



SHAPING THE FUTURE OF WORK

A reflection of the COMECE Social Affairs Commission



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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Bishops of COMECE.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Shaping the digital as well as the ecological transformation of our economy will be a common challenge for European politics. Both trends will transform the world of work, changing our understanding as well as the labour conditions in Europe, and will require the political will and vision to shape the new world of work.

As the on-going transition will deeply transform our societies, the reflection of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) encourages the EU institutions to work on a common European vision as to ensure that **everybody, as well as the society as a whole, will benefit from these changes**. The document elaborated by the COMECE Social Affairs Commission in close consultation with Catholic-inspired organisations in Europe, aims to contribute both to the debate of the next EU mandate as well as to the future of work centenary initiative of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The contribution is divided into four sections: it first provides a reflection of work, defining it not only as a source of income but as an **integral part of human identity**. Work can help people to find their place in society, to foster their personal development and to care for creation by making the common house more fruitful for the next generations.

Much beyond its financial aspect, work therefore has an important role to play in people's life, and the future world of work has the potential to promote decent employment in Europe. However, the **analysis in the second chapter highlights also some of the challenges** that are undermining the potential of work as contributor to the common good:

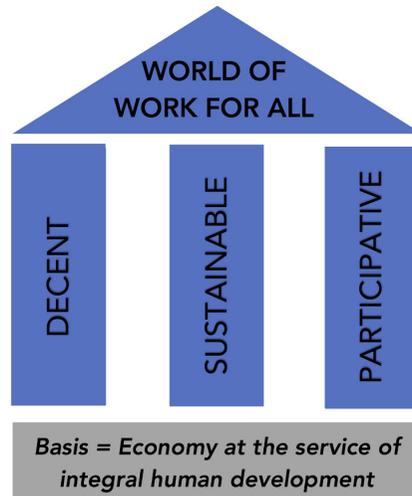


- ⇒ **Job polarisation is increasing** in a number of EU Member States as digitalisation and automatisisation have created many work opportunities for high-skilled people while putting the routine-task jobs of the middle class at risk
- ⇒ **New, more flexible forms of employment challenge EU labour law** and threaten job security of mostly young people, who are left to provide their own social security, health and personal protection
- ⇒ **The line between professional and private life has gradually become blurred**: the spread and use of new technologies has increased autonomy, but for many it has also led to an intensification of work, shrinking the space for life in family and society

Based on this analysis, the **COMECE reflection proposes to shape the current trends towards a decent, sustainable and participative world of work for all**. Such a vision should build on **an economy that serves the integral human development** and combines the following characteristics:

- ⇒ **This world of work will be decent** if it promotes just working conditions, including a dignified family-oriented income and sufficient space for life in family and society
- ⇒ **This world of work will be sustainable** if it provides the conditions for a stable and fruitful life of the present and future generations taking into account the ecological dimension of work
- ⇒ **This world of work will be participative** if workers and employers can shape together at all levels the conditions of their employment through social dialogue and cooperate in tripartite partnership with the state on the formulation of policies that affect their work

⇒ **This world of work will be inclusive** if it is centred around the primary goal of full employment and enables every member to take part in society and become a free actor for the authentic development of the society



*Figure 1: The vision of a decent, sustainable and participative world of work for all.
Source : COMECE Illustration*

In view of this vision of a decent, sustainable and participative world of work for all, the contribution proposes to the EU institutions **17 policy recommendations** (see page 33).



INTRODUCTION

Whereas the 2014 European elections were marked by a deep economic crisis, one of the key challenges ahead for the next five years will be to shape the digital and ecological transformation of the European economy and society. Both trends will continue to alter the world of work and, just as with industrialisation, there are again many uncertainties concerning access to work, its conditions and its future role as an elementary and defining part of human life.

For the Church, work has always been a human and hence a Christian priority: In the midst of industrialisation in the late 19th century, Pope Leo XIII shed light on the consequences of the new technologies and mass production on the human being². Today, the Church again feels committed to its mission to read the signs of the time³ - the new developments of digitalisation, artificial intelligence and ecological transition - and to call for the dignity of work for all.

Based on Catholic social teaching, this **document aims to contribute with a socio-ethical reflection to the current debate on the future world of work** in Europe. It shall feed into both the discussion of the agenda of the next EU Commission and the European Parliament, as well as into the *Future of Work Centenary Initiative*, which the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has launched to mark its 100th anniversary in 2019⁴.

1 Cf. Pope Francis (2017), *Address at the Meeting with Representatives of the World of Work - Pastoral visit to Genoa*: <https://bit.ly/2rrwFmE>.

2 Pope Leo XIII (1891), *Rerum Novarum - Encyclical Letter on Capital and Labour*: <https://bit.ly/12fQ8aH>.

3 Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1965), *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes*, 78.

4 Cf. <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/future-of-work/lang--en/index.htm>.

Whilst stressing the importance of voluntary and family work, the following text focuses predominantly on paid labour. This contribution emphasises the need for a clear European vision that shapes the current transformation to ensure that everybody will benefit from the new development. Highlighting the central role of work, it takes a look at the consequences of the structural changes in the world of work and contributes a vision to promote a decent, sustainable and participatory future of work for all. The reflection concludes with 17 policy recommendations that shall help the European Union ensure that human work will become for everybody the instrument of personal fulfilment and participation in society.



WORK IS CENTRAL FOR OUR SOCIETIES

Work is more than a way to make a living. It is an integral part of human identity and defines our role as human beings in society. It follows that, in this time of accelerating technological change, full employment remains a primary goal for EU politics and economy with a view to build inclusive and just societies.

From the perspective of Catholic Social Teaching, “*we are created with a vocation to work*”, as Pope Francis recalled in *Laudato Si*⁵. Under decent conditions, paid labour does not only reward us with money, but in balance with voluntary and family work, it helps us:

⇒ **To participate in creation.** In a time marked by the urgent need for an ecological transition, it is important to remember that work also refers to the common responsibility to care for the world as given by God and transmitted by past generations⁶. According to the biblical account, God placed woman and man in the garden he had created not only to preserve it (“*keep*”) but also to make it fruitful (“*till*”).⁷ Thus, work is part of our vocation to develop our common house in a prudent way so that it will remain fruitful for present and future generations.

⇒ **To fully integrate into society.** Work helps us find our role within the community and it is the primary mean towards a

5 Cf. Pope Francis (2015), *Laudato si'*, *Encyclical Letter on the Care for our Common Home*, para. 118: <https://bit.ly/1Gi1BTu>.

6 Cf. *Ibid.*, para. 124: <https://bit.ly/1Gi1BTu>.

7 Cf. *ibid.*; Genesis (2:15).



truly inclusive and active society composed of people coming from diverse backgrounds. Work gives us social recognition. We feel that we are needed by society and that we can play a role in helping our community flourish. By sharing the tasks with our colleagues and creating something together, we can learn from each other, enter into conversation and hence overcome prejudices and build trusting relationships.

⇒ **To foster our personal development.** Finally, decent and sustainable work is the setting of rich personal growth, “*where many aspects enter into play: creativity, planning for the future, developing our talents, living out our value, relating to others [...]*”⁸. Through work people not only develop their skills but also become responsible, critically-minded and autonomous citizens. Indeed, we thrive on work as young people become adults through work and it “*anoints us with dignity, fills us with dignity*”⁹.

Work can play a vital role in defining our meaning of life on earth, binding us together and unleashing our talents. In the wake of the transformative changes, politics should therefore remain committed towards the goal of full employment and facilitate the transition towards a people-centred economy that allows everybody a dignified and self-determined life through work.

8 Pope Francis (2015), *Laudato si'*, *Encyclical Letter on the Care for our Common Home*, para. 127: <https://bit.ly/1Gi1BTu>

9 Cf. Pope Francis (2017), Address at the Meeting with Representatives of the World of Work - Pastoral visit to Genoa; <https://bit.ly/2rrwFmE>.

UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSFORMATION

Given the importance of work, it is necessary to shape the current developments that transform the labour world to ensure that everyone and the society as a whole will benefit from these shifts. The current trends of job polarisation, new unregulated forms of work and the intensification of work-life are clear indicators of where policy actions are needed.

Digitalisation has shaped the conditions of labour in Europe, alongside with many other long-term trends: already in 1981, Saint Pope John Paul II pointed out shifts in technological, economic and political conditions, which would “*influence the world of work and production no less than the industrial revolution of the last century*”¹⁰. He referred to the widespread automatisisation of production, the accelerating globalisation and the “*growing realization that the heritage of nature is limited and that it is intolerably polluted*”¹¹. While the speed and complexity of these trends have increased, digitalisation, big data and artificial intelligence have emerged and rapidly gained in importance as drivers towards a new world of work.

Together, these changes have triggered innovation and helped to create employment throughout the EU. While it is not for the Church to scientifically analyse the consequences that these changes may have on human society, she considers it her task to call attention to the dignity and rights of those who work, to raise awareness about the negative impact and help guide these

10 Cf. Saint Pope John Paul II (1981), *Laborem Exercens – Encyclical Letter on Human Work on the Ninetieth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum*, p. 2: <http://bit.ly/2sDk9PS>.

11 *ibid.*



changes to ensure authentic progress¹². In this context, we have to take note that the shifts undergoing in the world of work have likewise come with challenges that affect the European society as a whole, including young people, families and citizens engaged in society:

1. INCREASING JOB POLARISATION IN EUROPEAN SOCIETIES

While the changes of the past years have created work opportunities for high-skilled people, many routine-task jobs are at risk of being either relocated to a country with cheaper labour costs or replaced by robots or algorithms.

Overall, it is promising to see that creativity and experience have become more valued in Europe’s labour market over the past years. Many of the newly created jobs are setting personal growth and tend to be much more rewarding than routine-task jobs that mainly characterised the world of work of the past.¹³

However, current employment trends show also that alongside the creation of many high-paid jobs, low-paid occupations in the service sector have steadily increased in a number of EU Member States.¹⁴ The new jobs at the lower income scale are professions that are difficult to automate or offshore, such as providers of personal service, cleaning personnel and care workers. The people employed in these sectors are working under an increasing time

12 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 3.

13 Eurofound (2015), *New forms of Employment*, research report, p. 106: <https://bit.ly/2FS2nOc>

14 European Commission (2018), *Employment and Social Developments in Europe – Annual Review 2018*, p.60: <https://bit.ly/2lyUWxn>; cf. also Eurofound (2017), *Occupational Change and Wage Inequality – European Jobs Monitor 2017*, p. 34: <https://bit.ly/2KKoB8G>

pressure, but under still very low, if not ill-paid remuneration.¹⁵ As a result, in-work poverty has increased from 8 per cent in 2007 to 10 per cent in 2017.¹⁶

On the contrary, traditional middle-class jobs, such as office, sales and blue-collar workers, have diminished, triggering a trend of job polarisation throughout Europe which is most accentuated in those EU Member States where collective bargaining systems as well as education and training schemes are less developed or, as in the case of Southern Europe, have been weakened in the aftermath of the crisis.¹⁷

In addition, digitalisation might further expand the rural-urban and the North-South division in Europe. Without further investment in the digital infrastructure of Europe's rural areas, in particular in Eastern Europe, the digitalised economy will likely create most of its jobs in the urban areas and richer EU regions. This might further boost labour migration, in particular of the young and highly-skilled people, and exacerbate the demographic challenges of Europe's rural areas and peripheral regions.¹⁸

15 Katholische Arbeitnehmer-Bewegung e. V. (KAB), Stiftung Zukunft der Arbeit und der sozialen Sicherung (ZASS), Jugendbildungs- und Freizeitgestaltungsverein der KAB (Jubi e. V.) & Weltnotwerk e. V. der KAB (2018): Zukunft der Arbeit – Arbeit 4.0, Digitalisierung, Menschenwürde, p. 12, Kettler Verlag GmbH Köln.

16 Eurofound (2017), In-work Poverty in the EU - research report, p. 3: <https://bit.ly/2wkFCO6>.

17 Eichhorst, Werner (2017), Labour Market Institutions and the Future of Work: Good Jobs for All, Institute of Labour Economics (IZA) Policy Paper No. 122: <https://bit.ly/2wkTKyX>; ibid. (2015), Do we have to be afraid of the Future of Work?, Institute of Labour Economics (IZA) Policy Paper No. 102, p. 19: <https://bit.ly/2iDscsF>.

18 Eurofound (2017), Occupational Change and Wage Inequality - European Jobs Monitor 2017, p. 14, <https://bit.ly/2KKoB8G>.



2. VANISHING JOB SECURITY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The changing world of work has allowed for the rise of more flexible working arrangements, including temporary contracts, part-time agreements or agency work. In addition, new forms of employment have emerged, in particular in the collaborative (platform or shared) economy, radically transforming our understanding of work and the traditional relationship between employer and employee¹⁹.

The new forms of work in the collaborative economy have the potential to spur entrepreneurship and the creation of innovative businesses in Europe. However, there is also a number of internet platforms that claim to be just intermediaries between consumers and service providers, but act as real employers by giving instructions to workers which are factually declared as self-employed.²⁰ Moreover, companies increasingly assign tasks and projects to freelancers or to crowd-workers recruited via internet platforms without engaging in any employment relationship with them.²¹

This development leads to a further flexibilisation of the labour market, in which workers, in particular the young people, are left to provide their own social security, health and personal protection.²² The resulting job insecurity inhibits them from starting a family, receiving a mortgage or simply planning ahead for their future, as the ever-increasing demand for flexibility prevents them from doing so. On-the-job training, which researchers as well as

19 Cf. Eurofound (2015), *New forms of Employment, research report*, p. 106, <https://bit.ly/2FS2nOc>.

20 European Commission (2018), *Employment and Social Developments in Europe – Annual Review 2018*, p.59, <https://bit.ly/2IyUWxn>.

21 Turk, Žiga (2018), *The future of Work: Robots Cooking Free Lunches?*, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies publication, p.33: <https://bit.ly/2NCKxXr>.

22 Degryse, Christoph (2016), *Digitalisation of the Economy and its Impact on Labour Markets*, European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) Working Paper 2016.02, p. 34: <https://bit.ly/2iIkfGA>

politicians stressed to be of strategic importance for the future of the digital economy and Europe's competitiveness, is often not provided to those working under flexible work arrangements as access to further education remains highly dependent on permanent contracts in the EU.²³

For this reason, labour law at both national and European level needs to be adapted to include the new forms of employment that are increasingly replacing a number of stable and more secure types of work in Europe.²⁴

3. NEW OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS FOR BALANCING FAMILY, SOCIAL AND WORK LIFE

The spread and use of new technologies has gradually blurred the line between professional and private life as a growing number of workers is now able to work from any place at any time.

Although the possibility of teleworking and more flexible working-time arrangements can certainly help people keep or even improve their balance between working life and family life, this development - in its current unregulated form - may also increase work intensification and pervasiveness. Many people in Europe feel an increasing pressure at the work place, especially as they work nowadays more often in projects and in result-oriented jobs: 25% of workers report that they experience work-related stress for all or most of their working life span.²⁵ If unregulated, this job intensification can trigger for some people a culture of permanent availability, which in the end can damage their work-life balance and harm their health. This is worrisome as both creativity and

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Turk, Žiga (2018), *The future of Work: Robots Cooking Free Lunches?*, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies publication, p.33.

²⁵ EU-OSHA (2014) *Psychosocial risks in Europe – Prevalence and strategies for prevention*: <https://bit.ly/1OD04NQ>.



the ability to take balanced decisions, hence the key competence of the digital economy, require fixed and sufficient rest time.

On the contrary, common rest periods, which are free from production and consumption and in which the society as a whole can calm down, are in many EU Member States under siege. Citizens are understood predominantly as consumers and producers, “*whose profit consists above all in the optimisation of his or her monetary income*”²⁶. Sunday, which is recognised by tradition or custom as the weekly day of rest in all the EU Member States²⁷ and which until 1996 had been protected by European legislation, has become in many countries one more day, in which shops are open. In a time of *rapidification*, however, there would be a need for such a common day that allows us to rest, to engage in community work and to spend time with our family and friends.

²⁶ Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith & Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (2018), *Oeconomicae et pecuniarum quaestiones – Consideration for an ethical discernment regarding some aspects of the present economic-financial system*, p. 3.

²⁷ Council of Europe (1996), *European Social Charter (revised)*, Art. 2 (5).

A DECENT, SUSTAINABLE AND PARTICIPATIVE WORLD OF WORK FOR ALL

In order to respond to the changing world of work, Europe needs a clear and common vision on the role of politics in shaping these trends. Seen through the lens of Catholic Social Teaching, we believe in a vision of a decent, sustainable and participative world of work for all, which based on an economy that serves the integral human development, will contribute to a more inclusive and prosperous society.

PREREQUISITE: AN ECONOMY AT THE SERVICE OF INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The necessary fundament for such a vision is an economy that is geared towards its ultimate goal of serving the people. The European Union, known for its advanced welfare systems and high living standards, has a particular responsibility in defending and promoting such a person-centred model in a globalised economy.

The financial crisis, its roots and its consequences, however, have shown that the dignity of the people, their welfare and right to social inclusion and participation in society played only a subordinated role in Europe.

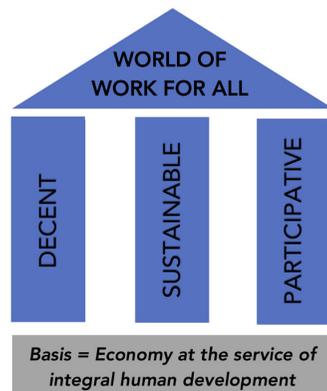


Figure 2: A vision of a decent, sustainable and participative world of work for all.
Source : COMECE Illustration



Instead, “priority tends to be given to speculation and the pursuit of financial gain, which fail to take the context into account, let alone the effects on human dignity and natural environment”²⁸. Workers and their families are still too often reduced to mere statistics, to cost-intensive workforces, or human capital, which can be pared down or replaced by machines or “cheaper” workers from abroad to maximise the margin of profits.²⁹ A strict focus on short-term benefits for shareholders and the increasing internal competition within companies have undermined trust, which shall be the soul of every organisation.³⁰

Against this tendency, the EU and its Member States can lead the way in showing that the future of work will be prosperous for everybody and that it is not only the margin of profit, but first and foremost the integral development of the citizens that shapes the whole economy. Cooperatives³¹, social enterprises, an increasing number of small and medium-sized enterprises and *social intrapreneurs*³² are leading already by example, showing that doing business is more than profit-making, but a noble vocation “to serve more effectively the common good”³³ and to make “an irreplaceable contribution to the material and even spiritual well-being of humankind”³⁴. Moreover, EU Member States with strong welfare systems have demonstrated throughout the crisis that

28 Pope Francis (2015), *Laudato si'*, Encyclical Letter on the Care for our Common Home, para. 56: <https://bit.ly/1Gi1BTu>.

29 Cf. Pope Francis (2017), *Address to the COMECE (Re)thinking Europe Dialogue*: <https://bit.ly/2KKRkiq> ; cf. also Develtere, Patrick (2016), *A Plea for Qualitative Growth: Quality is better than more*, beweging.net.

30 Cf. Pope Francis, (2017), *Address at the Meeting with Representatives of the World of Work - Pastoral visit to Genoa*: <https://bit.ly/2x4rNWE>.

31 Such as Mondragon Corporation based in the Basque region in Spain, founded by the Catholic priest José Maria Arizmendiarieta in 1956.

32 Social intrapreneur is an employee who promotes innovative services and products with wider positive social impact within his company.

33 Pope Francis (2014), *Message to the World Economic Forum, Davos-Klosters*, quoting *Evangelii Gaudium*, para. 203.

34 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2014), *What does it mean to say that business is a vocation*: <https://bit.ly/2I6n1fd>.

social dialogue and well-developed social protection systems are a vital investment to protect citizens and recover quickly.³⁵

Inspired by these promising examples, the EU could promote a new holistic paradigm. This approach would show that the principles of solidarity, care for creation and respect for workers' rights and the idea of a free, competitive, innovation-driven market economy are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary objectives.

“To do so requires coming up with new, more inclusive and equitable economic models, aimed not serving the few, but at benefiting ordinary people and society as a whole”, stressed Pope Francis when receiving the Charlemagne Prize in 2016.³⁶ In the same speech, he explicitly cited the example of the social market economy, which links the idea of a free competitive market with the principle of solidarity and the policies to serve the common good.³⁷ As it is enshrined as one of the objectives in the European treaties³⁸, it is now for the EU to fully rediscover this concept. The high-level agreement on a *European Pillar of Social Rights* in November 2017 was a first, vital step in this direction, and in the next five years, it will be crucial to keep this promise of a more social and people-centred Europe.

In this regard, the principles of the Pillar should continue to shape European policies beyond the European elections next year and become an integral part of the next *Multiannual Financial*

35 European Commission (2018), *The Resilience of EU Member States to the Financial and Economic Crisis – What are the Characteristics of Resilient Behaviour?* – JRC Science for Policy Report, p. 23: <https://bit.ly/2uriRxa>

36 Cf. Pope Francis (2016), *Acceptance Address on the Conferral of the Charlemagne Prize*: <https://bit.ly/24BFExe>.

37 Cf. COMECE (2011), *A European Community of Solidarity and Responsibility – A Statement of the COMECE Bishops on the EU Treaty Objective of a Competitive Social Market Economy*, p. 9: <https://bit.ly/2cFWwRE>.

38 Cf. Art. 3 Treaty of the European Union (TEU)



Framework (MFF). Together with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the high-level commitment should likewise set the basis for a new ten-year strategy that as a follow-up to *Europe 2020* will guide the EU towards a common vision of authentic development.

DECENT WORK THAT PROVIDES AN ADEQUATE
STANDARD OF LIVING AND LEAVES SPACE FOR FAMILY
AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

A first and important cornerstone for the future world of work is the fundamental and universal right to decent working conditions, which should not just be limited to workers in the EU, but to all people around the world who contribute to the functioning of our interconnected global economy.

Following the ILO definition³⁹, decent work is such to enable people to foster their personal development and live a life in dignity. A digital and technological transformation which replaces routine-tasks and hazardous jobs with much more creative and fulfilling employment for all, can play an important role in this regard, especially if we respect the following two principles:

First, nobody – regardless of the form or place of her or his work – can be denied the legitimate right to just working conditions and a remuneration that *“will give [workers] and their families a decent standard of living”*⁴⁰. Every person, notably those working under the supervision of somebody, shall be entitled to a core set of enforceable rights. We therefore welcome the broad scope of the proposal for a *EU Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions*, which aims to expand labour standards to the new forms of employment. Moreover, we believe that EU and national legislations need to be more protective of the health and dignity

39 Cf. <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>

40 Cf. Council of Europe (1996), *European Social Charter (revised)*, Art. 4 (1).

of those workers that provide a vital service for society and the common good, in particular in the caring sector. While the need for personal household services will grow in an ageing society, the remuneration and working conditions of people employed in this sector should remain a focal point of European as well as national employment policies.

However, the EU's role to protect the dignity of work does not end at its borders. Home of numerous multinational corporations and one of the largest consumer markets, the EU and its Member States have the moral responsibility to fulfil and promote adherence to international labour standards throughout the whole supply chain. The EU should become a frontrunner in a better implementation of the ILO and UN international labour standards and especially put emphasis on core labour standards and social policy norms in its Free Trade Agreements.

Second, we have to recall ourselves that work – even if highly remunerated – is only decent if it leaves space for a life in society and family.⁴¹ As highlighted in the analysis, nowadays people can work from any place at any given time. While this flexibility comes with opportunities, the key challenge for today's policies and society is to prevent that the freedom to self-organise work and life does not lead to unlimited working hours, self-exploitation and a life dominated by work in all its spheres.

Together we should preserve the spaces that enable us to work for the common good of our societies. We should promote decent working hours that allow us to spend sufficient time with our family and friends and to volunteer for an organisation. Companies should promote a corporate culture, which protects

⁴¹ Pope Francis (2017), *Address at the Meeting with Representatives of the World of Work* - Pastoral visit to Genoa: <https://bit.ly/2x4rNWE>.



the employees from long working-hours. In parallel, the European Commission could facilitate the exchange of good practices that can curb the tendency towards permanent availability. There are already promising examples, such as the *Right to Disconnect* in France, which could help increase protection of workers in other Member States and provide the basis for collective agreements as well as national and EU legislations.

We also believe that all EU citizens are entitled to benefit from decent working hours, which as a matter of principles exclude bank holidays and Sundays. Recalling our support for the *European Sunday Alliance*, we therefore remain strongly committed to its objective of reintegrating the Sunday as a synchronised day of rest in European law. Sunday is the only day of the week that allows us to spend time together as a society and to “enjoy what is not produced and not consumed, not bought and not sold”⁴². “[It] enables citizens to enjoy full participation in cultural, sports, social and religious life, to seek cultural enrichment and spiritual well-being and to engage in volunteer work and association activities.”⁴³ Reinstating Sunday as a weekly day of rest in a revised *European Working Time Directive* will therefore prove that the EU is more than just a union of economic interest, but a community that places the rights and interests of its people as citizens – not only as economic actors – at the centre of the common policies.

SUSTAINABLE WORK THAT PROVIDES STABILITY FOR CURRENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

Complementary to the need of decent employment, work must also be sustainable in both its social, economic and ecological dimension. This is to ensure that work provides the necessary conditions to maintain a stable and fruitful life for current as well

⁴² Pope Francis (2015), *General Audience on the family* – 22. Celebrations: <https://bit.ly/1j7CP4S>.

⁴³ European Sunday Alliance (2011), *Founding Statement setting up the European Sunday Alliance „Together for decent working hours!“*, p. 2: <https://bit.ly/2xg4Ek7>.

as future generations.

In response to ever more flexible working arrangements, workers need employment conditions that ensure their permanence and security throughout their working life. Young people need the stability to start a family, to build their home and to settle down. Fixed-term contracts, on-demand work and other new forms of employment, especially in the platform economy, that do not deliver a steady and hence sustainable income fail to provide for many the certainty that permanent jobs used to provide over the years.

The EU could play a vital role in discouraging the use of short-term contracts or other non-standard forms of work, notably zero-hour contracts, as cost-cutting measures. In particular, it should improve the protection of workers in the platform economy. While it is true that this new type of work challenges the traditional dichotomy of employee and self-employed, there are many cases where platforms act as employers or, more precisely, temporary work agencies. The European Commission should therefore examine to what extent already existing EU legislation, notably the *EU Directive on Temporary Agency Work*, is applicable to certain platforms. In parallel and with a view to its next mandate, it should likewise explore the need for a new European legal framework for platform work.

On the other hand, we have to rethink our education system in a labour world marked by *rapidification*. As technology evolves at an ever-faster pace, so do jobs and skills needs. This requires that education does not take place only at the early stages of life but will become a constant element that enriches our personal development. Life-long learning schemes and on-the-job training will therefore play a pivotal role and EU Member States should



assess how to encourage companies as well as employees in promoting these schemes. One possibility would be to set-up personal life-long learning and job retraining accounts. Similar to the retirement schemes, such an account could be funded tax-free by workers, employers and governments, and could be used by workers to pay for education and training opportunities. It should be portable from job to job and should provide special incentives for low-income earners and workers affected by the digital and ecological transition.

Nevertheless, work becomes only sustainable if it does not harm or destroy the livelihood of others and if it uses generously and equitably the gifts of creation.⁴⁴ We therefore should be aware that in today's world of work everything is interconnected and that the decision about our lifestyle has a vital impact on the quality of life of our children. Our work therefore should not be guided by short-termism, but by a long-term perspective that overcomes the current paradigm of value creation and respects the right of future generations. Likewise, it is necessary to consider the effects our work and lifestyle have on people in other parts of the world, where the consequences of man-made climate change have already deteriorated the life and work of millions of people. We should therefore take the debate on the future of work as an opportunity to rethink prosperity and the deeper meaning of how we can create authentic and long-lasting value in a world that currently lives beyond its planetary boundaries.

The EU could become a global frontrunner in this process and promote new types of occupations and businesses that, in line with the biblical account, seek to continue creation and care for the environment. Over the past years, the increase in high-skilled jobs in the energy-efficiency and renewable energy sectors in

⁴⁴ Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith & Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (2018), *Oeconomicae et pecuniarum quaestiones – Consideration for an ethical discernment regarding some aspects of the present economic-financial system*, p. 2.

Europe has already proven that the needed ecological transition can have a positive impact on the world of work. Start-ups, social enterprises, as well as *social intrapreneurs* and cooperatives have taken the lead in the transformation of our economy, yet still many of them still lack access to adequate funding. This calls for the need to promote sustainable investment in the EU that, alongside supporting regulatory policies, will further shape the idea of a European circular and low-carbon economy.

Towards this end, the public sector in Europe could lead by good example by applying social as well as ecological criteria in public procurement processes to spur the growth of social entrepreneurship in Europe.⁴⁵ It will also be important to improve the legal environment of social enterprises at both the national and EU level to further encourage the creation of new businesses, as well as to foster cooperation with traditional companies and promote cross-border activities in Europe. Built on the *Social Business Initiative* (2011) and in line with the proposal of the European Parliament on a *Statute for Social and Solidarity-based Enterprises*⁴⁶, the European Commission should therefore consider creating a *European social economy label* to improve the visibility as well as the legal environment of these companies that work for the common good in Europe.

In parallel, the EU could help making sustainability a guiding principle of the financial market and private investments. COMECE therefore welcomes the fact that investment in sustainable infrastructure is one of the focal areas of the proposed *InvestEU*

⁴⁵ European Commission (2016), *Social enterprises and the social economy going forward, a call for action from the Commission Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurship (GECES)*: <https://bit.ly/2uiAM5Q>

⁴⁶ European Parliament (2018), *EP report with recommendations to the Commission on Statute for Social and Solidarity-based Enterprises (2016/2237(INL))*: <https://bit.ly/2uklhKY>



Fund and encourages the EU to go forward with its ambitions to promote sustainable investment on the financial markets.

PARTICIPATIVE WORK THAT ALLOWS EMPLOYEES TO SHAPE THEIR ENVIRONMENT

“If there is one word that we should never tire of repeating, it is this: dialogue”, underlined Pope Francis in his acceptance speech of the Charlemagne Prize.⁴⁷ He reminds us that dialogue is the privileged means for building consensus and agreement for a just, responsive and inclusive society. It follows that not state policies alone, but primarily social dialogue⁴⁸ among workers and employers at equal footing shall shape the working environment.

Rerum Novarum has been the inspiration for the creation of Christian workers’ associations, and throughout the past 127 years, Catholic social teaching has recalled the importance of workers’ involvement in the shaping of their labour conditions.⁴⁹ The participation of workers through the means of a social dialogue based on partnership will help to guide the sometimes diverging interests of employers and employees to the common good. Indeed, countries with long tradition of social dialogue have been more resilient throughout the past economic crisis and are less polarised in terms of job creation along the income scale.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Pope Francis (2016), *Acceptance address on the Conferral of the Charlemagne Prize*: <https://bit.ly/24BFExe>

⁴⁸ This dialogue encompasses all forms of exchanges between workers and employers as well as the tripartite partnership with the state, including the Third Way, as applied by the Catholic and Protestant Churches in Germany.

⁴⁹ Cf. Pope Leo XIII (1891), *Rerum Novarum*, Encyclical Letter on Capital and Labour, para. 54: , see also Saint Pope John Paul II (1981), *Laborem Exercens* – Encyclical Letter on Human Work on the Ninetieth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, No. 20: <http://bit.ly/2sDk9PS>; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1965), *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes*, 82, 99.

⁵⁰ Eurofound (2017), *Occupational Change and Wage Inequality - European Jobs Monitor 2017*, p. 14: <https://bit.ly/2KKoB8G>.

It is hence surprising that this fundamental right, as enshrined in the European Treaties⁵¹, has come under pressure by recent political interventions at European level⁵². Contrary to this practice, social as well as civil dialogue should be included in the design and implementation of European employment and social policies to ensure that the policies will be in balance of interest between employers and workers. Especially in the European Semester, social partners as well as civil society actors, including the Church-based organisations, and Churches should be consulted to allow them to bring in their insights and expertise of day-to-day social work.

With a view to these objectives, the EU should remain committed to its initiative of a new start for social dialogue and should especially promote it at the European level. We also call on the social partners to keep their promise in reinvigorating the European social dialogue and contributing to the European integration process by negotiating and adopting EU-wide framework agreements.

Workers' organisations could foster their ties and dialogue even more with employees beyond European borders. These workers contribute to our economy and they sometimes work with us in the same company on the same product, but often under less favourable and sustainable conditions. The EU could also facilitate the conditions for trade unions and workers' organisations to better represent the interests of those employees working under the new forms of employment and allow them to take part in the social dialogue.

⁵¹ Art. 152-155 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, see also Article 28 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

⁵² For example by the European Semester, which aims to coordinate EU Member States' economic, fiscal and employment policies at European level, or by the Economic Adjustment Programmes, which were implemented in some Eurozone countries during the sovereign debt crisis.



FOR ALL: INCLUSIVE WORLD OF WORK THAT ALLOWS
EVERYBODY TO CONTRIBUTE

Lastly, but most importantly, a decent, sustainable and participative world of work is not exclusive, but open to everybody. Centred around the goal of full employment, it should seek to enable everybody to contribute to the development of a just and sustainable society.

As explained in the second chapter, work is much more than a source of income as it helps us to care for creation, to define and integrate ourselves in society and to unleash the rich personal growth inherent in all of us. *“It follows that, in the realities of today’s global society, it is essential that ‘we continue to prioritise the goal of access to steady employment for everyone’, no matter the limited interest of business and dubious economic reasoning.”*⁵³

The idea of granting an unconditional basic income to every citizen has gained some prominence in recent months. Yet, as supporters and opponents bring different models into the discussion, there remain numerous questions: can it become an adequate alternative to the current social security system and allow people to have more time for their family and civic engagement? Would it be fair if the state grants everybody the same amount of money, though some people due to illness would require more extensive support to live a life with dignity? Would such a scheme enable the most vulnerable to fully take part in society, or would they feel neglected from society, and discarded with money? Considering all this, unconditional income support does not seem to be the panacea to the complex challenge of unemployment and poverty. Pope Francis reminds us that decent and sustainable work anoints us with dignity and “[i]t [therefore] *must be clear that the real goal*

⁵³ Pope Francis (2015), *Laudato si'*, *Encyclical Letter on the Care for our Common Home*, para. 127, <https://bit.ly/1Gi1BTu>

to be achieved is not ‘income for all’ but “work for all”! Because without work, without work for all there is no dignity for all.”⁵⁴

Society instead is called to ensure that nobody feels left behind and cut off from the technological and societal evolution. This refers both, to the effects of digitalisation on routine-task jobs as well as to the impact of the ecological transition on the many workers that are employed in the carbon-intensive industries in Europe. If they feel that their interest for stable employment does not count anything in the ecological transition, the wide public support for climate change policies might start to unravel. Managing the transition towards a low-carbon economy therefore starts with the support of the workers most affected by these changes. This will certainly require more funding for further education, career guidance and regional support programmes, but will facilitate that the digital as well as ecological transition will be just for everybody.

The *European Globalisation Adjustment Fund* (EGF), which supports European workers whose jobs have been replaced by trade liberalisation since 2007, can play a complementary role to national programmes in managing the transition. The EU could turn the EGF into a European Transition Fund, increase its funding and enlarge its scope to also assist workers affected by the needed transition to a low-carbon and digital economy. COMECE welcomes that the European Commission has tabled this recommendation in the current negotiations of the new Multi-annual Financial Framework and encourages the Member States

⁵⁴ Cf. Pope Francis (2017), *Address at the Meeting with Representatives of the World of Work - Pastoral visit to Genoa*: <https://bit.ly/2x4rNWE>; *Laudato si'*, Encyclical Letter on the Care for our Common Home, para. 124: <https://bit.ly/1Gi1BTu>; cf. also ibid, para. 128: <https://bit.ly/1Gi1BTu>



and the European Parliament to support this proposal.⁵⁵

Furthermore, the EU and its Member States could explore the possibility of better re-integrating the long-term unemployed by offering them tailor-made job search assistance, training, socio-educational help and – if possible – publicly financed jobs in order to bridge the access to the labour market. The Catholic Church, with its movements and organisations, has a long-standing experience in the guidance and support of long-term unemployed people and is willing to share its good practices.⁵⁶

With a view to an economy that serves the integral human development, businesses need to remain encouraged to invest in people and fulfil their noble vocation of generating prosperity and creating employment. However, EU average tax rates on labour are still considerably higher than taxes on capital and have increased since 2009 while top corporate income taxes declined during the same time span.⁵⁷ In an increasingly capital-intensive economy, we thus encourage the EU and its Member States to rebalance taxes to be paid between capital and labour and to better capture the added value generated by robots as well as by transactions on intangible assets, information and data. By targeting profits, the EU should focus on removing mismatches between national systems and preferential regimes that allow tax avoidance. We therefore support the proposal of a *Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base* (CCCTB) and strongly encourage the Council of the EU to come to a swift decision. This will prove that the EU is more than just a collection of interest groups, but

⁵⁵ Cf. European Commission (2018), *Proposal for a Regulation on the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund* (EGF), Art. 2 (2): <https://bit.ly/2L5EEAZ>.

⁵⁶ Examples are i.a. the Aktion Arbeit of the diocese of Trier, Germany or the Episcopal Unemployment Foundation Linz, Austria (*Bischöfliche Arbeitslosenstiftung Linz*)

⁵⁷ European Commission (2017), *Taxation Trends in The European Union – Data for the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway*: <https://bit.ly/2w05d24>.

“a single community that sustains and assists its members”⁵⁸. We also recall the proposal of the bishops of COMECE of creating an EU-wide financial transaction tax that will potentially lower market volatility, curb excessive speculation and help restoring tax justice.⁵⁹

Fairer taxation can help raising resources to bolster national and European social security schemes and support the transformation towards a more decent, sustainable, participative and, above all, inclusive future of work.

58 Cf. Pope Francis (2017), *Address to the COMECE (Re)thinking Europe Dialogue*: <https://bit.ly/2KKrkig>.

59 COMECE (2011): *A European Community of Solidarity and Responsibility – A Statement of the COMECE Bishops on the EU Treaty Objective of a Competitive Social Market Economy*: <https://bit.ly/2cFWwRE>.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Derived from the vision of a decent, sustainable and participative world of work for all, we suggest to the institutions of the European Union and its Member States the following 17 policy recommendations.

PREREQUISITE: ECONOMY AT THE SERVICE OF HUMAN INTEGRAL DEVELOPMENT

1. **Promote human integral development:** We encourage the EU and its Member States to guide their policies towards the EU Treaty objective of a social market economy. Towards this aim, the EU should strictly adhere to the climate, employment and poverty targets of the *Europe 2020 strategy* and place the *Sustainable Development Goals* at the centre of a new strategy for 2030.
2. **Rebalance economic freedom with social rights:** The EU should swiftly translate the *European Pillar of Social Rights* into concrete policy actions using all policy instruments, including legislations, the *European Semester*, EU funds and European social dialogue. We expect that the high-level commitment will shape EU policies also beyond the European elections.

DECENT ...

3. **Ensure decent working conditions in all forms of employment:** European legislations should safeguard that every person that works under the supervision of somebody shall be entitled to a core set of enforceable rights, including health and safety protection, access to mandatory training and information. In addition, the EU and its Member States should



ensure that all EU citizens, regardless of their employment relationship, have access to adequate social protection.

4. **Uphold international labour standards:** Together with its Member States, the EU should become a global frontrunner in advocating, promoting and implementing international labour standards, with particular reference to the *ILO Declaration on Multinationals and Social Policy* and the on-going negotiations on a *UN binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights*. The European Commission should also systematically incorporate these labour standards as conditionality in its Free Trade Agreements.
5. **Promote the recognition of family work and volunteering:** In rearing their children and caring for the elderly, family members perform a vital service for the common good. Hence, they should have access to health insurance and be entitled to receive an adequate pension. Moreover, the EU should better value the contribution of volunteering as an active expression of citizenship and promote the recognition and validation of non-formal as well as informal qualification gained through volunteering.
6. **Facilitate the exchanges of good practices on decent working hours:** The spread of mobile work devices has facilitated the trend towards a culture of permanent availability. We therefore call on the EU to secure working hours respecting workers' health, safety and human dignity through a revised EU Working Time Directive and other relevant legislations, including a *Right to Disconnect* as recently enacted by France
7. **Reintegrate Sunday protection into EU law:** Whereas EU citizens are increasingly faced with work on public holidays and Sundays, we recommend that the EU protects Sunday in a revised Working Time Directive as a collective day of rest.

... SUSTAINABLE ...

8. **Promote stable and more secure employment:** The EU should discourage the use of short-term contracts or other non-standard forms of work, in particular zero-hour contracts, as cost-cutting measures, and help to convert temporary labour into permanent employment. In order to improve the protection of workers in the platform economy, the European Commission should also explore the need for a EU directive on platform work and examine to what extent already current EU legislation, notably the *Directive on Temporary Agency Work*, is applicable to certain online platforms.
9. **Rethinking the notion of education:** In childhood and youth, education lays the foundation for a self-determined life, but in a rapidly changing world of work, it should become the constant element of working life. The European Commission should therefore facilitate the exchange of best practices about how to promote life-long learning schemes. In particular, the EU Commission should assess with the Member States the possibility of introducing a personal activity account that each worker could use to pay for education and retraining.
10. **Promote jobs and entrepreneurship that care for creation:** The EU should become a frontrunner in promoting occupations and enterprises that care for the environment. Towards this end, COMECE recommends the EU to spur the development of social enterprises. In line with the *European Parliament report on a Statute for Social and Solidarity-based Enterprises* (2018), the EU should consider creating a European social economy label and promote this business model in public procurement.



11. **Making sustainability a guiding principle of private investment:** A prerequisite for the creation of sustainable labour are conditions for investment that are directed towards the common good. While COMECE welcomes the fact that sustainable infrastructure is one of the four focal areas of the proposed *InvestEU* Fund, it encourages the EU to fully implement the EU Action Plan on Sustainable Finance with the view to unlock the potential investment for the creation of jobs that are sustainable for both, the human person and the environment.

... PARTICIPATIVE ...

12. **Strengthen the involvement of social partners, civil society and Churches in the European Semester:** The EU should foster dialogue with the aforementioned and involve them in the design and implementation of European labour and social policies, in particular through the European Semester process. This will enhance ownership and favour a smooth implementation of policy measures.
13. **Reinvigorate social dialogue at all levels:** The EU and its Member States should promote social dialogue in view of the common good at all levels. This dialogue should allow employees and employers to jointly shape their employment conditions and enable them in tripartite partnership with the state to contribute to the formulation of policies that affect their work. The EU should especially encourage the negotiation of autonomous EU-wide framework agreements.
14. **Adapt social dialogue to the post-factory environment:** New forms of employment and in general, a more segregated world of work challenge the traditional models of collective bargaining and social dialogue. Against this background, trade unions should be supported in adapting their established models of campaigning and advocacy in order to more effectively and inclusively represent the interests and rights of all workers across the EU.

... WORLD OF WORK FOR ALL.

- 15. Support workers in the transition towards the new labour world:** We recommend enhancing the support for workers affected by the transformation and suggest turning the *Globalisation Adjustment Fund* (EGF) into a European Transition Fund that, equipped with expanded resources, helps workers to adapt to the new world of work.
- 16. Develop tailor-made programmes to curb long-term unemployment:** The EU and its Member States should explore the possibility of better re-integrating the long-term unemployed persons by offering them tailor-made job search assistance, training, socio-educational help and – wherever appropriate – publicly financed jobs in order to bridge the access to the regular labour market.
- 17. Promote tax justice between labour and capital:** Fairer taxation can help raising resources for financing a just transition in the world of work. We therefore encourage the Council of the EU to improve the taxation of the digital economy and agree on a comprehensive directive on a *Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base* (CCCTB), which is capable of removing the mismatches and preferential regimes that allowed for tax avoidance. Moreover, we recall the proposal of the bishops of COMECE to create an EU-wide financial transaction tax that will help to lower market volatility, curb excessive speculation and finally will help restoring tax justice.



ANNEXE

This contribution has been elaborated under the responsibility of **Bishop Antoine Hérouard**, Auxiliary Bishop of Lille (France), President of the COMECE Social Affairs Commission together with his predecessor **Bishop Gianni Ambrosio**, Bishop of Piacenza (Italy) in close collaboration with:

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- **European Christian Workers Movement (ECWM)**
- **European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA)**
- **International Christian Union of Business Executives (UNIAPAC)**
- **International Co-ordination of Young Christian Workers (ICYCW)**
- **International Young Christian Workers (IYCW)**
- **Jesuit European Social Centre (JESC)**
- **Justice and Peace Europe**

