Conservative government failed to deliver on the trade promises they made, with the UK economy left paying the price. Instead of prioritising exports, growth and jobs across the UK, or taking a lead on using trade to tackle the climate crisis and workers' rights, Conservatives simply cut and paste pre-existing deals that were negotiated decades ago.

In their 2019 manifesto, the Conservatives promised that 80 per cent of Britain's trade would be covered by free trade agreements by the end of 2022, yet they have now missed their own deadline.

This failure to deliver on trade targets is incredibly damaging, leaving the UK economy missing out on billions of pounds of potential opportunities that could boost growth here in the UK.

Boris Johnson and Liz Truss repeatedly promised new trade deals with India and the US, but these are yet to materialise.

Out of the few trade deals that have been signed, almost all have fallen short. Instead of aiming for ambitious new trade deals with international partners, the Conservatives have rushed around in search of the quickest agreements they can find, with no questions asked.

The Australian trade deal failed to include binding commitments on climate targets and risks undercutting UK farmers through the removal of import tariffs. By the Conservatives' own admission, "*the UK gave away far too much for far too little in return*" when negotiating the Australia deal.

In its negotiations with the EU, the Government's antagonistic approach repeatedly undermined progress and soured key relationships, limiting any chance of a new kind of progressive agreement. The last minute deal was far from what was promised, with significant gaps that make trading with European partners much more burdensome than before..

Moving into 2023, the Northern Ireland Protocol impasse remains one of the most damning examples of the Conservatives' failure on the international stage, with progress remaining slow. In government, Labour must immediately get to work on securing a better deal for British people.

After 13 years of Conservative government, Britain's reputation as a reliable and trusted partner has been significantly damaged. On trade, it is clear the Conservatives have no strategy, which is costing jobs, investment and growth. Labour knows that Britain deserves better.

The future under Labour

In light of our withdrawal from the EU, Britain will need to develop a bespoke and flexible trade policy that is fit for the future.

Negotiating an independent trading policy will be a significant challenge for a future Labour government. It will fall to Labour to grow the UK's economy and show that Britain can once again be a force for good on the international stage.

Heading into the next election, it is clear that Labour is the party of economic growth. The Labour Party has already set out a clear plan to make Britain and its people better off, giving the country the fresh start it needs.

International trade will be a vital part of this, helping deliver jobs at home while promoting Britain's principles abroad. From defending workers' rights to tackling the climate crisis, the Labour Party has the opportunity to develop a comprehensive trade policy that puts Labour values into action.

Building on the commission's previous consultation, where the NPF looked at the importance of promoting Labour's internationalist values through multilateral alliances, promoting aid and bolstering democratic systems, the commission will this year look to develop the party's position on trade.

The starting point must be the restoration of Britain's reputation as a trusted partner, both to our closest neighbours in Europe and our allies further afield. Labour has already outlined plans to scrap the treaty-breaking Protocol Bill and deliver real progress to ease trade, key first steps in building a new working relationship with Europe and solving the Northern Ireland issue.

The Labour Party will make Brexit work outside of the single market and the customs union, helping to move the country on from the arguments and divisions of the past. The veterinary agreement Labour will seek with the EU would eliminate most checks in agricultural goods, but there is much more to do.

Labour will seek to use trade policy to boost the economy and promote jobs, to create a trading environment that works for Britain. The UK is home to some of the best and most innovative businesses in the world, but they need the right platform to thrive. Labour's international trade policy must support this, particularly for businesses who rely on global supply chains.

Importantly, Labour understands that the benefits of trade must be felt across the whole of the UK. The country simply cannot go on with a situation where just 1.4 per cent of exports are from the North East and less than 5 per cent of exports originate from the East Midlands, compared to 25 per cent from London and 21 per cent from the South East.

The recent Commission on the UK's Future chaired by Gordon Brown highlighted this disparity, recommending a bigger role for devolved leaders as one way of tackling regional inequality. Labour is keen to build on this, and is looking at how a Labour government can further open up services and use trade to help level up across our regions and nations.

Following the recent disruption of the global pandemic and the war in Ukraine, Labour must consider what lessons to learn about the resilience of international trade to global events and use trade policy to better secure the UK's supply chains. This could include working closer with allies and partners to strengthen the international trading system.

To tackle the climate crisis and seize the economic opportunities of decarbonisation, Labour has set out plans to drive green British exports. At Annual Conference 2022, Shadow International Trade Secretary Nick Thomas-Symonds explained how a new network of Climate Export Hubs will work with businesses, universities and other innovators to take UK climate science innovations and export them to the world. These export hubs will support every region in the country – helping to create skilled jobs and opportunities nationwide.

Together with new rules to ensure that trade negotiators have binding responsibilities to deliver for the whole of the UK, Labour's trade policy will help ensure that Britain becomes a global leader in the race to net zero. These are strong first steps in the party's work to build a greener and fairer trade policy, but the commission is keen to hear what more the party can do.

Workers' rights must be the heart of Britain's trade policy. Labour opposes a global race to the bottom on standards and rights.

At home, this involves supporting wages and conditions in every sector of the UK economy. Labour can look to examples such as the new era of partnership in Wales, where the devolved government is working with business and unions to co-develop policy, as positive examples of civic engagement. This will help Labour to determine the best way of involving key partners, not just in relation to workers' rights chapters, but to entire trade agreements. Internationally, this involves standing up for workers, often including women and children, who are forced to work in extreme conditions. The UK must establish an effective means of working with key international players, including China, on issues such as the climate crisis while calling out cases of abuses of human rights.

Alongside an effective international development strategy, fair trade can play a key part in tackling poverty and global inequality, a key goal for a future Labour government.

Above all else, Labour sees trade as a force for good. In government, Labour will secure deals that bring investment while also promoting rights, climate action and ensuring higher standards. A Labour trade policy should support future green jobs, promote technology and innovation and embrace a digital future.

Through this consultation, the Britain in the World commission looks forward to receiving a wide range of thoughts and ideas on Labour's future trade policy, helping build the party's international policy platform in this important final year of the NPF cycle.