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# Labour as a Driver of Sustainable Development: Presentation of a Nationally Significant Research Project

Valeria Fili \*

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## 1. The *LIVEABLE* Project

The PRIN project *LIVEABLE – Labour as a Driver of Sustainable Development* stems from the collaboration of four research units affiliated with four Italian universities: the University of Udine, the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, the University of Bari Aldo Moro, and the University of Macerata.

This initiative is part of the PRIN programme (*Progetti di Rilevante Interesse Nazionale* – Projects of Significant National Interest), funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research following a competitive selection process. The Ministry supports fundamental research conducted by universities through the PRIN programme, financing projects which, due to their complexity and scope, necessitate the collaboration of multiple research units distributed across the national territory. The programme is guided by several core principles, including the high scientific calibre of

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the participants, and the sustainability, originality, and feasibility of the proposed research.

The present project, broad in scope and spanning a three-year period, is primarily grounded in labour law but is distinctly interdisciplinary in nature. It engages scholars—both permanent faculty members at the participating universities and researchers specifically recruited for the project—working across various disciplines, including labour law, administrative law, commercial law, private law, international and EU law, political economy, Germanic philology, and demo-ethno-anthropological studies. This section of the journal features contributions from some of the researchers involved in the project.

## 2. The Core Content of the Project

The COVID-19 pandemic has starkly highlighted Italy's delay in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in the United Nations 2030 Agenda. Sustainability is a necessary condition for meeting the needs of the present generation while preserving the ability of future generations to meet their own.

The pandemic revealed that the suspension of non-essential economic activities can have beneficial effects on the ecosystem. However, the shutdown of such sectors also exposed the limitations of policies that prioritise environmental goals while overlooking economic and social dimensions. In this respect, the pandemic underscored the intrinsic interdependence between labour and the broader pillars of sustainability.

A close reading of the 2030 Agenda reveals that labour, in its various forms, is embedded across all the Goals, thereby confirming that the right to decent work is not only compatible with environmental protection but also essential for fostering sustainable, smart, and inclusive economic growth. As Guy Ryder, former Director-General of the International Labour Organization, noted in the presentation of the report *Decent Work and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*: “Decent work is not just a goal – it is a driver of sustainable development.”

This project arises from the recognition of the central role of labour—not only in relation to Goal 8, which explicitly addresses decent work and economic growth—but also in connection with the broader framework of the Agenda. Decent work acts as a catalyst for sustainable and inclusive economic development. Accordingly, the role of enterprises and public administrations must be reinterpreted through the lens of sustainability, enabling them to become fully proactive agents of change.



Furthermore, the project advocates a shift from an individualistic conception of rights—often rooted in self-interest—towards a renewed collective dimension that links stakeholders to each other, to the environment, and to the communities in which they operate.

To this end, and in view of the urgent need for action, the project set out to critically assess existing labour and social legislation, identifying both its strengths and, more importantly, its shortcomings.

The SDGs served as an analytical framework through which to interpret economic and social phenomena and to formulate concrete policy proposals. In particular, the project examined the strategies adopted by the Italian legal system and the European Union to address demographic change and the increasing prevalence of chronic diseases, in the context of other phenomena that shape the sustainability of work.

### **3. General Presentation of this Special Section Dedicated to the *LIVEABLE* Project**

The contributions presented in this section aim to explore, from a range of perspectives, the evolving role of labour in shaping inclusive, resilient, and sustainable societies. Grounded in the framework of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, the essays examine how legal systems can respond to the challenges posed by demographic change, technological innovation, ecological transition, and the increasing fragmentation of work.

The selected papers offer a multidisciplinary analysis of key dimensions of sustainable labour, addressing issues such as pension reform, chronic illness in the workplace, vocational training, income support, and the integration of artificial intelligence into public sector employment. They also provide a critical evaluation of the effectiveness of legal enforcement mechanisms and sector-specific policies, including the introduction of social conditionality within the Common Agricultural Policy.

Collectively, these contributions reflect a shared commitment to rethinking labour law and social protection through the lens of sustainability—placing the dignity, adaptability, and inclusion of workers at the heart of legal and policy innovation.

### **4. Seven Different Insights into Key Dimensions of Sustainable Labour**

The contributions collected in this section reflect both the thematic richness and analytical depth of the *LIVEABLE* project, offering diverse insights into key dimensions of sustainable labour.

Sergio Nisticò, Filippo Olivelli, and Simone Caldaroni examine the long-term sustainability of pension systems in their paper *Demographic and Workforce Projections in Italy and Sweden*. Through a comparative analysis of Notional Defined Contribution (NDC) reforms, the authors highlight the trade-offs between financial solvency and social adequacy, underscoring the need for structural adjustments in labour market participation and welfare design in response to demographic pressures.

Emanuele Dagnino, in *Ageing, Chronic Diseases and Employment*, explores the intersection of health and employment, focusing on legal frameworks that support the retention and reintegration of workers with chronic conditions. His comparative analysis of the Italian and French models demonstrates the importance of early recognition and activation mechanisms, and advocates a more systematic and preventive approach to sustainable work.

Federica Stamerra addresses the evolving concept of vocational training in *The Right to Professional and Vocational Training Between Individual and Collective Agreements*. Her paper interrogates whether training can be recognised as a subjective right within the Italian legal system, and argues for a shift towards a model of employability that supports workers through discontinuous careers and transitions, particularly in the context of digital and ecological transformations.

Nicola Deleonardis, in *Social Sustainability in the CAP 2023–2027*, investigates the introduction of social conditionality within the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. His analysis critically assesses both the symbolic and practical dimensions of this mechanism, drawing attention to its limitations within the Italian context, and calling for a stronger integration of collective bargaining provisions to secure decent work in the agricultural sector.

Massimino Crisci, in *The “Replacement Risk” of Artificial Intelligence in Civil Service Employment*, reflects on the impact of artificial intelligence on public sector employment. Moving beyond narratives of technological displacement, the paper proposes a model of “augmented work” that enhances job quality and efficiency through human–algorithm collaboration, while urging the reorganisation of work processes and investment in upskilling.

Claudia Carchio, in *Income Support at the Intersection of Job Security and Labour Transitions*, examines the dual function of income support mechanisms as both passive and active tools. Her analysis underscores the importance of integrating welfare and labour market policies to support mobility and employability, while also cautioning against the distortive effects of exceptional income-support measures introduced in recent years.



Finally, Gianluca Picco, in *The Labour Law Inspection and Enforcement System in Italy*, critically evaluates recent reforms concerning labour inspections and sanctions. The paper denounces the resurgence of criminal penalties as a populist reaction to workplace accidents, and calls for a reconfiguration of enforcement strategies based on preventive and administrative tools, restoring criminal law to its proper function as an *extrema ratio*.

Taken together, these contributions offer a comprehensive and nuanced reflection on the role of labour in advancing sustainable development. They reaffirm the centrality of decent work—not merely as an objective, but as a vital driver of social cohesion, economic resilience, and human dignity.

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**ADAPT** is a non-profit organisation founded in 2000 by Prof. Marco Biagi with the aim of promoting studies and research in the field of labour law and industrial relations from an international and comparative perspective. Our purpose is to encourage and implement a new approach to academic research, by establishing ongoing relationships with other universities and advanced studies institutes, and promoting academic and scientific exchange programmes with enterprises, institutions, foundations and associations. In collaboration with the Centre for International and Comparative Studies on Law, Economics, Environment and Work, (DEAL) the Marco Biagi Department of Economics, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, ADAPT set up the International School of Higher Education in Labour and Industrial Relations, a centre of excellence which is accredited at an international level for research, study and postgraduate programmes in the area of industrial and labour relations. Further information at [www.adapt.it](http://www.adapt.it).

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