



subsidised by the European Commission, with the collaboration and support of the EZA
(European Centre for Workers' Questions)

Press Release

The European Group for Worker Pastoral met in Porto (Portugal) from 3 to 5 October 2019 for its annual symposium. The theme for the symposium was **“A common vision for the European Pillar of Social Rights? Social protection and social inclusion.”** From the various speeches and exchanges, the meeting formulated a message intended for its structures and member associations as well as Christians involved in the world of employment.

Final message from the symposium

We are at a turning point in the construction of Europe. The Brexit issue sounds like a warning with regard to the continuation of the project. It is not only in the United Kingdom that a large part of the population is increasingly critical of the European dream.

We are aware that too many people in Europe today have been treated badly in their lives through successive crises and that Europe has not been able to guarantee supranational solidarity for all its citizens. But we are convinced that, to be precise, the solution can only be found in the creation of a political space, which is a condition for a social approach, alongside an economic space. This space must become one of solidarity and justice for all people, men and women, native and migrant, citizens of rich regions or the periphery. The achievements of the construction of Europe will be sustained on the basis of a new pact which will have to take better account of each citizen's aspirations of a good and dignified life.

For the GEPO, the starting point remains the importance which must be attached to work as a vital element in building the dignity of people. By “work” we mean, on the one hand, an essential contribution to the community through a commitment which gives meaning and, on the other hand, adequate remuneration which allows a dignified life. In our European countries, most social rights are linked to paid work. It is therefore all the more essential that we vigorously fight against all forms of precarious employment which no longer allows people to enjoy basic social rights, the minimum condition for a respectful human life. It also requires policy measures to reduce persistent inequalities, both at an inter-country level and within countries themselves. It is scandalous that the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few is arising at the expense of a growing number of workers who can no longer make a decent living from their work.

Our lines of action for the various worker pastorals:

- combating improper work and the dehumanisation of the economy. The economy must be at the service of mankind and not the other way around. This requires a policy

which is against all forms of exploitation in the workplace with the objective that everyone can live properly from their work and the social rights that flow from it (unemployment benefits, pension, indemnities for incapacity for work, disability allowances, and so on). At a European level, we must strengthen the protection of the rights of all those working under atypical contracts. We must also ensure that the rights of cross-border workers and posted workers are guaranteed;

- engaging with all the organisations in the world of work to build a European social rights base. It will have to be given a concrete and binding content if European policy is to become the guarantor of social justice and supranational solidarity. The GEPO undertakes to enter into a dialogue on this subject with the new Commission and the European Parliament;
- implementing a radical action plan to reduce inequalities in wages and the distribution of wealth through an appropriate tax policy. It is unsustainable that companies which create the most wealth today are those which contribute least to the common good.
- since social rights are first and foremost rights, we call for an end to harassment and to making people feel guilty for being entitled to social protection. This is contrary to the European principles of respect for the fundamental dignity of each citizen. We denounce the fact that, on a budgetary pretext, States are making access to social assistance more and more complicated. The logic of benevolence must guide all social policy. It also requires reforms to make social legislation more easily understood. The accessibility of social rights also requires administrative simplification;
- income levels replacing acquired rights (pension, unemployment benefits, sickness allowances, indemnities for incapacity for work) must be maintained at a level which guarantees a dignified life, without leading people into a situation of poverty. We advocate harmonisation at a European level through a single level among countries: a replacement income rate of 80%. We call for a major debate on the issue of postponement of pensionable age from the point of view of the problem of unemployment among people aged 50 and over. Too often, they are condemned to become long-term unemployed, which, with the increase in pensionable age, further marginalises them;
- in many European countries, access to quality jobs for young people is almost non-existent. We must renegotiate a contract between generations which allows young people to build a sustainable economic existence.