



SHAPING THE FUTURE OF WORK

- A reflection of the COMECE Social Affairs Commission -

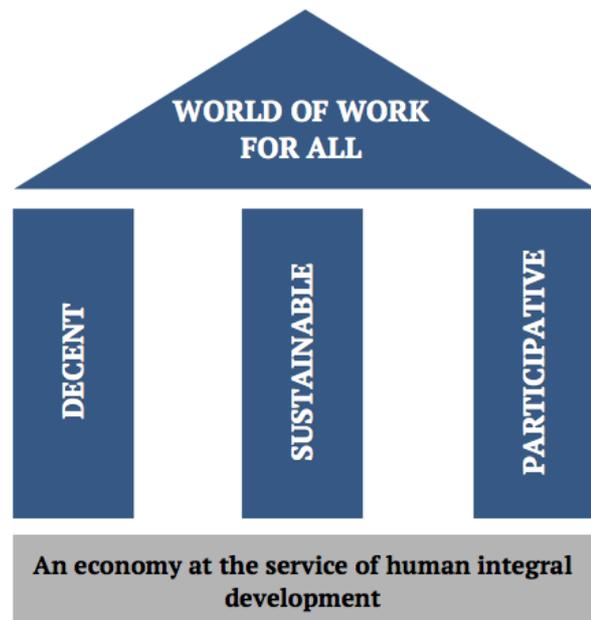
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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 in 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.



The vision of a decent, sustainable and participative world of work for all

Source: COMECE illustration

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

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: An 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 this 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 how far the current EU legislation, notably the *Directive on Temporary Agency Work*, is already 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 personal learning accounts at national levels that workers 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 partners 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.

The Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) brings together the Bishop delegates from Bishops' Conferences of the 28 Member States. For more than thirty years now, COMECE has been closely involved in the process of European integration and sharing its reflections with EU institutions. COMECE is the Catholic Church partner of EU institutions in the Dialogue foreseen by Article 17(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Its permanent General Secretariat, based in Brussels, analyses EU policies on a day-by-day basis, striving to bring the specific contribution of the Catholic Church into the European debate.