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Foreword to this Special Issue of the E-Journal of International and Comparative Labour Studies

László Andor ¹

Security seems to be in the focus of European politics and policy in 2017, and this very much applies to the world of labour as well. Job security at a time of technological transformation is a challenge that has been explored in the recent years. In 2017 new geopolitical changes and resulting restructuring processes add to security risks in international relations as well as labour markets.

Individuals are interested in job security, while national governments are aiming at high and stable levels of employment for the society as a whole. Europe has indeed produced some remarkable examples of employment boosting reforms, while long periods of high unemployment, especially during the financial and economic crisis, have caused severe setbacks too. The share of people experiencing or concerned about job insecurity has increased in many EU member states (and in countries that belong to the eurozone periphery in particular).

Where progress is made, the challenge is to ensure that it lasts. Security is therefore linked to sustainability what concerns individuals but also societies as a whole. And the sustainability of high employment is affected by the demographic transformation, practically in all European countries. Related considerations have visibly influenced government decisions regarding intra-EU labour mobility and international migration in a large number of EU member states.

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Debates about the impact of demographic ageing on labour markets and social security systems were particularly intense a few years ago, and especially in 2012 which the EU designated as an “European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between the Generations”. However, today it seems another concern, namely the one about the impact of digitalisation is eclipsing the demographic problem.

Discussions about the implications of the ICT revolution for economy and labour have made a big journey from euphoria to panic. Just a couple of years ago, estimates were competing about how exactly digitalisation would boost the demand for labour. More recently, fears have grown assuming that the digital age and rapid robotisation would soon crowd out humans from the labour market. Studies by the OECD and the ILO have brought a necessary dose of realism into this discussion what concerns the speed and the width of the transition.

Nevertheless, the complexity of the ongoing transformation should not be underestimated. Sustainability is often reduced to one or another aspect (e.g. financial or ecological). However, sustainability is more useful if it is seen as a multi-dimensional concept with environmental, economic, social as well as institutional aspects.

Studies in this volume, which were presented at the Bergamo conference in November 2016, connect with all four aspects. They explain how efforts to reconcile work and family life can serve sustainability on various accounts (improving demographic outcomes and reducing social exclusion at the same time). Very importantly, they also provide evidence about the need to invest in skills as well as better working conditions. Together with the shift towards flexible work organisation that allows for a better work—life balance they help boosting economic competitiveness but also making labour markets more inclusive. Those working in these fields find good arguments in favour of maintaining a broad employment policy agenda that pursues all these goals simultaneously.

The Europe 2020 Strategy of the EU (adopted in 2010) has been aiming at higher employment levels and reduced levels of poverty and social exclusion in all Member States. These objectives were embedded in a reform program for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The underlying assumption was that these three objectives should be mutually supportive and reinforcing, and the necessary measures can be designed at both EU and national levels.

Though his strategy has received less attention from the political level in the last two years as compared to the early phase, it is important to remain committed to its overarching philosophy and goals, and measure progress as well as deviation from the targets. Apart from a return to result

orientation, EU policy in the current phase can help strengthening employment sustainability by promoting the European Pillar of Social Rights, especially if this initiative can lead to new legislation that would ensure decent working conditions in all forms of employment, as advocated by the Report adopted in January 2017 by the European Parliament.

Readers of this volume must have been, and should remain convinced about the diversity of labour market practices internationally but also within Europe. However, they should also feel that good international standards and best European practices can be identified and there is potential in mutual learning as well as a transfer of employment policy know-how. Critical analysis and evaluation presented in ADAPT conferences and also in this volume help both.

ADAPT International Network



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.

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