

12 October 2026

# **Policy paper**

## **Quality Jobs Act**



### **Purpose of this policy paper**

In this paper, Caritas Europa presents its understanding of the purpose of work, the areas of the Quality Jobs Roadmap that can be built on in the Quality Jobs Act, the areas of the Roadmap that need to be complemented in the Act, and recommendations for the Act.

## **Introduction**

Caritas Europa welcomes the upcoming Quality Jobs Act as an important legislative initiative to build on the Quality Jobs Roadmap.

Before entering into further discussion on how to define and ensure quality jobs, it is important to first set out Caritas Europa's understanding of the purpose of work. Work should be an expression of care for the planet and for the dignity of people and contribute to the common good. As a result, all our activity towards this goal should be conceived of as work. In this sense, work encapsulates all forms of labour – formal and informal, paid and unpaid – including domestic work, informal care, internships, volunteering and community engagement amongst others. All forms of work can contribute to care for the planet and for the dignity of people and they should all be valued, whether accounted for in GDP or not. Employment, i.e. formal paid work, is one aspect of our daily work and should serve the same overarching goal<sup>1</sup>.

This stands in stark contrast to the narrative set out in the [Quality Jobs Roadmap](#), which repeats that quality jobs should build Europe's competitiveness and productivity, particularly through increasing labour market participation. While quality jobs may improve attractiveness and therefore productivity in certain sectors, jobs do not exist to serve competitiveness and economic growth. Nor should inclusion in the workforce be predominantly about "unlocking...talent pool[s]" for the same goal. This language and predominant narrative imply that people are resources, rather than human beings with inherent dignity.

## **Building on the Quality Jobs Roadmap for a Quality Jobs Act**

Caritas Europa supports the [June 2025 EMCO opinion](#) on the 13 dimensions of job quality, which was mentioned in the Roadmap as the basis for an updated monitoring framework and new indicators. Yet, it is disappointing that the call for evidence for the Quality Jobs Act does not even mention these 13 dimensions of job quality and has a very narrow understanding of jobs. All 13 dimensions are important for defining quality jobs and Caritas Europa has been working on many of them both at EU and national level.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see [The EU should rethink work beyond competitiveness – Euractiv](#)

Below, we emphasise a few of them along with Caritas key messages<sup>2</sup>. Caritas Europa is especially supportive of some of the new additions to the job quality dimensions including workplace wellbeing, social protection and undeclared work to be eliminated:

#### **Adequate earnings and fair wages:**

- Decent wages are an essential component of quality jobs helping to support social fairness and reduce wage inequality as the Roadmap rightly stated. Caritas Europa supports the progress that has been made in lifting minimum wages across the EU following the adoption of the Minimum Wages Directive and calls for continued progress to be made. Higher minimum wages are essential for workers in lower-paid positions, which are more often occupied by women than men.
- Decent wages should be higher than minimum income levels to ensure that work pays, to prevent in-work poverty and to provide decent living conditions.
- The Traineeships Directive needs to be adopted to ensure that young people are properly supported on the labour market. Without clear binding EU-level rules, many young people face unpaid or underpaid work and limited social protection, which reinforce inequality rather than ease learning and school-to-work transitions.
- We look forward to the adoption of a European Care Deal in 2027 to address long-term care workforce challenges, including better pay, better training, and working conditions, to improve attractiveness and retention of workers and, importantly, to improve the value and recognition given to workers in the care sector.

#### **Skills development and career progression:**

- A lot of emphasis is currently being placed on digital skills, green skills and STEM-related skills, all of which are valuable. However, this represents a rather narrow classification of useful skills. Other types of skills should be better valued and developed in the workplace, including critical thinking, media and information literacy, and interpersonal skills. All of these are essential skills in key employment sectors such as AI, communication, healthcare, and education.

#### **Working time, and workplace wellbeing:**

- Quality jobs are crucial for promoting a healthy work-life balance and positive physical and mental well-being. This is especially important given the commonality of excessive working hours, especially with the rise of remote and hybrid work and rising levels of work-related (di)stress and burnout. Workers are people first and foremost and should have adequate rest periods, and be able to balance their personal needs and responsibilities with their professional aspirations in a healthy way.
- Zero-hours contracts and platform work – which are inherently exploitative and provide little or no social protection – continue to persist despite the adoption of the Platform Work Directive.

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<sup>2</sup> These key messages are taken from: [Quality jobs – going beyond productivity – www.caritas.eu](https://www.caritas.eu/Quality%20jobs%20-%20going%20beyond%20productivity), [What decent work looks like – Work and digitalisation | IPS Journal](https://www.caritas.eu/What%20decent%20work%20looks%20like%20-%20Work%20and%20digitalisation%20I%20PS%20Journal), [A human-centred EU anti-poverty strategy – www.caritas.eu](https://www.caritas.eu/A%20human-centred%20EU%20anti-poverty%20strategy), [221215\\_CE-briefing-paper\\_labour-migration-V2.pdf](https://www.caritas.eu/221215_CE-briefing-paper_labour-migration-V2.pdf), and [Caritas\\_EuropeanReport\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.caritas.eu/Caritas_EuropeanReport_FINAL.pdf)

- It is positive that the Roadmap acknowledges the risks linked to digital work pressure that can lead to increased work-related (di)stress and undermine workers' well-being. Strong safeguards are essential to prevent digital exploitation and ensure the right to disconnect, which should be understood as a digital-age extension of the existing rest and working-time protections already provided under the Working Time Directive.

### **Social protection:**

- Social protection has always been a crucial part of quality jobs, and access to it is especially needed for self-employed and non-standard workers so that they can also have guaranteed healthcare, a decent pension and other benefits and rights.
- However, access to social protection as well as access to adequate and affordable enabling services should first and foremost ensure human dignity and be seen as support services for people throughout their lifecycle rather than a tool to promote labour market participation.

### **Undeclared or underdeclared work to be eliminated:**

- It is crucial to strengthen the detection and prevention of labour exploitation, including through subcontracting practices. Non-EU workers are particularly at risk, not only because they may have an irregular status, but also because they are over-represented in sectors where exploitation is most prevalent, such as construction, transport, domestic services and agriculture. Mobile EU citizens, posted workers and the bogus self-employed can also face particular vulnerabilities, e.g. gaps in access to rights and social protection, lower wages, and the risk of abusive employment practices. Effective enforcement is essential to prevent social dumping and ensure that labour mobility does not come at the expense of decent working conditions.
- We expect that the upcoming revision of the European Labour Authority mandate will help by further addressing the challenges related to undeclared work, labour exploitation and the abuses of working conditions of third country nationals.

Caritas Europa recommends adding a further dimension of job quality focused on inclusion, which is broader than any of these individual dimensions and would span several of them in a comprehensive way. A separate dimension on inclusion would also help ensure that inclusion itself is not used as a tool to drive competitiveness, productivity and growth but rather to support people's aspirations in work. We highlight our concern around the focus on "activation", which implies that people not working on the formal labour market are not active, thereby ignoring and devaluing many of the important activities they already undertake, such as unpaid care work and volunteering. Caritas Europa supports some of the positive points mentioned in the Roadmap on inclusion, such as the need to support older people to update their skills and to pass on their experience, which would help to improve social cohesion. But support for older people regarding the labour market is also broader than skills, encompassing for example, flexibility in working time, complementary social protection, and adapted jobs and workplaces that better respond to the needs of older workers.

Vulnerabilities often intersect, reinforce one another and may be further compounded by factors such as gender, origin and age, creating multiple and overlapping barriers to accessing quality and stable jobs. A comprehensive inclusion dimension, supported by relevant indicators, could cover the availability of childcare places, the recognition of qualifications for people with a migrant

background, and tailored job training and upskilling programmes, among other areas. It would help to ensure that people in vulnerable and marginalised situations – such as women, older people, young people, persons with disabilities, persons with a migrant or ethnic background and long-term unemployed people – are given all the support needed to access quality jobs.

### **Beyond the individual dimensions of job quality**

Beyond these dimensions of job quality, the Roadmap also mentions several other important elements related to job quality. Below, two of them are emphasised below along with Caritas Europa's key messages<sup>3</sup>:

*Just transition:* Caritas Europa welcomes the need for a fair and just transition which should anticipate change as well as the new European Fair Transition Observatory. When it comes to quality jobs, a just transition should support green job creation, re-skilling programmes and transitional support for regions dependent on high-emission sectors. However, further long-term financial support is also needed to ensure that workers are sufficiently supported in the transition.

*AI & algorithmic management:* Caritas Europa acknowledges the potential of AI to support workers in their tasks, reduce repetitive and burdensome work, facilitate access to information, and create new opportunities for people – including those who may face barriers to employment. However, to bring real benefits technological innovation must be developed and used in a way that ethically supports and complements human skills and judgement. Algorithmic and automated management systems must be transparent, accountable and subject to human supervision. These systems should not undermine workers' rights by arbitrarily determining pay, workload, performance or dismissal. Not only should trade unions and workers' representatives be informed and consulted well in advance on decisions relating to AI and algorithmic management at work (including which systems are in use, which actions and tasks they perform), but also employees themselves. Employees need to be informed precisely if and how they are being monitored by algorithmic management. Monitoring employees while they are off-duty, during breaks or in private rooms must be prohibited. Workers and self-employed persons should also be able to exercise their judgement and overrule or ignore decisions or assignments made by algorithmic management systems, if unreasonable or unjustified.

Although important innovations are exploring how to make AI systems more energy-efficient and environmentally sustainable, and transparency standards are being strengthened through the EU AI Act and sustainability reporting rules, Caritas Europa highlights the considerable environmental impact of AI, including high electricity demand, water consumption, emissions and raw material needs. These impacts should be balanced with the benefits of AI and taken into consideration when promoting its use in the workplace.

## **Complementing the Quality Jobs Roadmap for a Quality Jobs Act**

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<sup>3</sup> Some of these key messages are taken from: [A human-centred EU anti-poverty strategy - www.caritas.eu](https://www.caritas.eu)

With the absence of an EU definition of “quality jobs”, the dimensions discussed above, as well as aspects related to a just transition and AI & algorithmic management, provide a broad and fairly consensual understanding of what a quality job is. However, for Caritas Europa, this broad understanding is still incomplete. Since work should be an expression of care for the planet and for the dignity of people and contribute to the common good, the concept of quality jobs should also consider their broader impact on people and the environment<sup>4</sup>.

For example, whether the job is tailored to individual circumstances, whether it is environmentally sustainable e.g. not polluting the environment or destroying ecosystems, whether it is dependent on exploitation elsewhere, as well as the ‘meaningfulness’ of the job i.e. whether it contributes to the good of society, should also be important criteria to determine a quality job.

Quality jobs should allow for flexibility, including part-time work, or extra support for persons who require it. They should ensure that the supply chains and factories they depend on are free from exploitation and uphold social and labour rights. They should actively protect nature and the environment, operating within planetary boundaries. And they should, first and foremost, exist to contribute to the common good rather than to competitiveness and economic growth, ensuring that all value, economic or otherwise, created is shared for the wider benefit of people and planet.

The contribution of employment to climate change and environmental degradation is not being sufficiently discussed and addressed at EU and national level. Much more consideration needs to be given to the kind of activities that we want to promote in the future and those that need to be replaced, such as those of the fossil fuel industry. Much more emphasis also needs to be placed on ensuring that workplaces, beyond the jobs themselves, are healthy and sustainable in terms of their carbon and material footprint<sup>5</sup>.

These elements – the broader impact of work on people and the environment – are also key dimensions of job quality, and should also be included in the updated monitoring framework with further research on how they could be measured and translated into additional indicators.

## **Other elements to be included in the Quality Jobs Act**

It was positive to see that the possibility to develop a headline target to track progress in improving working conditions across the EU was mentioned in the Roadmap. However, for Caritas Europa such a target is essential and should be part of the Quality Jobs Act. A complementary employment sub-target on quality jobs should consider the dimensions set out in the EMCO opinion as well as the broader impacts jobs in Europe have on people and the environment. Equally important would be a sub-target on in-work poverty, given that 8.2% of the EU working population still faces in-work poverty<sup>6</sup>. Such a target should look beyond quality jobs to tackle the wider drivers contributing to in-work poverty, including high costs of living, personal debt, and involuntary part-time work.

The Quality Jobs Act should also acknowledge the crucial work of civil society organisations and social economy actors, including not-for-profit social service providers. Their contribution to

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<sup>4</sup> Many of these messages are based on: [What decent work looks like – Work and digitalisation | IPS Journal](#)

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see: [Care is work, work is care \(24 February 2022, Global\) – The Future of Work, Labour After Laudato Si](#)

<sup>6</sup> [8.2% of EU workers are at risk of poverty – News articles – Eurostat](#)

inclusion, the prevention of exploitation and the support of vulnerable workers is essential to any comprehensive approach to quality jobs<sup>7</sup>.

## Conclusion

It is disappointing that the call for evidence for the Quality Jobs Act does not even mention the 13 dimensions of job quality and instead has a very narrow understanding of jobs. We hope that the Act will not only address all these dimensions of quality jobs, together with ensuring a just green and digital transition and the proper management of AI, but will also go further. Work should be an expression of care for the planet and for the dignity of people and contribute to the common good, and therefore quality jobs should also be inclusive, and consider their broader impact on people and the environment.

It is also essential that existing EU directives and regulations are transposed and effectively enforced by EU Member States. As the Roadmap states, EU social rights need to be a reality on the ground. In the same spirit, it is crucial to ensure that EU policies are coherent so that upholding worker's rights is a fundamental aspect of every EU policy and piece of legislation.

## Recommendations for the Quality Jobs Act

- **Acknowledge the 13 dimensions of quality jobs from the EMCO opinion in the Quality Jobs Act, and broaden it to also take inclusion into account, as well as the impact on people, in Europe and globally, and on the environment.** Include these dimensions of quality jobs in the updated monitoring framework and carry out research on how they could be measured to form additional indicators.
- **Propose a guiding framework that analyses the extent to which each sector of the economy contributes now and in the future to care for the dignity of people, in Europe and globally, and to care for our common home<sup>8</sup>.**
- **Propose a quality jobs sub-target by 2030 to complement the existing EPSR employment headline target.** The progress towards this target should be measured through a multifaceted composite indicator, which should take into consideration all the relevant dimensions of a quality job, including inclusion, the impact on people, in Europe and globally, and on the environment<sup>9</sup>. This requires up-to-date and meaningful cross-country data.
- **Propose an in-work poverty target by 2030 to complement the existing EPSR employment headline target.** This target would look more broadly beyond quality jobs to assess and coherently address other factors contributing to in-work poverty, such as high cost of living (e.g. childcare, housing expenses), personal debt, involuntary part-time work, and other related barriers.

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<sup>7</sup> [Reaction to the Quality Jobs Roadmap – Social Platform](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Care is work, work is care \(24 February 2022, Global\) – The Future of Work, Labour After Laudato Si](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Policy Position Paper – Quality Jobs](#)

- **Recognise and promote other types of skills** beyond digital, green, and STEM-related skills, **including critical thinking, media literacy, and interpersonal skills.** These are essential when it comes to AI, communication, healthcare, and education – four big employment sectors. They should be valued and trained in the workplace.
- **Include strong safeguards to prevent the digital exploitation of workers and to ensure a just, human-centred digital transformation.** Algorithmic and automated management systems – whether used in the workplace or for recruitment – must be transparent, accountable and subject to human supervision. These systems must never undermine workers' rights by determining pay, workload, performance or dismissal. Employers should ensure workers' information and consultation and safeguard workers' autonomy, mental health and work-life balance<sup>10</sup>. The energy responsibility and the environmental impacts of AI systems should also be addressed, ensuring that AI development remains aligned with the EU's climate and sustainability objectives.
- **Following the European Parliament INL, propose a Directive on establishing the right to disconnect that would apply to all workers and all sectors.** The Directive would ensure the protection of workers' health and safety and fair working conditions<sup>11</sup>.
- **Propose a legislative initiative to build on the Council Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed.** Social protection should be extended to all workers, no matter the type of employment or length of contract<sup>12</sup>.
- **Support targeted, public and not-for-profit sector organised employment programmes, such as an EU-wide job guarantee, to increase the number of quality jobs across the EU.** A job guarantee is a state-funded locally implemented project that provides a decent job for anyone willing and able to work but struggling to find employment on the regular labour market, in order to reduce involuntary, long-term unemployment. It could be funded jointly through the EU funds, national governments and local authorities. With appropriate safeguards, a job guarantee can offer personalised support and help improve quality employment prospects, skills and self-confidence<sup>13</sup>.
- **Acknowledge the crucial work of civil society organisations and social economy actors,** including not-for-profit social service providers, whose contribution to inclusion, the prevention of exploitation and the support of vulnerable workers is essential to any comprehensive approach to quality jobs<sup>14</sup>.

## Broader recommendations on quality jobs

<sup>10</sup> [Towards a quality jobs act](#)

<sup>11</sup> Taken from: [Towards a quality jobs act](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Just Economy Styles Digital Low.pdf](#)

<sup>13</sup> For more information, see [A human-centred EU anti-poverty strategy - www.caritas.eu](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Reaction to the Quality Jobs Roadmap - Social Platform](#)

- **Following the European Parliament INL, propose a Just Transition Directive to proactively anticipate and manage changes in the world of work.** The Directive should serve as a legal tool to support workers through the transitions, strengthen workers' rights and ensure they have a meaningful say in decisions that affect their jobs and futures<sup>15</sup>.
- **Ensure Member States effectively transpose and enforce existing EU labour market legislation** – such as the Adequate Minimum Wages Directive, the Platform Work Directive, the Work-Life Balance Directive, the Pay Transparency Directive and the Council Recommendations on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed.
- **Ensure that EU policies are coherent so that upholding worker's rights is a fundamental aspect of every EU policy and piece of legislation.**
- **Ensure that at least 25% of the funds in the new National and Regional Partnership Plans are dedicated to social objectives. These funds should invest in crucial sectors such as healthcare, as well as ensure adequate national policy and legislative frameworks under which quality jobs can be created and maintained.** This means, for example, investing in quality and affordable childcare, recognising qualifications for people with migrant backgrounds, ending excessive conditionalities between social assistance and job searches, and designing tailored upskilling programmes.
- **Ensure that Member States have the fiscal space to support civil society organisations and social economy actors, including not-for-profit social service providers, to provide quality jobs,** especially for people that are not able to find work in the regular labour market.
- **Conclude the negotiations on the Directive on Traineeships without further delay.**

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<sup>15</sup> Taken from: [Reaction to the Quality Jobs Roadmap – Social Platform](#)

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### About Caritas Europa

Caritas Europa is a network of 49 member organisations in 46 European countries and one of the 7 regions of Caritas Internationalis. Our members assist and provide services to millions of people in need.

Caritas Europa works with people of all faiths to end poverty and to promote the dignity of all. We believe that people and the environment, not profits, should be at the heart of all policies.



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