

6 Minimum income and working time in the pluri-active society

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6.1 A new phase in the development of the European welfare model?

The debate on new emerging social needs and on new active welfare policies represents a turning point in the long history of the European welfare state. This new phase, which has been defined as the ‘recalibration’ of the European welfare model (Ferrera et al. 2000), has, however, been marked, more or less evidently in recent years, by a ‘neo-liberal’ imprint, in line with the dominant economic creed in many European countries (Ferrera 2016; Ascoli et al. 2016). Many of the active policies launched in this phase, while distinguishing themselves from the previous ‘passive’ or ‘compensatory’ policies, introduce a contradictory element: the reintegration of the worker into the labour market, which often leads to unsatisfactory forms of employment in terms of their security and remuneration. It gives rise to precarious low-status jobs (e.g. the so-called ‘mini-jobs’ in Germany) and new forms of poverty, in addition to pre-existing forms of poverty. Basically, the new phase of welfare ‘recalibration’, which we have entered with activation policies, has shifted social protection from the simple level of compensation to the active reintegration of the worker. However, it does not seem to have eliminated the problem of job insecurity and poverty. This is partly because in the field of public policy, in many countries reforms have tended to introduce several types of subsidies aimed at supplementing low incomes, whilst not doing much to counteract the poverty risk associated with work (ibid; Grady 2017). As a direct result, the increase in employment thus generated has often not led automatically to a reduction in poverty (Saraceno 2016).

The spread of the in-work poverty does not only depend on social policies. The negative changes in the structure of inequalities have also been important (Piketty 2016; Stiglitz 2019), as well as the impact of the new dualisms that have formed in the labour market and in access to welfare protections. This has been shown in comparative political

economy studies (Palier and Thelen 2010) as well as within the critical literature on social investment (Cantillon 2011; Cantillon and Van Lancker 2013; Bonoli). These problems are then combined with the issue of polarisation, a phenomenon about which there has recently been a growing debate within the field of labour market studies. From different perspectives (Goos and Manning 2007; Autor 2015; Bachmann et al. 2019), the progressive decline of medium-skilled occupations and the simultaneous growth of the lower and upper parts of the labour market are commonly referred to as polarisation. The resulting disorienting effect contributes to an even more articulated dualisations within the labour market. Alongside the dualism between the high-skilled and the low-skilled, which can be traced back to the transition to the knowledge economy (Palier and Thelen 2010), polarisation adds the problem of the downward slide of the medium-skilled, who have been partially protected from it so far, with the more immediate effect of increasingly strong competition for the same low-skilled jobs (Marchal and Marx 2018). Consequently, there is even more of a downward spiral in the spread of poor jobs. There are several underlying factors behind this phenomenon. The first, and for many the main one, concerns automation in the workplace by applied technologies, with a displacement effect that increasingly pushes down groups of medium-skilled workers. The second relates to delocalisation processes, that is, the gradual shift of mainly medium- and low-skilled manufacturing and industrial jobs to newly industrialised countries. That too contributes to the narrowing of the middle section of the labour market, resulting in increased competition in the lower tertiary sector for the same jobs.

Although in different forms and to different extents in different countries, all these transformations contribute to increasing the extent of the working poor, with new demands for social protection to which policies are called upon to respond. We have seen in Chapter 3 that social policies, especially minimum income policies, risk feeding this circuit of in-work poverty, modifying and worsening the overall quality of the work that is created or supported, directly or indirectly. Faced with the alternative of budgetary cuts, policy makers reforming minimum income schemes have often opted for increasing the means tests and selection criteria for beneficiaries, thus setting up a system based on subsidies legitimising and reproducing poor work. The latter is found in productive and even reproductive spheres, for example, through subsidies being conditional on community service work. The question we ask ourselves at this point is: is it possible to trace a possible alternative to this option? And to what extent can the structural transformations affecting work (outsourcing, polarisation, and digitalisation of the economy) be rebalanced by a different way of conceiving income support? Here we come to the heart of the problems addressed in this chapter.

The analysis we intend to develop aims at identifying interventions capable of making minimum income compatible with the enhancement of non-market activities: care, civic and voluntary commitment, and training. All this, however, is not intended as a condition for accessing some kind of social benefit, a subsidy, or a minimum income, but as a universal right of the citizen linked to a different ‘chosen’, rather than suffered, work-life balance. For a number of reasons, the time has come for a reassessment of this ratio of work to life, which necessarily includes the issue of working time.

The chapter is organised as follows: in Section 6.2, we will give an overview of the theoretical coordinates of the debate on polarisation and its effects on the labour market. Section 6.3 relates these transformations to the challenges that welfare policies are facing. Starting from this, in the Sections 6.4, 6.5, and 6.6, we will focus on minimum income policies in their different articulations with reference to those strands of literature that have focused on the issue of market and non-market activation. The fifth and last paragraph recalls some conclusive considerations on the issues of work-life balance in the framework of a reform agenda inspired by the SI objectives.

6.2 Polarisation, technological innovation and labour transformations

Despite being a medium- to long-term phenomenon (Bachmann et al. 2019), research on the phenomenon of polarisation has steadily increased in recent years. The growing number of studies that have been conducted at the international level (Goos and Manning 2007; Autor 2015; Bachmann et al. 2019) is proof of this; these studies have largely focused on the consequences of technological transition in the workplace. As has been pointed out by several authors (Autor 2015; Eichhorst et al. 2016) technological change does not impact generically upon work, but tends to differentiate according to the degree of replication and standardisation of different work tasks, regardless of their intellectual or manual nature. This aspect is very important in terms of polarisation, because it is the basis for the increase both in more skilled jobs and in less skilled jobs, which can only be performed by workers. On the other hand, as a result of these transformations, average professionalism in sales, administration, or production is decreasing. It is more routine and replicable and for this reason, Autor (2015) argues, it is more easily replaced by automation or the spread of algorithms. The resulting employment framework tends to narrow amongst the medium-skilled and to increase amongst the high- and low-skilled. That the employment picture tends to shrink in these components is also confirmed by other estimates, such as those provided by the OECD (2016;

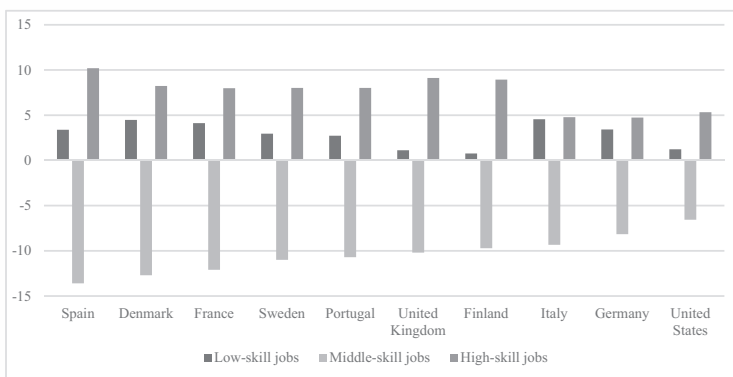


Figure 6.1 Employment rate change in Europe (EU28 average) and the United States by occupational skill level, Val. %, Years 2002–2014

Source: Our elaboration on OECD data

see Figure 6.1), according to which the most significant employment losses between 2002 and 2014 occurred in the more routine medium-skilled jobs in Europe and the USA. On the other hand, it is pointed out that both high-skilled and low-skilled jobs increased, many of them in the low-productivity tertiary sectors: trade, food services, but also care, which represent today one of the major sources of new employment, although often at risk of poverty because of the very low wage levels.

That said, if the focus shifts from flows and stocks to the content and organisation of work, further issues emerge that require further investigation. This aspect is all the more important if one takes into account the differences that tend, for example, to differentiate industry and manufacturing sectors, on the one hand, and services on the other, which are in turn distinguishable in sub-sectors that are differentiated in terms of work content, skills, and the use of technologies applied to work.

As Guarascio and Sacchi (2017) correctly remarked, the reference to automation applied to production – especially industrial production – is not indicative of a generalised trend, likely to be replicated with the same characteristics in other sectors. In services, for example, the drive to multiply supply (brought about by technologies) does not necessarily go hand in hand with skill improvement and the quality of work, as can be expected in some industries. Just think about the tensions and problems faced by platform workers in this case, regarding which several authors (Huws 2014; Degryse 2016; Pulignano 2019) have highlighted how the almost total lack of regulation in the area of contractual rights

(pay, welfare, and working conditions) facilitated by the web exposes these workers both to low wages and stressful work schedules between the (unpaid) time they have to devote to the job or order search on the platform and the request to perform the service quickly (through technology) to obtain a remuneration aligned with that of a regular employment agreement.

The drift towards deregulation and disintermediation arising from these contexts increases the downward pressure on labour, with negative consequences in terms of growing inequality, income inequality, and job security. These issues are, to all intents and purposes, different from those found in the industrial sector, where digitisation can also lead to an enrichment of work content and an improvement in skill levels, albeit for an increasingly smaller number of workers.

In such a fragmented scenario of conflicting dynamics, what we know most for sure is that, for the moment, two trends tend to emerge, upgrading and polarisation, which are different but not necessarily opposed to each other. Under the impetus of technological change, labour markets are indeed undergoing a qualitative change that favours the creation of high-skilled, high-value-added jobs at the top levels, even if it is conceivable that this process has affected only a few occupations. At the same time, the simultaneous reduction in medium-skilled jobs contributes to increasing the amount of low-skilled and low-paid work, which is already growing in the low-productivity service sectors.

Both the upgrading and polarisation theses agree on one point, namely that the changes underway will mainly affect the reduction of middle jobs, middle skills and, ultimately, the middle classes. On this point, both theories seem to converge, although from different starting points. In the case of the upgrading, we are faced with a process of improving skills and competencies that leads some, if only a few, to improve their chances of upward mobility in the labour market. Polarisation, in contrast, involves the downward slide of large parts of the traditional middle classes. The consequences of all this for social protection systems are likely to be severe. It is in fact around the central role of the 'middle classes' that the welfare systems have historically been built. And this, as Palier (2019) points out, both in terms of the beneficiaries of the measures and, no less importantly, their financing, whether it be tax- or contribution-based.

6.3 Welfare challenges in the face of technological transition

These problems pose significant challenges for European welfare systems. If, on the one hand, a 'productive' welfare agenda is crucial for a high level of competition (as it is the goal of the SI), on the other hand,

it does not avoid the problem of poor and precarious jobs that tends to affect also mid-siders, pushed to the margins of the labour market as a consequence of polarisation. Are active labour market policies enough for these workers? It is clear that in the face of such a problem, the presence of a structured income support network. Hemerijck (2017) has also recently stressed this point in his redefinition of the institutional basis of the SI, seen as a combination of three fundamental functions: Stock (education and human capital), Flow (activation, labour insertion, and work-life balance), and Buffer (social safety nets and minimum income policies). Together with the relaunch of expenditure on education, research, and care services for active participation in the labour market, Hemerijck (*ibid*) adds the importance of buffers, that is, income protection measures aimed at coping with the different phases of life cycle transition. Compared to the first theoretical approaches to SI, there is in this new articulation of interventions the recognition of the necessary integration between actions to support the transition to higher added value production and income protection measures in the form of a guaranteed minimum income (see also Hemerijck and Ronchi in this volume).

But even in relation to the problem of polarisation, this idea of integration has begun to make headway. In order to temper its negative effects, some scholars (Oesch 2013) have suggested the adoption of integrated passive and active measures. On the one hand by investing public resources in tertiary education, so as to allow firms to access a highly qualified workforce able to take full advantage of technological progress, and on the other hand by strengthening upper secondary education and vocational training for low-skilled and low-wage workers, supporting these wages through the establishment of a minimum income (Oesch 2013, pp. 8–9). In this same line of intervention, the guaranteed minimum income, as a dedicated anti-poverty measure, also plays a buffer function, supporting incomes for those who are exposed to the poverty trap. It is no coincidence that in many countries combinations of this kind, between minimum income and minimum wage, tend to be on the list of the responses to combat the phenomenon of in-work poverty and precarious work. Even the OECD (2019), in its report on the future of work, acknowledged the need to strengthen income protection measures disconnected from the contributory mechanism, in order to cope with the growing conditions of insecurity and precariousness that prevail in short-term contracts, especially in the grey areas between dependence and independence that are increasingly encountered in different sectors impacted by technologies, starting with platforms. All this has obvious policy implications. Whether it relates to the impact of technology on the social groups most at risk of substitution or

to the issue of labour in the transition to the 'service economy', there is a call to strengthen income protection mechanisms, starting with minimum income policies. Indeed, these policies came with many expectations, not only the (original) one of coping with situations of extreme poverty but also income support for the working poor (Natili 2018).

6.4 Participation income and the pluri-active society

The debate on the review of minimum income policies raises issues of different magnitude. Some concern the institutional design among services, direct transfers, tax credits, active labour policies, and economic supports for housing, health, and childcare (Marchal and Marx 2018). Others reflect more general theoretical issues. At this level, minimum income brings with it an internal duplicity which has been present since it appeared on the scene many years ago. On the one hand, minimum income can be considered as a conditional anti-poverty measure targeting certain population groups at higher risk of poverty. On the other hand, the minimum income can be considered a universal measure, covering all citizenship without any work conditionality and obligations. Moreover, it is not accompanied, as in the case of minimum guaranteed incomes, by ancillary benefits in the form of contributions to housing payments, food or other consumer goods (Von-Parijs and Vanderborgh 2019), but provides an individual basis that in the intentions of the proponents contributes to freeing people from the 'unemployment trap' and precariousness.

(ibid)

In its first conception, the minimum income does not present any substantial new aspects, being part of the traditional measures of economic assistance and labour inclusion for the poor, including the working poor. In its second meaning, on the other hand, we are faced with a real 'phase change' in the history of welfare: it will no longer be only workers or the poor who would be the beneficiaries of the new social protection measure, but all citizens, rich and poor, as long as they belong to a specific national community. In Von-Parijs's proposal (1995; see also Standing 2014), the 'basic income', which is not linked to work and the contributory mechanisms for financing social benefits, is considered a form of emancipating social intervention, that is, designed to encourage mobility between one job and another and to free up time to devote to other activities outside the market: education, care activities, and voluntary work.

Already in the 1980s, in the theoretical framework of some authors, such as Ralf Dahrendorf (1988), the idea of a new 'society of activities'

emerged, in which market work even assumed a secondary role. Subsequently, it resonated particularly with the contribution of Alain Supiot (2003), who, summarising the idea of the legal and economic recognition of non-market activities, proposed the granting of specific 'social drawing rights' (*droits de tirage sociaux*).

in which the time spent to perform them can be assimilated to working time according to labour and social security law, such as the activity of caring for people, the activity of training and job search and voluntary activities of collective interest.

(*ibid.* p. 90)

The discussion concerning these non-market activities, on the other hand, has often gone hand in hand with discussion of the reduction of working hours, through the development of leave and especially the spread of part-time work.

Among the authors who have combined the idea of non-market activities with that of working time, it is worth mentioning Tony Atkinson (1996, 2015), with his proposal for a 'participation income' as a basic level of universal transfer to be juxtaposed to a market labour income. It is to be kept low in order not to favour displacement effects on labour supply. Atkinson's proposal does not exclude forms of conditionality for the provision of participation income. However, they are not linked to activation in the labour market, but to non-market activities such as voluntary work, care and assistance, continuous training, and further education.

The concept of a 'pluri-active' society (Paci 2005) is based on a similar interpretation but within a broader consideration of the changes in work in all its forms. This is intended to emphasise the need for welfare reforms aimed at including within their scope, with appropriate forms of legal and monetary recognition, the many fields of activity outside the market: care, assistance, and voluntary commitment, which already occupy an important space in welfare systems. This interpretation does not deny the value and importance of paid work, even in welfare. But it starts with the recognition that not all social services can and should be provided through public or market services.

Paci's interpretation (2005, in particular: 184 et seq.) propels us towards a pluri-active society characterised by a high level of innovation and productivity, in which, alongside market work, a series of socially recognised non-market activities carried out by citizens are valued, such as, for example, study, apprenticeship, and training; care work and assistance to children and the elderly; voluntary work; and artistic and cultural work. In this interpretation, non-market activities are not to be understood as one of the conditionalities to access an unemployment

benefit or minimum income. In Italy, (free) community work is one of the requirements to access the minimum guaranteed income. Differently, in the pluri-active society conception, it is a right guaranteed to all citizens on the basis of their wishes, including the right to reduce working hours (for the same wage) to free up time to devote to other spheres of activity. The modalities of this recognition are of a different kind (Paci 2005 pp. 156–167). Some forms of this recognition are already present, varying widely. On the one hand, there has been an expansion of forms of ‘suspension’ of work without salary reduction (leave; sabbaticals, etc.). On the other hand, there has been an expansion of the allowances or subsidies paid to those who carry out such non-market activities (such as support for family caregiving, including notional contributions for caregivers). This process of legal and economic recognition does not only concern caregiving, study, and training activities, but also those of civic and voluntary commitment, as is the case, for example, in Italy for the universal civic service: a form of monetary recognition (EUR 444 per months) for young people who choose to be involved in care activities, international cooperation, the protection of cultural heritage or activities linked to social and environmental sustainability for a period of 8 to 12 months. These activities, while remaining outside the labour market, nevertheless acquire their own autonomy and a ‘para-labour’ identity. In France, a scheme has recently been introduced, ‘the *compte d’engagement citoyen*’, that legally recognises the engagement of citizens in activities outside the labour market. Thus, they are able to benefit from an annual amount of freely chosen vocational training, costing up to EUR 720 per year. Together with two other schemes: the ‘*compte personnel de formation*’ and the ‘*compte professionnel de prévention*’, it is part of a set of measures that are based on a citizen’s subjective rights (see also Ferrera 2019). They ensure access to accredited training initiatives, and lastly use time as a new criteria to define the content of welfare protection, allowing beneficiaries to better combine work obligations and off-market activities.

6.5 New needs and new work: towards new welfare policies?

The debate on pluri-activity is closely linked to the transformations we have just outlined. Polarisation, poor work, and the impact of technology may have consequences for the quantity and quality of available work. And some of those are already evident, as we have just seen. In particular, the main problem currently is the reduction in the number of medium-skilled occupations, resulting in increased downward competition for the same jobs. However, technology does imply not only the displacement of some market jobs but also a possible time-release,

(increase in free time) due to the fact that more is produced with less labour and with productivity gains, or at least with reduced costs for companies. This aspect calls into question several issues, relating to the inequalities that are thus produced, for example, between those who suffer from polarisation and those who instead manage to take advantage of the upgrading to higher-skilled jobs. But it is equally important to raise the question of how to use this productivity or how to allocate it for social protection.

Faced with the problem of labour displacement, the various reform hypotheses can be grouped into three main options. The first aims at strengthening social safety nets and especially policies to combat poverty, so as to meet the demands for protection of the most vulnerable in the current transition. The second concerns the establishment of an unconditional basic income for all. The third aims instead at a controlled reduction of market working hours and consequently time-release into other, economically and legally recognised non-market activities. This perspective does not prefigure a differentiated strategy between the few winners and the losers of the technological transition which reflects the two movements of polarisation and upgrading mentioned earlier. If anything, it envisages a reorganisation of protection for all within a framework of controlled reduction of working time within the market. On the other hand, while it is true that throughout history technological revolutions have contributed to the creation of new job opportunities, it is also true that in the long run working hours have also steadily reduced. Today, it is inconceivable to think of working a 12-hour day, seven days a week. Yet, as Ralf Dahrendorf (1988) had already pointed out in the 1980s, this was the case for a long time (Castel 1995). Yet, even here, productivity increases, new technologies and, no less important, the pressures and claims of workers and trade-unions made it possible to reduce working hours, guaranteeing new social benefits. Without taking into account the French 35 hours (the main attempt to impose by legislation the reduction of working time) we are now in a favourable situation for this reflection to be intertwined with the prospect of a controlled reduction of working time at the same wage. Through collective bargaining, agreements to reduce working time have spread in several European countries. Consider, for example, the experimental agreement concluded in Germany in the Baden Wuerttemberg region involving 900,000 workers in the metalworking sector. It allows for a reduction in working hours, from 35 to 28 hours, for a minimum period of six months and a maximum of 24, in the event of family care needs. The agreement ensures that no more than 10% of the applications per individual company can be accepted and that there is an increase in flexi-time up to a maximum of 40 hours per week on a voluntary basis to compensate the company. More recently,

in the United Kingdom on of the biggest trial of a four-day working week has been launched, involving more than 3000 staff members and 70 firms, mostly tech companies. The pandemic had a profound impact on labour markets, accelerating trends towards reduced working time. On the one hand, many countries adopted programmes to incentive agreements for working hour reductions. On the other hand, the spread of smart working contributes to reorganise working activities, renewing interest in issues related to the relationship between working time and productivity. However, they also present critical points. These trials are unlikely to cover economic sectors that are more marginal or where bargaining power is weak. From this point of view, they do not prevent the development of new dualisms, namely between those who have the chance to benefit from options of this type thanks to their professional status or type of company, and on the other hand, those who remain excluded not only from work in the market but also from non-market work economically recognised by a contract. It would be different if these options were included in a general reassessment of work-life balance for all.

In Italy, the standard working week is set at 40 hours, one of the longest in Europe. While unemployment is still high, any reduction in working hours is more often involuntary, for example, through the growth of involuntary part-time work. Figure 6.2 shows that the average number of hours worked – 36.5 between 2009 and 2018 is steady. However, this is still below pre-crisis levels (Istat 2019) and involuntary part-time work has increased for all age groups, highlighting a problem

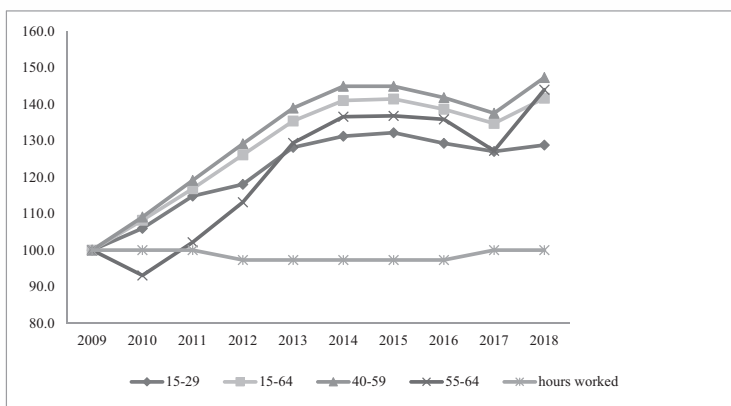


Figure 6.2 Involuntary part-time and working hours in Italy, 2009=100, Years 2009–2018

Source: Our elaboration on Eurostat and Istat data

that particularly affects Italian women. Approximately two-thirds of the increase in involuntary part-time work involves women and accounts for 19.5% of female employment (*ibid*), which is increasing but of low quality.

The paradox is that while there is a high level of involuntary part-time work and people working for only a few hours, there are others who work well over 40 hours a week, and they are benefitted by the overtime tax relief measures introduced by governments in recent years. On the other hand, with regards to informal caregiving, the data tell us that family care work has also increased during the same period, especially for women. In the first place is the fact that Italy is the European country with the highest gender gap in the distribution of paid market-work and unpaid non-market work. In other words, while men work much more in the labour market, women are much more present in the family. They work about 3 hours more per day than men, and home working amounts to 75% of their working day. This means that more than half of women are burdened with paid work, and with unpaid work, and 54.7% work 60 hours a week. Among men, fewer than half, 47.3%, work these hours. That said, time dedicated to family care is also increasing. For many men, this increase is accompanied by a reduction in paid work. This is particularly true for those who have suffered most from the crisis, for example by reducing their working hours in order to retain their jobs (Istat 2019).

The negative consequences of economic stagnation are hidden behind these data, from the return to pre-crisis employment levels, with more people employed, but working far fewer hours, to the role of involuntary part-time employment as an alternative to unemployment. In more general terms, we can say that the scenario of the pluri-active society is now a fact, but more as an obligatory alternative, especially for women, rather than as the outcome of a free choice.

Apart from a purely economic approach, the right to balance market and non-market labour is about enlarging the sphere of universal citizens' rights. Secondly, it is not antithetical to the development of social investment-oriented policies. They are two separate but mutually related spheres. The objectives set by social investment are of paramount importance for improving human capital, and supporting an ever better-qualified labour force and sectors with higher productivity. Training and active labour policies play a strategic role to respond to the pressures of digitisation. Inside and outside the labour market, Stock and Flow can help to ensure that skills are constantly improved, all the more so given the problem of the present nature of professional skills, which become rapidly outdated. At the same time, it is equally important to invest in welfare services in order to ensure that they match emerging social needs, be they related to care,

work-life balance, or lifecycle labour market transitions. These investments also have the potential to generate new jobs, both directly and indirectly.

Employment in welfare services is also less impacted by the displacement effects, as Palier recently wrote in reference to the impacts of digitisation on welfare systems (2019). For many of these services, the problems concern, if anything, the downward pressure on labour costs, which we have dealt with in the previous chapters, and the fact that the services are not accessible to all, especially in some countries.

But, if the welfare state is disrupted, providing a basic income to all will not enable everyone to purchase these services on the market. Rather, it is by investing in collective and social goods, services and social infrastructures that these downward adjustments can be counteracted. That said, a long-term investment policy in the strategic areas of social investment does not exclude investing also in individual pluri-activity, that is, in balancing the different spheres of activity, formal and informal, in parallel with a reduction in working hours in market employment.

Several studies have confirmed a positive relationship between reduced working hours and productivity. Conversely, they point out that long working hours, as well as leading to increased stress and risks to physical health, in the long run, lead to lower productivity. Now, if we look at these aspects from a broader perspective, that is, also in the light of technology-induced transformation, we can envisage viable solutions. The point is to redirect innovation and productivity generated by the technological transition in the direction of people's desires and not only those who introduce these innovations, that is, companies and their shareholders. While digitisation reduces the workforce, at least in some sectors, productivity gains and cost reductions for companies can provide a fiscal basis for financing new welfare schemes aimed at economically and legally recognising the 'social' activation of non-market activity, as a universal right guaranteed to all citizens. The alternative is not to regulate these processes, leaving it to technology to rearrange living and working time. As in other transitional phases, rethinking the general structures of production and reproduction is a challenge. Besides, if technological development and automation will make it possible to produce more with relatively lower employment, and if there is continuous training to update skills for the new production contexts, the issue of the fair distribution of the benefits deriving from digitisation must also be addressed. Work less, work all, has been a slogan in the past used to redistribute labour. We cannot exclude that in the future 'working less' may be associated with a commitment to non-market activity areas being recognised, not with a salary but with appropriate economic and legal protections aimed at enhancing the pluri-activity of individuals.

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