

# The Europe 2020 Strategy



In the wake of the financial and economic crisis, mass unemployment – already a sadly familiar phenomenon for many years – has further increased in nearly all European countries. With the first of the five headline targets of its Europe 2020 strategy, a continuation of the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs with certain new priorities, the European Union demands that 75 % of the population aged 20 to 64 should be in employment by the year 2020.

Employment policies across the EU fall into the responsibility of the individual member states. Since the national labour markets in the EU have different internal structures and since countries have been affected by the financial and economic crisis in different ways, some of the member states are considerably further away from this 75 % target than others.

One problem is the quality of the employment opportunities that have been created over the past few years: people in temporary and short-term employment as well as people with project-specific jobs and micro-jobs – the type of jobs that represent the large majority of the new employment opportunities – will still be counted towards the 75 percent target, because some European countries extend the definition of a person “in employment” to anybody with a weekly working schedule of more than four hours.

For EZA and its network of Christian-social employee organizations, it is a key concern that more jobs must also mean better jobs. This is why EZA has dedicated a series of seminars to this issue as part of its 2011 educational programme “European Social Dialogue“. A total of twelve events, hosted with the cooperation of 13 educational centres from nine European countries, will address the following key questions:

- What contribution can the social partners make to the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy?
- How can the social partners be more closely involved in the development of political strategies to stimulate the employment market?
- What contribution can employee organizations make to the creation of more high-quality jobs – jobs with good or decent working conditions as well as adequate salaries that are subject to social insurance deductions – as part of the efforts to reach the headline target of a 75 percent employment rate?
- How can a model based on the idea of “decent work“ be integrated into the Europe 2020 strategy?
- What contribution can employee organizations make to the development of an educational and vocational training system that equips young people better to face the requirements of the labour market?
- How can we provide the most disadvantaged groups in our societies with better employment opportunities?
- What instruments might prevent a further spread of precarious employment relationships?

- How can we ensure that the fight against poverty – one element of the Europe 2020 strategy – will move up the agenda of the Social Dialogue?
- How can we – based on the targets of the Europe 2020 strategy – improve the reconciliation of family and career?



The series of seminars about the Europe 2020 strategy enjoys the scientific support of the HIVA, the *Onderzoeksinstituut voor Arbeid en Samenleving* of the Catholic University of Leuven

(Belgium), which is providing a research paper. A forecast of the projected development of the EU labour markets and employment rate until 2020, together with a comparison of the different national employment policies, demonstrates that the countries whose employment rate is currently below the European average will in all probability fail to close this gap by 2020. This is due to the different economic conditions in the individual member states and the options they have for their economic and employment policies. The specific consequences of the financial and economic crisis and the increased difficulties of creating new jobs are of key importance in this context. According to the forecast, the average employment rate of the EU 27 will climb to about 70 % by 2020.

The research paper also deals with the issue of “high-quality jobs”, providing a generally valid definition of the term and delivering generally applicable strategies for the structural design of employment relationships in the EU. The concept of “high-quality jobs”, derived from three Europe-wide representative surveys that were conducted to map working conditions, income structures and workforces inside the EU, is explained with the help of two benchmark indices for the assessment of jobs on a national and a pan-European level. The ultimate objective is to identify parameters that could be used on a pan-European scale for measuring the quality of employment opportunities.

Parameters in the field of labour and employment include the following:

- Job safety
- Working hours
- Distribution of weekly and monthly working hours
- Salaries
- Social benefits
- Autonomy at work
- Physical working conditions
- Occupational (physical and psychological) illnesses
- Occupational health and safety risks
- Work intensity
- Social environment at work
- A sense of purpose at work
- Opportunities to acquire further qualifications
- Participation
- Opportunities for promotion
- Opportunities for training and education

At the same time, it is demonstrated – by using a range of best practice examples – to what extent both employers and employees can benefit from the creation of high-

quality jobs on a local and community level (the level of small and medium-sized enterprises).

The research paper concludes that high employment rates can only be achieved in countries with a high proportion of high-quality jobs and good working conditions.

The results of the educational events and the research study will be comprehensively presented and summarized at a conference in February 2012.



Based on the project descriptions provided by the EZA member centres and the results that the overall project has so far delivered, the following preliminary recommendations for further action can be issued to employee organizations (under the proviso that these recommendations will be subjected to a review once the project has been completed in February 2012):

- Employee organizations should provide a standard definition of the term “work“ which can be applied all over Europe. From a Christian-social viewpoint such as ours, this definition should prescribe certain minimum standards which regulate the duration of the employment relationship, the weekly working hours, salary levels and the social insurance cover. Employee organizations should then actively promote this concept on a European policy-making level, aiming to integrate it into European legislation and into the Europe 2020 strategy.
- Employee organizations should provide a standard definition of the term “good and decent work“ which can be applied all over Europe. From a Christian-social viewpoint such as ours, this definition should oblige employers to pay their employees adequate salaries which allow them to cover their living expenses, to provide working conditions and working schedules that enable their employees to reconcile family and career, and to implement a health and safety regime which ensures that their employees are not subjected to any undue risks.
- Employee organizations should actively campaign for the introduction of a European Index which is capable of measuring the quality of jobs on the basis of clearly defined parameters (see above).
- Employee organizations should actively campaign for and contribute to the integration of problem groups into the labour market. Such problem groups include young people, women, senior citizens, people with disabilities and migrants. From a Christian-social viewpoint such as ours, it must be ensured that the integration of problem groups into the labour market does not involve any act of discrimination – through lower salaries and poor working conditions, e.g. – and proceeds under the maxim that the people concerned must be given equal treatment, equal rights and equal employment opportunities.
- Employee organizations should actively campaign on a political level for improvements to the vocational training system, particularly for a review of

existing curricula in the light of the requirements of new occupations and technologies. They should also insist that good practice examples from European countries are, where applicable, considered and possibly adopted by other member states.

- Employee organizations should lobby their national governments for legislation designed to prevent a further spread of precarious employment and further increases of the number of the “working poor“. They should commit themselves in collective bargaining negotiations to (and politically campaign for) a minimum wage policy which can prevent increasing numbers of people in employment from having to rely on welfare payments and other government benefits. From a Christian-social viewpoint such as ours, it seems important to create a general awareness for the value of human work.

## Youth Unemployment in Europe



One in five young Europeans was unemployed in 2010. This youth unemployment rate of 20 % – which is twice as high as the unemployment rate for the general population – represents one of the stiffest challenges currently faced by European social policy makers and the participants of the European Social Dialogue.

The European Union uses its Europe 2020 strategy to focus the attention on the educational needs of young people. Number four of the five headline targets calls for a drop in the proportion of early school leavers to under 10 % by 2020. It also demands that by the same date, at least 40 % of the younger generation should have completed a tertiary or equivalent (college) degree course. The Youth in Movement flagship initiative of the EU has been designed to encourage member states to adopt a “youth guarantee scheme”. The scheme would ensure that young people are offered a job, further training or work experience within six months of leaving school.

The fight against youth unemployment is a key concern for EZA and its network of Christian-social employee organizations. This is why EZA, under the umbrella of its 2011 educational programme “European Social Dialogue”, is coordinating projects that are dedicated to this subject. In close coordination with the EZA platform for young employees in Europe and contributions of three member centres from three European countries, a series of educational events will be exploring the following key issues:

- How can we integrate young employees into the labour market, more closely involve them in trade union activities and improve their access to educational opportunities?
- How can we ensure that the different groups of young people (high-school dropouts, high-school graduates with secondary degrees for stages I and II, vocational college and university graduates) receive better access to the labour market?
- What types of problems do young people – especially young women – have to contend with nowadays when trying to gain access to the labour market, and what programmes or measures might be able to help them to find a good job more quickly?

The results of the educational events will be published by EZA in early 2012 as part of the series of publications “Contributions to Social Dialogue”.



Based on the research which will be conducted by the EZA member centres (as specified in their project descriptions), the following preliminary recommendations for further action can be issued to employee organizations (under the proviso that these recommendations will be subjected to a review once EZA has completed its project management assignment in early 2012):

- Employee organizations should strengthen the awareness of employers and governments for the fact that young people need high-quality jobs to give their lives a perspective and to assure them that they have essential and valuable contributions to make to our societies. From a Christian-social viewpoint such as ours, it is also important to provide young people with the material foundations required to start and raise their own families.
- Employee organizations should actively lobby the responsible politicians for introducing improved training systems in Europe and an easier recognition of qualifications that have been acquired in other countries. From a Christian-social viewpoint such as ours, it is also important to ensure that young people from a socially disadvantaged background and the children of migrants will receive equal opportunities in the competition for high-quality training places.
- Employee organizations should actively lobby employer federations and their national Ministries of Labour for increasing the proportion of successfully completed apprenticeships that are converted into full-time jobs.
- Employee organizations should call upon their national governments to launch programmes designed to achieve the active integration of young people into the labour market. From a Christian-social viewpoint such as ours, it is also important that such programmes do not lead from one unpaid internship to the next, but to decent, fairly remunerated employment relationships of sufficiently high quality.
- Employee organizations should actively lobby employers and governments for measures to encourage the employment of young mothers for whom finding access to the labour market and continuous employment – already not easy under normal circumstances – is fraught with additional difficulties.
- Employee organizations should open themselves more to young people, make it more attractive for young people to join and try to involve them more closely in their work. In the light of the specific difficulties encountered by young people on the labour market, it is important to assure them that they are needed in employee organizations, even if they are in precarious employment relationships or unemployed.

## The Reconciliation of Family and Work



Without an effective strategy to reconcile the often conflicting demands of family and career, it will be impossible to increase the employment rate of women – and, consequently, to reach the Europe 2020 headline target of finding jobs for 75 % of the overall population.

Such an effective reconciliation of family and career requires the active involvement of many actors: social partners, enterprises, municipal governments, politicians with responsibility for family policies and, of course, the families themselves who will ultimately have to decide how parental and domestic tasks are to be assigned. What is required is a whole package of policies which reflect and respond to the actual requirements of the employees concerned.

What is required to improve the balance between work and (private) life is therefore an integrated approach. The point of departure is, necessarily, the existence of a political will to pass the legislation required to support such an improvement. Such legislation would create the legal framework that enables the families concerned to arrive freely at their individual decisions. Secondly, collective bargaining agreements and company-specific agreements – supported by legal regulations – would provide a suitable economic environment, allowing parents to cover for each other and to assume each other's domestic responsibilities in an emergency. Ultimately, attempts to reconcile family and career will only thrive in a supportive climate of social and family traditions and in a working environment where a “culture of understanding” for the need to provide care for children and old people exists. A healthy work-life balance equally requires the existence of a service network designed to provide assistance in the care for the very young and the elderly.

The reconciliation of family and career is a key concern for EZA and its network of Christian-social employee organizations. This is why EZA, under the umbrella of its 2011 educational programme “European Social Dialogue“, is coordinating projects that are dedicated to this subject. In close coordination with five member centres from three European countries, a series of educational events will be exploring the following key issues:

- How does the reconciliation of family and career fit into the Europe 2020 strategy?
- What responsibilities do employers, employees, employee organizations and public authorities have for the reconciliation of family and career?
- Would an improved reconciliation of family and career have any impact on the birth rate and could it therefore provide a solution to the demographic challenges our societies are facing today?
- What would it actually mean, on the level of our daily lives, to “improve the work-life-balance”?
- How does family life affect the career?

- Can a general reduction of the weekly working hours make any contribution to the fight against unemployment and to a more effective reconciliation of family and career?

The results of the educational events will be published by EZA in early 2012 as part of the series of publications “Contributions to the Social Dialogue”.



Based on the research which will be conducted by the EZA member centres (as specified in their project descriptions), the following preliminary recommendations for further action can be issued to employee organizations (under the proviso that these recommendations will be subjected to a review once EZA has completed its project management effort in early 2012):

- Employee organizations should use collective bargaining negotiations to insist on further framework agreements that are designed to path the way for flexible working hours for men and women and to enable telecommuting. Examples for good practice should be widely disseminated to members of the general public.
- Employee organizations should lobby the municipal governments for substantial improvements in the provision of affordable neighbourhood child care facilities of high quality.
- Employee organizations should use collective bargaining negotiations to insist on equal wages for equal work. The fact that women are still receiving lower wages for the same work is a strong disincentive for them on the labour market. As a consequence, many women prefer to stay at home or work only part-time, and their better-paid husbands remain the main breadwinners.