

**ANSWERS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE**  
**Nicolas SCHMIT**  
**Commissioner-designate for Jobs**

### **1. General competence, European commitment and personal independence**

**What aspects of your personal qualifications and experience are particularly relevant for becoming Commissioner and promoting the European general interest, particularly in the area you would be responsible for? What motivates you? How will you contribute to putting forward the strategic agenda of the Commission? How will you implement gender mainstreaming and integrate a gender perspective into all policy areas of your portfolio? What guarantees of independence are you able to give the European Parliament, and how would you make sure that any past, current or future activities you carry out could not cast doubt on the performance of your duties within the Commission?**

Throughout my professional career, I have been involved in European affairs, when I was a civil servant as well as when I was serving as a Minister in the government of Luxembourg. Being a Luxembourgish citizen, I have since my young age been committed to European integration, knowing that only a strong Europe is up to the major challenges we face as Europeans. I strongly believe in the core values and principles on which Europe is founded and I will deploy all my energy in the coming years in defending democracy and promoting social justice, being committed to equal rights, cohesion and shared prosperity, which constitute fundamental objectives since the beginning of our Union.

As stated in the new Strategic Agenda for the period 2019-2024 adopted by the European Council in June, as well as in the Political Guidelines presented in July by the new President-elect, not only must Europe lead the transition to a healthy planet and a new digital agenda; it also needs to be more inclusive by bringing people together, by fostering integration and by upgrading our unique social market economy to fit today's new ambitions. I will work with the European Parliament to tackle the challenges facing our Union and our institutions.

I believe that in order to achieve a fair and inclusive economy, we must put people first, address rising inequalities, embrace diversity and defend international cooperation in the spirit of multilateralism and in close partnership with the United Nations, notably with regard to the implementation of the Sustainable Agenda for 2030. After the economic and financial crisis that has also become a social crisis, we have to move towards a more inclusive and human-centric society, that remains based on values and trust. Europe needs to put the social dimension at the centre of its policies and foster upward economic and social convergence.

This is the spirit with which I intend to promote the European general interest and participate in the work of the Commission led by Ursula Von der Leyen. I will use all my knowledge and experience to assist her and my future fellow colleagues to uphold the European Union's priorities and to work as closely as possible with the European Parliament, the Council, with

all relevant stakeholders, including the civil society, and in particular with social partners, to deliver on the political goals presented by the President-elect in her Political Guidelines.

Having been Minister for labour, employment and social affairs between 2009 and 2018, I believe I have the knowledge and experience to become the next Commissioner in charge of employment and social affairs. I chaired the employment, social policy, health and consumer affairs Council during the 2015 Luxembourg presidency. I also had the opportunity twice, in 2005 and 2015, to represent the Presidency of the Council in negotiations with the European Parliament.

If I am confirmed as a Commissioner, I intend to strengthen Europe's social dimension by respecting all values and principles enshrined in the EU Treaties, in particular those stated in Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty on European Union, while pursuing the general objectives set in Articles 8, 9, 10 and 11 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. The strengthening of social Europe requires a holistic approach. We need to accelerate the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, fostering synergies between all relevant actors, policies, instruments and funding in an effective way. My work will be driven by the principles of collegiality, fairness, transparency and inclusiveness.

Pursuing gender equality is a precondition for achieving sustainable development and for building fair, modern and inclusive societies in the EU as well as globally. I will implement gender mainstreaming in all policy areas and legislations pertaining to my portfolio. I will work closely with my colleagues in charge of gender equality within the framework of the new European Gender Strategy outlined in the political guidelines presented by the President-elect, in particular on employment aspects of gender equality issues and in full cooperation with the Task Force for Equality that will be set up.

I commit to comply without fail, as soon as I am appointed, with the Treaty obligations on independence, transparency, impartiality and availability, as defined in Article 17(3) of the Treaty on European Union and in Article 245 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

If I am confirmed as Commissioner, I will fully respect the letter and spirit of the Treaties, in particular the obligation to act in the European interest and without taking any instructions. I will also honour the Code of Conduct of Members of the European Commission and its provisions on conflicts of interest. My Declaration of Interests is complete and accessible to the public, and I will update it rapidly should any change be required.

## **2. Management of the portfolio and cooperation with the European Parliament**

**How would you assess your role as a Member of the College of Commissioners? In what respect would you consider yourself responsible and accountable to the Parliament for your actions and for those of your departments? What specific commitments are you prepared to make in terms of enhanced transparency, increased cooperation and effective follow-up to Parliament's positions and requests for legislative initiatives? In relation to planned initiatives or ongoing procedures, are you ready to provide Parliament with information and documents on an equal footing with the Council?**

As a future Member of the College, I will fully respect the principle of collegiality and I will take full political responsibility for the activities in my area of competence, as set out in the Mission Letter sent to me on 10 September. As I truly believe that the College is a team, I will

closely involve all my colleagues in the design, development and implementation of policy initiatives from my area of responsibility.

### **Role and co-operation with the European Parliament and its committees**

As a current Member of the European Parliament, I am very much convinced of the crucial importance of this institution. Engagement with the European Parliament is therefore of paramount importance to me. I intend to work with the Parliament and relevant committees at all stages of both the policy-making process and the political dialogue.

Effective inter-institutional cooperation is essential for the EU's institutional system to work and deliver, as it ensures the efficiency and legitimacy of the EU's decision-making system. Inter-institutional cooperation relies on key principles such as openness, mutual trust, efficiency, and regular exchange of information. President-elect von der Leyen's Political Guidelines and Mission Letters fully reflect these principles, and stress the intention to reinforce the special relationship between the European Parliament and the Commission. If confirmed as Commissioner, I will work towards this objective, and in doing so I will fully respect the provisions of the 2010 Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission and the 2016 Inter-Institutional Agreement on Better Law-Making, to the negotiations of which I contributed in my capacity as a representative of the Council. I will manage my regular cooperation with Parliament in an open, transparent and constructive way, with the view to building a special partnership.

In line with President-elect von der Leyen's Political Guidelines, I will make myself available to take part in all relevant parliamentary debates, committee meetings and trilogue discussions. I will ensure that parliamentary committees are involved in any major developments under my responsibility. At the same time, I am fully aware of the importance of equal treatment of the Parliament and the Council. In this respect, it is of utmost importance, as stated in the Political Guidelines, to move towards co-decision in all social policies, with due respect to the role of social partners as set out in Articles 154 and 155 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. I believe that the Commission has to be accountable to the directly elected Members of the European Parliament, and not only in the framework of the ordinary legislative procedure.

I also commit to basing the relations with my fellow colleagues and with the services under my responsibility on the principles of loyalty, trust, transparency, a regular two-way flow of information, and mutual assistance. Specifically, I will ensure a regular flow of information with the Chairs of the relevant parliamentary committees, directly communicate with committee coordinators and members, and ensure that I am available for bilateral meetings. I will also ensure that the European Parliament is regularly briefed, notably before major events and at key stages of international negotiations in areas under my responsibility.

I will also ensure that the questions from Members of the European Parliament to the Commission that come under my responsibility are responded to swiftly and accurately and in a non-bureaucratic way. I will appear before the European Parliament's plenary and/or committees whenever called to answer a question or provide any particular response.

### **Transparency**

President-elect von der Leyen's Political Guidelines stress that in order to regain citizens' faith in the Union, our institutions should be open and beyond reproach on transparency

issues. I will work closely with the European Council and Parliament for more transparency in the legislative process. Citizens should know whom we, as institutions that serve them, meet and discuss with and what positions we defend in the legislative process. Strengthening interinstitutional cooperation by promoting legitimacy and accountability will boost the EU's efficiency and good governance.

I am therefore fully committed to implementing the wide-ranging provisions on transparency and the flow of information in the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission and the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making. In particular, I will ensure that these provisions are respected in my structured dialogues and other contacts with Parliament's committees.

This Commission will also continue efforts to inform citizens on its activities, namely through citizens' dialogues. In addition, policy proposals under my responsibility will be based on proper consultations of relevant stakeholders, experts, social partners and the public, in line with Better Regulation principles.

### **Follow-up to Parliament's positions and requests for legislative initiatives**

President-elect von der Leyen supports a right of initiative for the European Parliament. She is committed that her Commission will follow-up on Parliamentary resolutions adopted by a majority of its members with a legislative act, in full respect of proportionality, subsidiarity and better law-making principles. I fully subscribe to this objective and as part of the next College's commitment to a deepened partnership with the European Parliament, I will work hand in hand with Parliament at every stage of designing and debating resolutions. I commit to work closely with the relevant parliamentary committees, and be active and present during the preparation of resolutions. I strongly believe that this will improve dialogue, foster confidence and a sense of working together towards a common goal.

The Commission will also effectively respond to Parliament's positions, including by replying to parliamentary resolutions or requests made on the basis of Article 225 TFEU within three months after their adoption, in accordance with the Framework Agreement. The Commission will ensure political oversight over the process.

I am also committed to fully respecting the role of social partners as set out in Articles 154 and 155 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

### **Provision of information and documents**

Further to my statement above about ensuring that parliamentary committees are involved in any major developments under my responsibility at the same time as and on an equal footing with the Council, I am fully aware that the provision of information and documents is an essential aspect of deepening the partnership between the European Parliament and the Commission. I therefore commit to fully implement the relevant provisions of the Framework Agreement between the two institutions, and of the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making. The Lisbon Treaty sets out the equality of Parliament and Council as co-legislators, and I will ensure that this is respected in terms of how information is shared in areas under my responsibility.

## Questions from the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

**3. The full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights is of vital importance in order to meet the challenges that the EU is confronted with. Which are the legislative pillars you aim to build the Social Europe on, and which concrete legislative proposals and financial support do you envisage at Union level in order to make social progress and a just transition to a sustainable society a reality for all people in Europe?**

Europe is facing a number of challenges and trends that must be addressed with ambition. As our economies and societies undergo the digital and green transition and face demographic changes, it is more important than ever to put social rights and fairness at the heart of the transition towards a sustainable Europe. Our success as a social market economy, and as a global actor, depends on it. To make Europe stronger, economically and socially, I firmly believe that we must invest in people and ensure that Europeans are protected and empowered to face these challenges in order to promote their wellbeing.

From the start, I have been a strong supporter of the European Pillar of Social Rights. I took part in the Social Summit in Gothenburg where the Pillar was proclaimed by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission in November 2017. The Pillar is a strong political commitment from the EU Heads of State and Governments and from the European Parliament for a better enactment and implementation of social rights.

Under the leadership of President-elect von der Leyen and working together with Executive Vice-President-designate Dombrovskis and my other colleagues in the Commission, I will do my utmost to implement and make the rights and principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights effective and relevant for our citizens, based on a fully-fledged Action Plan and proposals with a concrete effect on the ground.

I believe that the Action Plan should cover the Union level and the Member State level, within their respective competences and fully respecting subsidiarity, as also emphasised in the Strategic Agenda of the European Council of June 2019. Moving forward on the Action Plan requires joint and active political engagement among all partners, most notably in the European Parliament, with Member States, with social partners, and with other stakeholders in the civil society. Social dialogue plays a central role in reinforcing social rights and enhancing sustainable and inclusive growth. Implementing the Pillar will contribute to the overarching objective of delivering on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, in line with the guiding principles set out by the President-elect in her Political Guidelines and in the Mission Letters.

At Union level, this will require using all available instruments in our toolbox: from legal instruments to policy coordination and funding. The President-elect in her Political Guidelines included a number of initiatives that fall within the remit of the Pillar, which I will take forward. This includes:

- A legal instrument on fair minimum wages, with due respect for wage-setting according to national traditions, through collective agreements or legal provisions;
- A European Child Guarantee;
- Strengthening the Youth Guarantee;
- Looking at ways to improve the labour conditions of platform workers;

- Updating the Skills Agenda.
- Ensuring the full implementation of the Work-Life Balance Directive
- Doing more to fight poverty

Other proposals will also have a meaningful contribution to the Action Plan, for which I will work actively with my colleagues in the College:

- A proposal on a European Unemployment Benefit Reinsurance Scheme;
- A new European Gender Strategy, including measures to introduce binding pay-transparency measures.

These are other actions included in the Political Guidelines are an ambitious starting point to open the debate together with the Member States, the European Parliament, social partners and civil society organisations to ensure that the 20 principles of the Pillar become reality.

In the EU, we still have more than 100 million people at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This is unacceptable. We need to further engage in tackling poverty and social exclusion. I am committed to make full use of the tools at my disposal to ensure a dynamic jobs market, equal opportunities and fair working conditions as well as a flourishing social economy sector. With regard to social inclusion, a lot still needs to be done to ensure adequate income support, inclusive labour markets and access to quality services. In this, I count on the European Parliament to explore with me the best way to be on the side of those who need us the most, in full respect of the subsidiarity principle.

I also believe that we can and should do more on skills. Education and training plays a very important role in ensuring equal opportunities and access to the labour market but also in driving forward growth and prosperity through the ongoing green and digital transition. This is why I will put forward an updated Skills Agenda with a view to identify and fill skills shortages, to tackle skills mismatches, and to support upskilling and reskilling, to address the challenges of the future of work and digitalisation of our economies. In particular, I will explore the idea of individual learning accounts for people of working age. These are fully in line with principles 1 and 4 of the Pillar. They will empower individuals, putting them in the driving seat of their career and learning trajectories.

The Action Plan should also encourage Member States to take action. The European Semester should remain the main tool to mainstream the promotion of a high-level of employment, social protection and inclusion and social rights into our economic policies, recognising that economic and social progress are intertwined and equally important. Re-focusing the European Semester to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals will be the means to show that environmental and social sustainability in economic development need to go hand in hand. The Semester needs to continue to guide Member States towards more effective delivery of social rights through recommendations based on facts and sound analysis, including the monitoring of social performance through the Social Scoreboard. Moreover, a stronger focus on employment and social performance will also contribute to increasing resilience and deepening the Economic and Monetary Union.

Delivering on the principles of the Pillar requires more investment in people. For the new generation of EU funds post-2020, I will seek to ensure that the support provided by the European Social Fund+ (ESF+) and other funds goes towards the policy priorities identified in the context of a European Semester well aligned to the principles of the Pillar. The ESF+, as the main EU instrument for investing in people, will support Member States in tackling

challenges such as child poverty and youth unemployment, especially where the European Semester and the Social Scoreboard tell us that they are underperforming. I also count on the commitment of the European Parliament to ensure this consistency between our political priorities and EU funds during the upcoming legislative process.

Moreover, we need to ensure that the next generations will be able to live on a clean planet. We need to enable a just transition for all. Many workers and families are concerned that the transition might happen at their expense or at the expense of their children. The future Just Transition Fund included in the President-elect Political Guidelines will support to the most affected territories and empower people to reap the benefits of moving towards climate neutral economic models.

**4. In her political guidelines for 2019-2024, President-elect Ursula von der Leyen engages, among other things, to ensure that every worker in the Union has a fair minimum wage; to create the European Child Guarantee; and to turn the Youth Guarantee into a permanent instrument to fight youth unemployment.**

**Can you explain what these initiatives and engagements exactly consist of, which concrete instruments and legislative and non-legislative initiatives you will take to achieve them, and if and how they are compatible with the Member States' internal legislation and the collective bargaining systems in those Member States where wage is solely decided by collective bargaining?**

- **fair minimum wage;**

Millions of jobs have been created in the EU over the last few years. However, we are still facing challenges of inequality and in-work poverty. The President-elect has made it clear: every worker in the EU should have a fair minimum wage. I will endeavour to ensure that work pays and provides a decent living for the worker in the light of national economic and social conditions.

Moreover, building on the European Pillar of Social Rights, the proposal would call for adequate minimum wages set in a transparent and predictable way. Such an EU initiative on minimum wages would not only protect workers across Europe but could also lead to a better coordination of EU policies, allowing Member States to tackle common challenges in a more effective way, with a view to pursuing upward economic and social convergence. The initiative could encompass common principles for Member States for minimum wage setting, common indicators to assess their policies as a way to support convergence while fully respecting Member States' and social partners' competences, as well as national traditions of wage bargaining. Therefore, it is important to consult all relevant stakeholders, taking into account the timeline indicated in the Political Guidelines presented by the President-elect.

Fair minimum wages can indeed be set through collective agreements or legal provisions, depending on each country's traditions. Like the President-elect, I am also a firm believer in the value of social dialogue between employers and unions, the people who know their sector and their region best.

- **European Child Guarantee;**

I fully share the President-elect's commitment to create a European Child Guarantee. In line with the European Pillar of Social Rights, all children have the right to protection from poverty, and disadvantaged children have the right to specific measures enhancing equal opportunities. Therefore, the Child Guarantee should add value to existing actions at national and EU level to ensure that every child in need has access to basic services, such as healthcare and education. I will ensure that we carefully consider the findings of the ongoing Preparatory Action as requested by the European Parliament with a view to identifying the most suitable course of action and the tools needed for its implementation.

The Commission can support the Member States in improving access to those basic services, through targeted policy guidance and financial assistance, notably through the European Structural and Investment Funds. Let me recall that already during the current programming period, our funds have been supporting children in need. For the future, it is vital that we make the most of the potential of the future European Social Fund+, duly taking into account the European Parliament's requests in that respect.

Often, to improve the situation of children, we need to improve the situation of their families. Children benefit from investments intended to promote equality between men and women in all areas, including access to employment, career progression, reconciliation of work and private life and the promotion of equal pay for equal work.

- **Youth Guarantee**

Like the President-elect, I have been a strong supporter of the Youth Guarantee from the very first days when it was launched, as it has triggered important structural reforms. Therefore, I intend to reinforce our collective commitment towards young people that the European Parliament and the European political leaders confirmed in principle 4 of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Six years ago, we adopted the Youth Guarantee to respond to a severe crisis. Since then it has helped 3.5 million young people per year towards better prospects for their future.

Today, EU youth unemployment has fallen to the lowest level ever on record. However, there are great differences between and within Member States. Youth unemployment is still far too high in some countries. There, youth unemployment is a structural problem that requires continued attention. Also, skills requirements in the labour market are changing rapidly. Transitions from school to jobs are taking longer, and many young people start their career in temporary and atypical contracts. They often lack full social protection coverage during their early career. Unfortunately, the Youth Guarantee does not yet reach all young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs).

We need to be more ambitious in tackling these problems and make sure that the Youth Guarantee adjusts to the evolving needs of young people. I believe we should look at the age group we support and how to improve the quality of Youth Guarantee offers. We could also look at ways to strengthen partnerships between all relevant stakeholders, equip young people with the right skills (digital and green), promote more integrated services to young people, and ensure better career guidance.

This ambition needs appropriate financial support at national and European level, through the future European Social Fund+. We need to boost our efforts to ensure that no young person is left behind.



**5. What are the specific legislative and non-legislative initiatives which you intend to propose in the area you are responsible for and in particular to:**

**- improve worker's health and safety and to facilitate the reinsertion of those workers recovering, in particular in relation to harmful substances, stress and work-related musculoskeletal disorders and chronic diseases including cancer;**

I intend to be ambitious in ensuring a high level of protection of safety and health at work and by looking into possible ways forward for Occupational Safety and Health beyond the current strategic framework ending in 2020. We need to signal clearly that the Union stands ready to ensure high standards across all workplaces, including towards social partners, labour inspectorates and occupational safety and health authorities. In particular it will be very important to tackle fatal accidents to send a strong signal. We need to explore carefully the policy tools to address key risks such as cancer, stress, mental health and musculo-skeletal disorders. I will work together with the social partners and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work in order to develop a genuine prevention culture among employers and workers regarding work-related stress, musculo-skeletal disorders and chronic diseases.

I am also in favour of continuing our work on updating the Carcinogens Directive and update limit values for substances that affect millions of workers across Europe; this is even more relevant in the context of our transforming economy.

Finally, ensuring the smooth return to work after all kind of illnesses is crucial, not only for the individuals themselves and for their families but for companies and society at large. This requires a coordinated approach involving employment, social and health services at national level in close cooperation with social partners. We should make use of the European Social Fund to help reintegrating people into active working life as quickly as possible.

**- ensure that Member States have sufficient flexibility in defining target groups for access to social housing;**

I am convinced that housing plays a crucial role in enhancing social inclusion and cohesion. Investment in sustainable housing will be at the core of the green transition. All those who lack sufficient resources should receive social and housing assistance, as laid down in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The Charter is very clear: in order to combat social exclusion and poverty, the Union recognises and respects the right to social and housing assistance so as to ensure a decent existence for all those who lack sufficient resources, in accordance with the rules laid down by Union law and national laws and practices. Principle 19 of the Pillar of Social Rights also states that access to social housing and housing assistance should be provided to those in need. I stand behind these fundamental principles. I believe that the housing situation in the Member States should continue to be monitored in the European Semester and that, on the basis of the assessment of the Social Scoreboard, where relevant, country-specific recommendations should be carefully tailor-made on specific conditions existing in the different Member States.

I am keen to discuss with the European Parliament on the way forward for EU support to Member States, within the limits of Union competences and in line with the principle of subsidiarity.

**- ensure that the announced European Gender Strategy will go beyond actions to promote gender equality in employment so as to include a diversity and inclusion strategy that deems fit for the 21st century, which includes actions to close the gender pay gap, career and pension gaps and prevent discrimination for all;**

As already stated, I will endeavour to implement gender-mainstreaming in all policy areas falling under my competence. I offer my full support to my fellow Commissioner-designate for Equality, Helena Dalli and her mission to deliver an ambitious, comprehensive and future-oriented gender equality strategy. We need a strategy focused on the structural and systemic inequality that women and girls still face, including gender employment gaps, pay and pension gaps. The social partners play an essential role in all these matters, and must be involved thoroughly, during all policy cycles. Beyond gender equality, it is clear that the wider equality and diversity agenda, namely with regard to access to the labour market and in the workplace, need to be tackled. As President-elect von der Leyen has said in her Political Guidelines, we need equality for all and equality in all of its senses. I will ensure that my services assist Commissioner-designate Dalli and her Task Force in all areas that fall under my portfolio.

Specifically, on principle 9 of the European Pillar of Social Rights concerning work-life balance, I will strongly support Commissioner-designate Dalli in ensuring the timely transposition of the newly adopted Work-Life Balance Directive. In-depth work is already being carried out in cooperation with Member States, to ensure accurate data collection on family-related leaves.

The adequacy, affordability and quality of formal care services, including childcare, can significantly affect the choice of women to remain or drop out of the labour market. Over 10% of women are inactive due to caring responsibilities. This choice has a strong impact on employment, pay and pension gaps. My services are addressing this, together with the Member States, both on the policy front and also on the funding side with the help of the European Social Fund. I will strive to push forward this work.

I also intend to pay particular attention to long-term care policies. Many women are engaged in this area, doing unpaid informal work. Boosting the provision of long-term care services will give the possibility to women who currently cannot work due to their care responsibilities to participate in the labour market.

We should not forget that women are also overrepresented in work of precarious nature: they are the vast majority of part-time workers and often opt for variable hours and temporary contracts. This is another factor that significantly reinforces gender gaps. In this regard, I will ensure that all the legal instruments at the disposal of the Member States are properly implemented: the Recommendation on Access to Social Protection, the Directives on Part-Time and Fixed-Term Work, and the Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions.

Finally, the European Semester will remain one of the strongest tools to monitor the gender gaps in terms of employment, pay and pension. Moreover, the implementation of measures towards achieving gender equality will feature prominently through our funding instruments, particularly the ESF+.

**- elaborate a solution in the field of social security coordination that takes into account the different social systems in the Member States;**

The outgoing Commission proposed at the end of 2016 to revise the rules on social security coordination, to ensure that they are more fair, clear and easier to enforce. I am convinced that this revision is needed to address new challenges and opportunities in the fields of long-term care, unemployment benefits, family benefits and the rules on applicable legislation. In March 2019, co-legislators reached a balanced provisional agreement for social security coordination. The fact that it could not be adopted before the European Parliament recess due to lack of qualified majority in Council does not mean that the problems are gone. On the contrary, I believe it is necessary to urgently resume work with a view to achieving better social security coordination rules for those who live and work across borders.

The outgoing Commission is now working with the Council and the new European Parliament to find a final agreement as soon as possible. There is urgency in this matter and many reasons for it. I hope for a rapid and ambitious agreement, which will update and safeguard the rights of people moving to another EU country and facilitate the cooperation between national authorities to prevent abuse and fraud. I remain convinced that we are close to the final agreement.

**- combat fraud and wage-dumping for precarious workers like mobile workers, seasonal workers, digital platform workers and to make digital platforms recognize their workers as employees and not as self-employed, with the labour and social protection rights stemming from the status of workers?**

Already in my former role as Minister for Labour, Employment and the Social and Solidarity Economy, I have strongly supported the European Pillar of Social Rights and all the initiatives of the outgoing Commission applying those principles in a number of different areas. As a Commissioner, I will be committed to continue that work, on the one hand ensuring thorough implementation of the EU legislation adopted over the past years and, on the other hand, proposing new initiatives where needed. The situation of workers in precarious forms of employment has to be addressed in line with the principles set out in the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Mobile workers will soon benefit from the new rules ensuring that posted workers are paid on the same terms as local workers in every Member State. The European Labour Authority (ELA) has been established to strengthen the provision of information and cooperation between Member States, including in the fight against undeclared work. As a Commissioner, I will pay close attention to the transposition and implementation of the revised Posting of Workers Directive and the thorough application of the 2014 Enforcement Directive. I will also provide the necessary impetus to the European Labour Authority to ensure that it maintains a high level of ambition as regards, amongst others, the coordination and support of joint inspections and the exchange of relevant information between the Member States.

The situation of vulnerable workers, such as some seasonal workers, on-demand workers or platform workers needs to be closely monitored. Dignified, transparent and predictable working conditions are essential to our economic model. First of all, I am going to ensure that existing EU labour law is properly enforced for the protection of those workers. The directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions, which is a major step forward towards modernising workers' rights to protect them in the new world of work, will be transposed during my mandate, and I will ensure that the Commission works closely with Member States

in preparing effective national legislation to put it into effect. It not only updates and extends the written information that all workers – including platform, casual and domestic – must receive at the start. It also creates new rights to protect those in the most precarious and vulnerable situations such as zero hours or on-demand workers. It has a powerful enforcement chapter to make sure these rights do not exist just on paper.

Specifically on platform work, this is a new and dynamically developing business model, which is affecting work patterns and shaping the future of work. Platforms provide new flexibility for both businesses and workers, creating opportunities for many to enter the labour market or gain additional income. At the same time, they also challenge the existing legal employment, social frameworks as well as the pattern of social dialogue. Labour standards and access to social protection have to be guaranteed to all categories of workers. For many people working through platforms, there is growing uncertainty on a number of issues, including their employment status, working conditions, access to social protection, and access to representation and collective bargaining. I think this deserves closer attention and I will follow up to the President-elect commitment to explore ways to improve the labour conditions of platform workers, looking to positive developments taking place elsewhere in the world.

Finally, I am a strong supporter of the Council Recommendation on Access to Social Protection. At the heart of the Recommendation lies the principle that all workers and the self-employed should have access to adequate social protection. As Commissioner, I will relentlessly recall this principle, and I will mobilise all the tools at my disposal to make it a reality across Europe. For me, the future of work should not be synonymous with precariousness. Social protection systems will therefore have to evolve.

**6. The future of work is a topic that will feature prominently over the next five years. There are and will be changes and challenges in the midterm labour market such as digitalisation, automatisisation, robotisation, and changes and challenges linked to the fight against climate change. On the one hand, this will lead to more and better jobs, for which we must have different and better workers. Europe needs smart legislation to harness the power of technology and deliver green jobs while integrating vulnerable workers in the workforce. On the other hand, digitalisation will lead to the diminution of certain jobs.**

**How do you look at this panorama and, especially, do you foresee the possibility to build at the European level a strong and consistent mid-term strategy that provides the European Union and the European citizens with the appropriate tools to face those challenges? In particular, how will you promote the use of vocational training systems in all the Member States in order to meet these challenges, and what will you do to secure, sustain and promote rural careers in the face of the current changes and challenges and ensure that we have the right skills to safeguard and value our rural communities, making them sustainable and inclusive places for people to live and work?**

Shaping the future of work is our shared responsibility as policy-makers. We must turn challenges into opportunities. Digitalisation and the transition to a carbon neutral economy have the potential to create jobs and lead to much-needed innovation, investment, and economic prosperity. We need to make sure that all Europeans and all European regions can benefit from these new opportunities. Many jobs will change significantly. Many new jobs will be created but will require new skills, some of them we cannot even know today. The digital age is here and is already transforming the way we work. The European Foundation for

the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions can provide valuable insight to inform our actions.

### **EU approach to the future of work**

The European Pillar of Social Rights provides a steady compass to address the challenges of the new world of work, which are also addressed through the European Semester. To tackle these challenges, I will work with my colleagues responsible for other portfolios on a wide range of topics within and beyond the remit of employment and social policies. We will engage with national and local policy makers, as well as civil society. I especially count on the European Parliament, as well as on social partners to contribute to the development and delivery of European responses to the future of work.

In my view, such an approach should first of all focus on ensuring better job quality. People working in the EU deserve good working conditions, including decent wages and we should look at ways to extend access to training and social protection to all – including people working on digital platforms.

European economic and social governance should be strengthened, notably through the integration of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in the European Semester.

We need to support regions and sectors disproportionately faced with the disruptive impact of changes – and here we would be able to draw on a wide array of EU funds and programmes (such as InvestEU, European Social Fund+, Horizon Europe, Digital Europe, European Globalisation Adjustment Fund) including the newly announced Just Transition Fund. Public employment services will have a very important role in this process.

In the new world of work people will need new skills. I will endeavour to scale up training and education efforts to address the need for re- and up-skilling, as well as focus on the quality of education and training based on the ‘learning to learn throughout the life course’ approach.

New business models challenge the principles of our tax and employment contribution systems. We should explore ways to make those systems sustainable and fit for the digital era, and address income inequality.

Social partners have always played a defining role in the EU’s social model. Their role is especially important now that we are going through such significant industrial transitions. Therefore, it is important to strengthen social dialogue to help workers in different sectors, notably in relation to the digital economy.

New technologies promise great opportunities but bring also new risks. We need to work towards a more human-centric technology by addressing socio-economic and ethical concerns related to the rise of artificial intelligence also in our labour markets and inside the workplace, and at the same time making sure that people have the necessary skills to work in an increasingly digitised environment.

Many of the new challenges need global responses. Therefore, I will ensure that issues such as working conditions, social protection, and promotion of labour standards are high on the agenda of international and multilateral forums, such as ILO, G7, and G20. The Union should

continue to promote decent work and internationally recognised labour standards among our trade partners and to enforce resolutely existing agreements.

### **Role of Vocational Education and Training**

Vocational education and training has an important role to master the challenges of the new world of work and in the green transition. In Europe, half of young people get their qualifications through vocational education and training. As recommended by the European Parliament, ERASMUS+ should include apprentices more widely. Adults need to re-enter training programmes to update their skills on a continuous basis. Within the renewed skills agenda vocational education and training should have a key role, as it offers opportunities for both economic and social integration, support smart and sustainable development and foster democratic citizenship and European values. I firmly believe that modern, inclusive and dynamic vocational education and training systems would be a pre-requisite for delivering on the ambitious agenda of our President-elect for an Economy that works for all, for a Green deal, and for a Europe fit for a Digital Age. The work of our agencies: the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) and beyond EU borders, in particular the enlargement and neighbourhood countries, the European Training Foundation (ETF) will continue to be central to our policy delivery.

### **Promoting rural careers**

Digital technologies provide new ways to reduce the urban-rural divide. For people living in rural areas, online services and labour opportunities can reduce the risk of deprivation from certain services. However, a prerequisite for this is access to basic social infrastructure (i.e. education and health), and to good broadband. We already have some good initiatives to build on: for example, the EU Action for Smart Villages strives to ensure that rural areas have access to digital technologies and innovation to support quality of life, a higher standard of living, public services and better use of resources. Training and upskilling will also become central in a strategy to support rural careers in the digital age. In the framework of the updated Skills Agenda for Europe, I will explore how individual learning accounts can ensure access to skills for all, including people living in rural areas.

**7. Paradoxically, the most economically disadvantaged regions are also experiencing the greatest difficulties in spending (absorbing) the EGF and the ESF funds. What will be your strategy to improve the absorption, and prevent misuse, of EU funds, and how will you encourage Member States to gear resources into less developed regions and to improve their capacities to develop projects related to these funds?**

Over 57% of the European Social Fund (ESF) resources (EUR 50.6 billion) are concentrated in less developed regions to support investments in human capital. My ambition, if confirmed as a Commissioner, is to ensure that these regions have the full capacity to spend the funding attributed to them, whilst preventing any abuse and fraud.

Overall, the implementation of the European Social Fund and the Youth Employment Initiative is progressing well, with a project selection rate of almost 77% of the total funding (EU and national) and an expenditure declaration rate of 33.5%. The ESF project selection rate is at a similar level for all categories of regions. Whilst economically disadvantaged regions experience to some extent more pronounced absorption challenges, the differences depend to a considerable degree on the individual Member State. The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, as a reactive crisis instrument, does not have an annual budget to absorb,

and there is no evidence that less developed regions have greater difficulties in having recourse to it.

The main reasons for protracted implementation and absorption include administrative capacity problems, a lack of valid projects and suspension of payments due to serious management and control deficiencies. I intend to continue to monitor the situation very closely, including via the eight task forces for better implementation, set up by the Commission in Member States at risk of de-commitment. I am also committed to strive for a better use of Technical Assistance to improve the capacity of Member State structures, in order to ensure that efficient procedures for managing and controlling are in place and that every staff member has the right skills.

In the context of the inter-institutional negotiations on the cohesion funds, I will also work hard to ensure that the necessary amendments towards a higher absorption rate will be realised, without compromising on the need to prevent fraud and abuse. Also for the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund the Commission proposed to facilitate the mobilisation of funding, notably by broadening its scope to any type of significant restructuring event and by lowering the eligibility threshold from 500 to 250 dismissed workers.