

**Speech given by Montserrat Mir, Confederal Secretary  
at the Ministerial Conference on Ageing  
Expert Panel II - Encouraging Longer Working Life and Ability to Work**

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**The lasting consequences of the economic crisis and new working conditions through advanced technologies, the so-called industry 4.0, on the employment of older persons.**

Two trends impact upon demographic ageing in the EU in the last decades: a steady increase in longevity and life expectancy, and also, in parallel, the falling of fertility rates.

The demographic changes must be considered in the context of the economic crisis which caused job losses, of the overall worsening working conditions (see the wage levels), of high unemployment rates especially among young people and of austerity measures which have impacted heavily on investments for growth and social protection.

Increased longevity potentially is a positive outcome of a healthy and wealthy Europe. However:

- Its economic sustainability cannot merely rely on line reforms increasing statutory retirement age without taking into consideration employment rate, people's employability, working and living conditions along the whole life-course and the impact of the nature of the work.
- Fiscal sustainability of an ageing society should mostly rely on a strongly positive economic dependency ratio, based on job creation, employment of young people and quality jobs with decent wages, fiscal redistribution policies funding adequate social protection. Intergeneration solidarity at these conditions is the only way to guarantee fiscal sustainability of an ageing society.
- Longevity should not be a luxury for few European citizens and residents, and public expenditure should develop in line with the needs of all.
- Life expectancy does not increase for all, and in particular it is not a reality for low educated people and low skilled workers, poorer citizens and migrants, arduous workers. Job quality enormously impacts health and life expectancy, and working conditions have dramatically dropped in the last decades. Working longer and healthy, and retire with dignity shall not be a privilege for few.

Advanced technologies, in this framework, may certainly help, but:

- It all depends on how the digital transition is managed - it should be led so as to ensure quality employment, increased productivity and its redistribution, and better working conditions
- The digital transition implies acknowledgement, learning, skill updating and training: rights which will have to be implemented since the very early life stages, in a quality way.
- If a rate of job losses may derive from digitalisation and the introduction of advanced technologies, sustainable and adequate social protection and in particular public pension schemes based on inter- and intra-generational solidarity shall ensure dignified living standards

The current economic and demographic contexts impose to frame active ageing in a wide framework and set of policy drivers, which should be seen in the light of an increased pressure on older workers (almost 40% of workers believe that they will be unable to perform their jobs when they will be 60 years old, Eurofound 2010) as well with the persistent barriers to employment for young people (5.6 million young persons -under 25- are unemployed in the EU28 Eurostat 2017, 1 million more since 2015!!).

The Social Partners' agreement on Active Ageing and Intergenerational Approach, proclaimed earlier this year, is a positive achievement and needs now to be implemented.

In our view, the agreement should aim at:

- contributing to a labour market able to accommodate the different stages of life;
- ensuring a healthy and safe working environment and conditions;
- enabling people ability to work as long as they can and retire from the labour market with dignity;
- facilitating young workers' transition in the labour market.

The priority focus for the ETUC should be on:

- ensuring that older workers are hired and maintained in employment under healthy conditions until they reach their retirement age; in this sense, advanced technologies may help
- enabling knowledge and skills transfers between workers of different age groups: practices of mentoring and intergenerational mutual learning are capable to provide positive outcomes
- helping young people into sustainable and quality jobs, pursued as a complementary objective of the agreement.

In a context of digitalisation and for the achievement of sustainable active ageing and intergenerational solidarity it is however crucial to address issues which affect the EU across all ages:

- quality of employment: job quality differences are detected as an enormous issue across EU countries, and they enormously impact the capacity of people to remain at work with dignity and in good health along the whole course of longer working lives
- education, skill level,
- employment creation, tackling unemployment and insecure employment will need to be defended across all age groups.