

Memorandum

Europe needs social benchmarks

In three workshops held in Sofia, Rome, and Stockholm, and in the final conference in Vienna, the partners in the „well-being@work“ project looked into the issue of whether or not the existing instruments used to measure job satisfaction and job quality in Europe are suited to calculate social benchmarks that seem indispensable for the success of a post-Lisbon strategy of the European Union.

The partners in this project unanimously agreed that whereas, in the countries participating in this project, institutional frameworks for assessing accident risks and safety hazards at the workplace are in fact in place and comparable, issues of health risks are in this context still strongly focused on physical threats. There are no comparable Europe-wide standards and measuring methods in order to compare the impact of such risks on job quality.

In addition, the partners in this project discussed existing statistics and studies as to whether or not they could be used for a continuous, flexible, annual measurement of job quality in the member countries of the European Union. The result is not satisfactory. The only comparable studies are those of the Dublin Foundation, and they are conducted only at large intervals. Many individual studies carried out in EU member countries are not comparable, neither in terms of the issue investigated, nor in terms of the methodology employed.

Among the individual studies conducted at various institutions in Europe, only few rely on longer time series, e.g., the Austrian Work Climate Index which is representative with regard to all employed persons in Austria. Many other individual studies lack in either representativeness or continuity of conduct so that changes in the measured parameters can be detected only to a limited extent. Hence, the partners recognize the lack of an instrument that, on the European level, presents a continuous and coherent picture of the development of job quality.

The partners in this project unanimously agree that in the light of the present economic crisis it is now all the more important to determine social benchmarks. In view to the fact that the Lisbon Strategy has largely failed to create safe and well-paid jobs throughout Europe, a reorientation of the European Union's economic and social policies will be indispensable. In order to continuously monitor and follow up on this process, it will be necessary to establish benchmarks on the quality of work, that can be updated annually and be used for all EU member countries.

When measuring job quality, the partners in this project consider it important to accommodate such factors as security of employment, job satisfaction, opportunities for employees to participate and have a say at their workplaces, the elimination of discriminatory practices at the workplace, opportunities for career advancement, physical and mental health, and work-life balance.

The partners in this project propose to push on with and further the development of such benchmarks and, in doing so, to make use of the experience obtained in ongoing projects such as the Austrian Work Climate Index. They consider it indispensable that, when developing such standards, the interests of employees in Europe be taken into account right from the outset.

The partners in this project are firmly convinced that the severe economic crisis can be overcome only if in Europe, and in the world in general, a new form of economic conduct is adopted and if the changes in business and working life are continuously monitored, measured, and discussed with the help of and based on suitable instruments. Without designing social benchmarks for Europe it will not be possible to develop and implement an effective and reasonable post-Lisbon strategy of the European Union.

Chamber of Labour Upper Austria, AKOÖ, Austria

Institute for Social and Trade Union Research, ISTUR, Bulgaria

Economic and Social Research Institute, IRES, Italy

Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees, TCO, Sweden

Institute Labour and Economy, IAW, Bremen, Germany

Central Mining Institute, GIG, Poland

Austrian Trade Union Federation, ÖGB, Austria

University of Ljubljana, Institute of Social Sciences, Slovenia

Šiauliai University, Social Sciences Faculty, Lithuania