

## Rethinking labour to face climate urgency

“Degrowth, climate urgency and labour transformation” is an article written by Luis González Reyes, taken from the collaborative book “Mas allá del colonialismo verde : justicia global y geopolítica de las transiciones ecosociales”, published in 2023 by CLASCO. Considering previous findings from economics, social and environmental science, the author shows how labour and production modes should evolve to be able to face climate urgency. Three key points in it have caught the attention of “La Fabrique Écologique”.

**#1** According to the author, an economic model based on infinite growth is not viable, because it assumes an increasing consumption of limited resources. More and more articles show that environmental transition shall go hand in hand with a reduction in our energy and resources consumption, thus leading to a degrowth in production. The climate urgency demands that we switch from fossil energies toward a sounder energy mix, based notably on rare-earth elements. However, these new energy sources have a limited storage capacity, which means that they should be deployed and used locally to be the most impactful.

**#2** Some economic sectors based on exploiting ecosystems, such as transportation and finance, should follow an overall degrowth trajectory, while others who aim at preserving them should be supported. With less transport using non-renewable resources, every area should therefore diversify its activities and locally produce enough goods and services to sustain its own population, in order to reduce its dependency on imports. For currently export-based areas and countries, these onshoring measures should also come with wealth transfer policies, so as not to penalize their economy.

**#3** Such changes would require reducing working hours, according to the author, and thus lead to a decline in production. In Spain, for instance, he shows that a decrease in working hours and production, achieved by switching to a 32 or 30-hour week, would not lead to a decrease in job numbers. For these changes to be viable, it is also necessary to lower people’s dependency on their salary to meet their needs. An overall de-commodification process should be pursued, with a maximum of goods and services produced through cooperative or self-management structures, which allow both to lower costs and escape market pressures.

### France and working hours reduction

In France, the environmental benefits of a working hours reduction have been outlined since the seventies. Labour unions such as CGT and Solidaires have been advocating its social benefits, and have long demanded to switch to a 32-hour week. And yet, working hours reduction is no longer on the agenda. An experiment with a 4-day week in civil service started in spring 2024, sure. But it is merely a contraction of the working week and not a true reduction of the overall working time. The merits and drawbacks of reducing working hours should deserve a renewed consideration.

### Pauline Bureau’s opinion, vice-chair at LFE

*Several recent scientific articles have underlined the benefits of working hours reduction. But to better tackle this topic, it would also require a significant investment to popularize it, and a debate involving opposite arguments in order to strengthen its case.*