

## **Hope for the World of Work**

### ***Concerted Action 2025 of Justice and Peace Europe***

I. Introduction: “Hope does not disappoint” (Rm 5,5)

#### **1. The Jubilee Year and the World of Work**

The Concerted Action of Justice and Peace Europe in the Jubilee Year 2025 addresses the changing nature of the world of work. The Christian idea of work requires decent working conditions and salary for all workers. It insists on the hope that the work we do is not only a small aspect of the huge work machinery which provides earthly goods and services, but also a contribution to the divine act of creation and recognised as such by God. The world of work is undergoing a process of transformation due to various factors: demographic, technological, and productive. Furthermore, there is the experience of a deeper cultural and motivational crisis. In recent years, there has been a shift from a focus on the "job" to a focus on the "individual" who works. Work is no longer the fundamental dimension of life but one that coexists "in condominium" with other aspects: family, leisure, sports, and spirituality. This could be seized as an opportunity to prioritize quality work over quantity and the Christian community can play a crucial role in educating people on the meaning of work and its connection with the spiritual dimension of life. Thus, the social and cultural transformation of work can offer hope in line with the Christian tradition, which has stressed throughout centuries the alternation between the time of work (weekday) and the time of celebration (holiday). Therefore, the approach of the Church cannot simply be a retreat into lamenting challenges, which are developed, but must accompany the ongoing cultural transition with new representations and expectations. This is overarching task of the Concerted Action 2025 of Justice and Peace Europe.

#### **2. Demographic challenges**

Currently, the world of work is rapidly transforming. In part this is due to technological changes - and many questions arise around the issue of decent working conditions and equal pay in the future - but insofar as our continent is concerned the most dramatic changes in the world of work are provoked by demography. The number of births has drastically diminished over the last fifteen years. In 2008 4.7 million were born in the EU in 2008 against 3.8 million in 2022. The number of deaths has increased and stood at 5.2 million in 2002. Since 2013 there have been more deaths than births in the EU.<sup>1</sup> Similar numbers are reported in the non-EU European countries and regions. Numbers for Scotland for instance show that there were

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<sup>1</sup> cf. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Mortality\\_and\\_life\\_expectancy\\_statistics#Number\\_of\\_deaths](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Mortality_and_life_expectancy_statistics#Number_of_deaths)

62,942 deaths but only 46,959 births in 2022.<sup>2</sup> Europe will enter its old age quite soon and an aging population will be in need of adequate housing, help in preparing their meals and care in general. A lot will have to be done to respond to these needs and, obviously, it will have to be paid for by a smaller working population. This smaller working population may have to work longer hours, more years and with higher productivity. In this respect new technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, can be a boon notwithstanding the inherent risks. It is a huge task for European economies to regain sufficient global competitiveness and to earn the money needed to maintain decent social and health standards. The need for additional migrant workers is also evident. In January 2024, the EU Home Affairs Commissioner stated the need of one million additional migrant workers annually to make up for the demographic shortfall.<sup>3</sup> The demand for migrant workers is however a global phenomenon and needs a thorough understanding of the socio-economic implications for sending and receiving countries.

### **3. Care, Construction and Hospitality**

Some sectors of employment are already under particular stress due to the impact of demography in the world of work. We have identified the care, construction and hospitality sectors, where jobs are abundant but often low paid and which very often fall under the radar of public attention. The people who work in these sectors shall be in the focus of the Jubilee year's Concerted Action of Justice and Peace Europe.

## **II. Employment sectors under particular stress - "You will eat the fruit of your labours; you will enjoy both blessings and prosperity." (Ps 128:2)**

### **5. The care sector**

Caring is a dimension of work in general, but the specific conditions of the care sector require our special attention. In 2022, around 6.2 million people in the EU were employed as care workers. The health and social care sector accounts for around 3 percent of total EU employment. 9 out of 10 care workers are women. Between 2022 and 2035 an estimated 4.3 million new people will need to take up employment in this sector.<sup>4</sup>

A special point of attention: A recent Eurofund study *Living and Working in Europe 2023* noted: "The situation for the health and care sector is more complex and multifaceted. Its current workforce is aging and exiting the labour market; as well as replacing these workers, the sector must expand to meet the rising demand from an older population. But recruitment slowed when health budgets were cut by austerity measures in response to the 2008–2012 economic crisis. Along with understaffing, underinvestment in many Member States has led to insufficient acute care beds, inadequate facilities and long waiting lists. Poor working conditions (e.g. low pay and exploitation of migrant workers) are widespread in the sector, which makes it difficult to

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<sup>2</sup> cf. <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/news/2023/almost-three-deaths-for-every-two-births-registered-in-2022>

<sup>3</sup> cf. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/legal-migration-eu-must-increase-workforce-ages-commissioner-says-2024-01-08/>

<sup>4</sup> cf of the CEDEFOP publication "[Care workers: skills, opportunities and challenges](#)" from December 2023. Outside the EU Switzerland and the UK can illustrate a similar trend: Until the end of the decade [an additional 30% workforce](#) is needed to cover the needs in the care sector.

retain and attract workers.”<sup>5</sup> These problems exacerbate pressures in primary health services. Our European societies have difficulties facing age and vulnerability. Thus, the care sector is put aside, leaders and citizens alike are tempted to look the other way.

## **6. The construction sector**

Construction is another sector where a lot of employment is currently generated. Under the Green Deal policies of the EU, construction emerges as the key driver of employment growth. An additional 312,000 jobs will be created in the forthcoming years in the EU in this sector to construct renewable energy power facilities, electricity grid extension and thermal insulation of buildings.<sup>6</sup>

A special point of attention: In 2021, more than a fifth (22.5 %) of all fatal accidents at work in the EU took place within the construction sector. In 2021, almost three quarters of all accidents at work in the EU caused wounds and superficial injuries, dislocations, sprains and strains, or concussions and internal injuries. From October 2023 to February 2024 alone more than thirty fatal accidents occurred on construction sites across Europe.<sup>7</sup> Take the example of Malta: For the period between 2014 and 2018, 21 fatalities in the workplace were reported, with 52.4% of reported fatalities registered in the construction industry. Of these fatalities, 47.6% were Maltese, 14.3% were other EU nationals and 28.6% were third-country nationals. Between 2019 and 2022 a further 25 workers lost their lives on construction sites.<sup>8</sup>

## **7. The hospitality sector**

Low pay, exploitation and poor work conditions are common in this sector. In 2021, bars, hotels and restaurants employed a total of 9.9 million people in the 27 EU Member States.<sup>9</sup> With 3.5 million people working in the sector, hospitality is the third largest employer in the UK.<sup>10</sup>

A special point of attention: a defining aspect of the hospitality industry is its focus on customer satisfaction. Yet while making sure that restaurant diners, bar patrons, and hotel guests are receiving great service, the workers taking care of them must endure tough conditions in a high-pressure work environment. Many workers may turn to drugs and alcohol as a form of self-medication to cope with stress from their jobs. For instance, the rate of addictions in Germany caused by the consumption of alcohol, drugs or medication among employees in these sectors was 14 cases per 1,000 inhabitants in 2022, whereas there were only 4 cases per 1,000 inhabitants in the public service sector.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Eurofund, [Living and working in Europe 2023](#), p.13

<sup>6</sup> cf. Eurofund, p.7

<sup>7</sup> cf. <https://etuc.org/en/pressrelease/enough-enough-zero-accidents-work-now>

<sup>8</sup> cf...

<sup>9</sup> cf. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Accommodation\\_and\\_food\\_service\\_statistics\\_-\\_NACE\\_Rev.\\_2&oldid=535207](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Accommodation_and_food_service_statistics_-_NACE_Rev._2&oldid=535207)

<sup>10</sup> cf. <https://www.ukhospitality.org.uk/media-centre/facts-and-stats/>

<sup>11</sup> cf. <https://www.bifg.de/atlas/drogen-und-alkoholmissbrauch>

### III. Considerations from the Social Teaching of the Church: “The Lord blesses our work so that we may share its fruits with others” (Dt 14,28-29)

#### **8. Work, an essential dimension of social life**

The well elaborated Teaching of the Church on work can be summarised as follows: Work is, “a good thing for his humanity-because through work man *not only transforms nature*, adapting it to his own needs, but he also *achieves fulfillment* as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes more a human being.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore all people have a right to work, to develop their personalities and to a decent salary allowing them and their families to live in dignity.<sup>13</sup> More recently Pope Francis affirmed that “there is no poverty worse than that, which takes away work and the dignity of work”, and he continued, “In a genuinely developed society, work is an essential dimension of social life, for it is not only a means of earning one’s daily bread, but also of personal growth, the building of healthy relationships, self-expression and the exchange of gifts. Work gives us a sense of shared responsibility for the development of the world, and ultimately, for our life as a people.”<sup>14</sup> In his encyclical letter *Laudato Si’* he affirmed: “We were created with a vocation to work. The goal should not be that technological progress increasingly replace human work, for this would be detrimental to humanity. Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfilment.”<sup>15</sup>

#### **9. The special place of caregivers in the world of work**

In the same encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti* Pope Francis expressed his particular appreciation of all those caregivers who, in the midst of fear, responded during the pandemic by putting their lives on the line.<sup>16</sup> In 2022, he then directly addressed healthcare workers by saying that “your service alongside the sick, carried out with love and competence, transcends the bounds of your profession and becomes a mission. Your hands, which touch the suffering flesh of Christ, can be a sign of the merciful hands of the Father. Be mindful of the great dignity of your profession.”<sup>17</sup> The special place of care in the world of work, and in a more general approach the complementarity of work and care have become in recent years a more prominent feature of the Social Teaching of the Church.<sup>18</sup>

#### **10. Safety at work, an integral part of care for people**

The tragedies and dramas of accidents in the workplace are also a theme regularly addressed by Pope Francis in the recent past. In an address in September 2023, the Pope lamented the fact that “these incidents do not cease, despite the technology we have at our disposal to

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<sup>12</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens* n°9, 1981

<sup>13</sup> cf. Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, n°14, 1971

<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, n°162, 2020

<sup>15</sup> Pope Francis, encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’* n°128, 2015

<sup>16</sup> *Fratelli Tutti*, n° 54

<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis, Message for the 30th World Day of the Sick, 11 February 2022

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/sick/documents/20211210\\_30-giornata-malato.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/sick/documents/20211210_30-giornata-malato.html)

<sup>18</sup> cf for example the key note speech of Sister Alessandra Smerilli, Undersecretary of the Dicastery for iNtegral Human Development at the International WORkshop of Justice and Peace Europe in November 2023 in Malta: <https://jp.church.mt/restart-by-focusing-on-the-discarded-workers-sr-alessandra-smerilli/>

promote safe places and times,' adding that, "This happens when work is dehumanized and, instead of being the tool through which human beings realize themselves by making themselves available to the community, it becomes an exasperated race for profit. ... Safety at work is an integral part of care for people. Indeed, for an employer, it is the first duty and the first form of good."<sup>19</sup>

### **11. Addiction at work**

Regarding the reality of drug abuse, the Social Teaching of the Church asks for compassion for addicts and firmness against traffickers. Thus, Pope Francis, has asked to consider with compassion those who become addicts and to remember that each addict "has a unique personal story and must be listened to, understood, loved, and, insofar as possible, healed and purified... They continue to possess, more than ever, a dignity as children of God". On the other side he claimed a "moral duty to end the production and trafficking of these dangerous substances" and called drug traffickers "traffickers of death driven by the logic of power and money at any cost."<sup>20</sup>

## ***IV. Spaces of Hope in the world of work***

### **12. Care is Work, Work is Care**

Ten years ago Pope Francis has offered a new orientation in his encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*. The needle in the compass of work is care for the Common House. This orientation can help policy makers and social partners to find solutions for the problems identified above. Catholic bishops' conferences and Catholic movements in the world of work, together with the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, are more and more taking up the approach that "Care is Work, Work is Care". The project "The Future of Work, Labour after *Laudato si'*"<sup>21</sup> will provide further insights. During the Jubilee Year 2025, Justice and Peace Europe will contribute to advocate for just transformation in the world of work.

### **13. The Concerted Action at the European level...**

During the Concerted Action in the Jubilee Year 2025 Justice and Peace Europe will advocate initiatives that may open up spaces of hope in the world of work. It will monitor policy initiatives at the European level regarding the demographic challenges in the world of work. It will address the need to improve the recognition for caregivers and in the context of the European care strategy, launch a debate with European policy makers on a complementarity of work and care, where each person accepts to complement work by care activities and, thus, opening up to the beauty of care. In the context of the European strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021 - 2027 the network will promote the Vision Zero concept to reduce work-related

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<sup>19</sup> Pope Francis, Address to the Italian national association of mutilated and invalid workers, 11 September 2023  
<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2023/september/documents/20230911-mutilati-invalidi-lavoro.html>

<sup>20</sup> Pope Francis, Catechesis on the occasion of the International Day against drug abuse and illicit trafficking, 26 June 2024  
<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2024/documents/20240626-udienza-generale.html>

<sup>21</sup> Cf. <https://futureofwork-labourafterlaudatosi.net/>

fatalities, accidents and ill health. In 2025 the European Union will elaborate a new European Drug Strategy. Justice and Peace Europe will closely follow this process and join forces to increase not only age-related prevention policies but also tailor-made measures for specific professions like the hospitality sector.

***14. ...and the national, community and personal level***

Within this Concerted Action the national commissions composing Justice and Peace Europe will develop their own actions and initiatives at the national level and suggest ideas for implementation at the community level. Finally, Justice and Peace Europe encourages all Christians to be attentive to the challenges of the changing world of work and especially in those above-mentioned sectors, which do not always stand in the spotlight and where the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters work. Thus, they will create space for hope in the changing world of work.