

Conclusion



We do not have to be passive onlookers: by outlining and considering the various possible scenarios we can exert (some) control over our future."

The Covid-19 pandemic and the 'polycrisis' it has provoked in Europe and the world are leading us into a period of uncertainty and transformation in almost all areas of economic, social and cultural life. New ways of living and working may contribute to more cooperation and solidarity or, on the contrary, to attitudes of mistrust and conflict. New ways of consuming and moving may lead to more sustainable development or, on the contrary, to more waste and pollution. Technologies may provide us with solutions in the management of the pandemic and in the way we experience it or, on the contrary, fail in their promises and create a dystopian future of control and surveillance. Stimulus packages could accelerate the climate transition or, on the contrary, slow it down by unconditionally rescuing whole swathes of some of the most polluting industries. In this plethora of ambivalent scenarios, foresight methodology offers tools that can inform political decision- and policymaking to help it regain some control over our collective future.

In particular, the impact of this crisis on the foundations of the European Union is likely to be profound. Some of the pillars of the European project have already been deeply affected: economic governance (as regards the Stability and Growth Pact, competition rules within the single market, and the EU budget), borders (Schengen and free movement), and of course the European economy, which is at the heart of the turmoil, when we take into consideration the already historic recession of 2020, rising unemployment, the transformation of labour markets and the insecurity of many workers. In the face of so much uncertainty, the role of political, economic and social actors will be decisive in the coming years. In many areas, there will be choices to be made between a Europe that fragments or strengthens, a Europe guided by fear or daring, a Europe of mutualisation and solidarity or a Europe of every man for himself. What will Europe be like in 2040? Is it going to be divided into North and South, East and West, frugal and lax, dogmatic and pragmatic, ambitious and sceptical – or will it have managed to use the crisis to revisit its *raison d'être* in the light of its shared destiny?

It appears that the pandemic has further revealed pre-existing social inequalities, but in the world of work in a very paradoxical way. On the one hand, it has made it possible to see, in the words of Gough, who are the 'key workers' of the economy and, more broadly, of our society: workers who are often at the bottom of the wage scale, disregarded and even looked down on. In the spring of 2020, a kind of popular and spontaneous consensus of support formed around these workers out of a sense of gratitude to them. One of the social challenges for the future will be to see how this informal consensus can be transformed into a structural programme for revaluing 'human' professions whose value has been underestimated for too long. In several European capitals, demands have been made for not only wage increases but also significant improvements in working conditions and greater social recognition. The future role of social and trade union organisations is to ensure that these demands are not abandoned and, in particular, to take them forward and negotiate them in tripartite and bipartite social dialogue bodies.

On the other hand, it must be noted that the new forms of work that have emerged from the crisis have created new vulnerabilities and divisions which will have to be addressed. Telework is the most evident example, revealing cleavages between those who have a (spacious) home office, state-of-the-art computer equipment with access to fast communication networks, or even a terrace and garden, and those forced to telework in uncomfortable conditions, sitting in the dining room with an obsolete computer while taking care of kids, or needing to share the computer due to distant education requirements. But there is also a divide between those whose profession allows these new forms of work, and those for whom teleworking is not practicable, including the 'human' professions listed above. These are also often 'the poor, the young and the women', as pointed out by the IMF. In the face of these new rifts, here too collective actors and organisations will have a central role to play in creating new alliances and dynamics to avoid the deepening of inequalities and the risk of social polarisation. As this foresight analysis shows, we do not have to be passive onlookers: by outlining and considering the various possible scenarios we can exert (some) control over our future.