



ROADS TO RIGHT-WING POPULISM – AND BACK
The SIREN Policy Recommendations Report

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FOREWORD

The aim of the SIREN project is to analyse subjective perceptions of and individual reactions to recent socio-economic change and, in particular, changes in working life. The research also aims to establish how experiences in working life influence political orientations and to what extent the threat of social decline and precarious living conditions contribute to the rise of right-wing populism in many European countries.

The objective of this report is to present the policy implications of the research. These were developed in two steps: First, the policy areas to which a contribution can be made on the basis of the research findings were selected. These are work organisation and working conditions, insecurity and inequality, older workers, migration and political representation. Second, the SIREN partners discussed policy implications in the light of both the policy context and other related research.

Because of the subject matter of the research, which relates to a broad range of policy areas, it is difficult to put forward policy recommendations in the narrow sense of the term. In particular, it is beyond the scope of this project to develop measures for the different arenas and actors of policy making within European multi-level governance. Rather, in the light of the research findings, fundamental policy problems are addressed and implications for policy making are discussed. The recommendations given are necessarily tentative.

The report draws on the contribution of the SIREN consortium partners and on the input made by a large number of participants in workshops held in several countries during recent months. While many valuable arguments and detailed information was provided by the SIREN partners and the workshop participants, the responsibility for the report remains with the authors.

Vienna, May 2004

1. *WORK ORGANISATION AND WORKING CONDITIONS*

1.1. *The empirical findings of the SIREN project*

Work organisation and working conditions were important issues in the empirical investigations within the SIREN project because it turned out that the workplace level plays a crucial role in perceptions of socio-economic change. Work organisation in this context relates to the design of tasks, to cooperation and control as well as to working-time arrangements and contractual forms of employment. Working conditions mainly include the workload, demands for flexibility, including mobility and temporal availability, and cover both physical and psychological strains.

The analysis of the interviews clearly showed that poor working conditions and health and safety problems have not been overcome in modern workplaces. Often, blue-collar workers reported that work has become more repetitious with reduced cycle times. Many interviewees pointed to increased workloads and pressures at work. The interpretation revealed that in the past workers had resigned themselves to unpleasant and even damaging working conditions because they were at least able to reach an acceptable living standard and integration into society. Now, for some, the much more precarious situation questions this integration and consequently makes the disadvantageous working conditions much harder to accept.

The qualitative findings also showed that new forms of work organisation have ambiguous consequences for workers. On the one hand there is the trend to give employees more influence and responsibility; on the other hand one finds increased management control and Taylorised work. Some interviewees suggest that the acquisition of greater influence and acceptance of responsibility in work is positive, as they experience this as more satisfying. Others perceive it as a form of personal pressure. The reactions will often depend on the way the changes are introduced, and on the extent to which employees are integrated into processes of change.

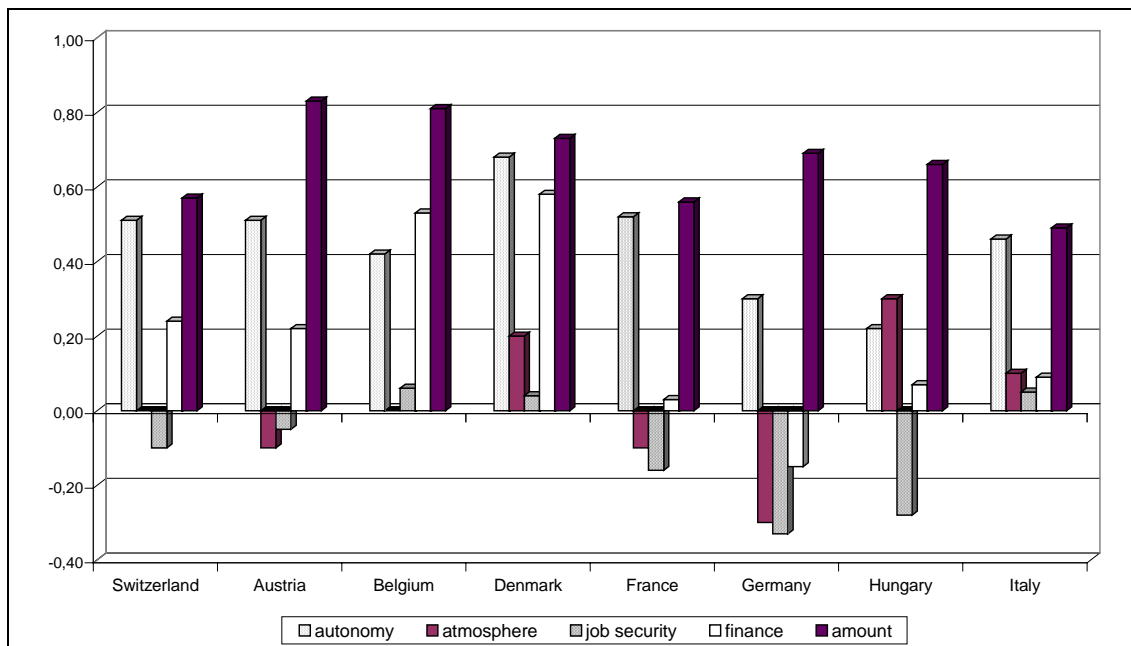
In the private sector, but even more so in the public services, restructuring of companies and organisational change at workplace level have become continuous features of working life. One consequence of restructuring that was felt by many interviewees is the devaluation of qualifications and work-related values. Sometimes, accumulated experience and appropriated skills are no longer recognised or appreciated. Changes in work organisation as well as new rules aimed at increased productivity, efficiency and flexibility can negatively impact on the quality levels employees can reach. Such developments are extremely irritating for many workers because they may violate work-related values or even threaten occupational identities.

Many interviewees – blue-collar and white-collar workers and self-employed people – have experienced increased pressure of work – usually described as an almost constant rise since the early 1990s. Interviewees say they are afraid they cannot keep up with the

pace. Older employees in particular express this feeling but we also find it among younger people. This not only contributes to a negative evaluation of current working conditions but also enhances feelings of insecurity.

The quantitative results are consistent with the qualitative findings: the subjective perceptions of interviewed workers in all countries indicate an increase in the amount of work as well as an increase in job autonomy. Perceived job security has decreased in five out of eight countries. The work climate has also deteriorated on average: only three countries have seen an improvement in social atmosphere.

Graph 1: Overview of five work-related changes in eight European countries



Source: Yves De Weerd, Hans De Witte, Patrizia Catellani, Patrizia Milesi, Turning right? Socio-economic change and the receptiveness of European workers to the extreme right: Report on the survey Analysis and Results. Deliverable 4 for the project SIREN (2004).

Regarding the relation between changes in work and political orientation, no simple relation emerged from the survey data: no clear correlation could be found between negative changes and attraction to right-wing populism. Interestingly, affinity to the extreme right could be found both among those who report negative changes and those who report positive ones. The path analysis carried out within the evaluation of the quantitative data of the SIREN project has shown two different psychological routes to extreme right-wing affinity:

The first one, called the “winners” route, denotes categories of people who perceive a positive change in their job conditions. According to this model path they develop a strong identification with the organisation and believe that some social groups should dominate over others. This, in turn, entails chauvinism, prejudice towards immigrants and, ultimately, an affinity towards right-wing extremism. The conviction that the

individual should successfully face up to any change and that people who may be an obstacle in this process should be pushed aside seems to prevail in this first psychological model route. According to the analyses, the categories of people who are more inclined to follow this first route are young people with a secondary level of education working in sectors such as commerce, professional services and consultancy. These people are likely to be either self-employed or part of small or medium-size organisations with which it may be rather easy to develop a strong identification; they are also likely to fully share the typical organisational goal of remaining competitive and defeating as many competitors as possible. This type is well illustrated by cases from the qualitative research in which promotion and higher income coincide with high workloads and stress.

The second route to right-wing extremism, named the “losers” pathway, was typically represented by people who have perceived negative change in their job conditions and, in addition, lack meaningful identification in their work context. These people are likely to develop strong feelings of injustice and are convinced that people like them are not sufficiently rewarded for the work they do. This may foster a displaced aggressiveness reaction, such as prejudice against immigrants, and authoritarian attitudes. These individuals are deeply aware of the discomfort caused by negative changes at work but they also perceive that they are not competent or strong enough to cope with it. The outcome is attraction towards the extreme right, including a very likely attraction towards a strong leader, someone to whom individuals may delegate the solution of their own problems. The categories of people more likely to follow this route are middle-aged blue-collar workers with secondary level of education, who are working in the industry or social-service sectors. They are very likely to work in large organisations, with which it may be rather difficult to identify.

1.2. The policy environment

Although work organisation is not an easy issue to tackle for policy makers at the level of national governments or the European Union, during the 1990s the salience of the issue for a number of policy areas was recognised. It was acknowledged that, in order to reach both economic and social goals, change is needed in the way work is organised. The most prominent goals are competitiveness, quality of work and social inclusion. This was also expressed in Pillar Three of the European Employment Strategy: adaptability is covered in terms of work organisation, working patterns and contracts and the adaptability of regulatory and training systems; the pillar recognised that there must be a balance between the need of businesses for flexibility and the needs of employees for security and employability.

The European Commission’s Green Book “Partnership for a new organisation of work” (1997) suggested the implementation of new forms of work organisation to enhance competitiveness and to make increased use of human potentials while at the same time improving working conditions. In the debate, these new forms of work organisation were often referred to as the “high road” to innovation and competitiveness. The

cornerstones of such a strategy are “partnership” and participation, team working and flexible forms of organisation, as well as utilisation of knowledge for continuous improvement (Totterdill 2002).

In the meantime, it has become quite obvious that the expectations regarding both the dissemination and the effects of a “high road” work organisation have not been fulfilled. Regarding dissemination, recent research shows that only a minority of European companies have implemented new forms of work organisation. Some 10% of companies surveyed in a study commissioned by the European Commission can be seen as “system users” of high-road strategies, applying an integrated approach to work design, co-ordination and human resource management (Business Decisions Limited 2002). Research on the spread of team working within the European Foundation’s EPOC project revealed that less than 4% of European businesses have implemented team working as a dominant organisational principle (Benders et al. 2000). Furthermore, the use of new forms of work organisation seems to be restricted to particular groups of employees, giving workers with lower status or in non-standard employment less opportunity for participation (Helfen/Krüger 2002, Goudswaard/de Nanteuil 2000). In a report for the European Commission based on a Eurobarometer survey Gallie and Paugam state that “less than a third of employees in the European Union were in jobs where tasks were of high quality on measures of variety, opportunities for self-development and task control” (Gallie/Paugam 2002:iv). Other research indicates that most manufacturing companies only introduced new forms of work organisation when confronted with problems of labour recruitment and retention. With growing unemployment semi-autonomous working groups were discontinued and highly standardised forms of work introduced again (Springer 1998).

As a consequence, detrimental working conditions such as repetitious, monotonous work, machine-paced work, low control over one’s work, etc. are still quite widespread or even on the increase (European Foundation 2003). The Eurobarometer study quoted above also concludes that “there was an overall decline in the quality of work tasks for employees between 1996 and 2001” (Gallie/Paugam 2002:iv). The negative impact on the affected workers, in our view, is exacerbated by the popular image of work in the knowledge society because it implies a lack of recognition of the problems and a false perception of “normal” work, which may aggravate relative deprivation.

Not only were expectations placed on new forms of work organisation not met in terms of its dissemination. On top of this, high-road strategies do not necessarily lead to win-win situations with both an improvement in the competitiveness of the company and the quality of work for the workers. Most research points to ambiguous consequences regarding the quality of work. Increased opportunities for participation and self-organisation are contrasted with increased workload and stress and problems regarding the work-life balance. In new forms of work organisation it is much more difficult to find ways to limit workloads. What is more, the demands of “flexibility” often mean flexibility *of* workers, clearly limiting the flexibility *for* workers. Overall, the perseverance of “old” forms of work organisation and the ambiguity of high-road

strategies lead to increasing levels of stress and psychological strain that is shown in representative surveys on working conditions (Merllié/Paoli 2000).

These findings, as well as those from the SIREN project, show that competitive pressures and the need for companies to be responsive to market requirements and customers' needs do not by themselves lead to high-road strategies and to higher quality of work. Rather, differing reactions or company strategies can be observed.

“One obvious point that too often gets neglected is that competitive success based on quality and up-skilling is only one of a number of strategies available to organisations. Others include seeking protected or monopoly markets, growth through take-over and joint venture, shifting operations overseas, cost cutting and the new forms of Taylorism . . .” (Sisson 2000:24)

This means that policy initiatives are needed to influence, first, the development work organisation takes and, second, the consequences of changes in work organisation on working conditions. However, only in a minority of member states, e.g. in Finland, Denmark, Sweden and Germany, are there several national programmes for the improvement of work organisation, while in many member states there are no such activities (Brödner/Latniak 2002).

At EU level, the “modernisation of work organisation” is one of the objectives of the European Social Funds, but experts argue that this objective is poorly understood by the member states and, as a consequence, is hardly taken into account at national and regional level (Totterdill 2002). The low level of activities at EU level can be explained with reference to a lack of capacity in this policy area (Ennals 2002). Furthermore, the discontinuation of EWON indicates that the issue is not given priority by the Commission. Only particular aspects of work organisation, such as working time or teleworking, are dealt with in working papers, proposals for directives or regulations.

The wider policy context seems rather conducive to aggravating the problems of work organisation and working conditions mentioned above. “Liberalisation” of markets, failure to fight mass unemployment and more “flexible” labour markets increase competition between companies and between workers, which, without effective regulation of workloads, translates into increased work pressures and a worsened work climate. As a consequence, solutions cannot only be found in the policy area of work organisation and the regulation of working conditions. Rather, fundamental economic policy needs to be taken into consideration.

1.3. Policy-oriented conclusions from the research findings

The findings from the SIREN project confirm some negative developments in working conditions that were established by specialised surveys. The analyses of the individual situation, of the subjective perceptions and of the meaning people attach to their working conditions revealed that the intensity of work and long working hours can mean a perceived threat to the viability of the job, to health and to social contacts. The interpretation of the qualitative data also showed that suffering at work, even if it does

not lead to overt job dissatisfaction, may entail feelings of injustice and aggression. We were able to understand how unpleasant and unhealthy working conditions may, under particular circumstances, nourish resentments against those who, in the media, are presented as illegitimately receiving income and care without contributing to society ('social scroungers', refugees, etc). In such a situation appeals to tolerance and political correctness are not only useless, they even exacerbate the problem. It is therefore important to acknowledge that often it is not xenophobia and racism but perceived lack of recognition, pains of work and feelings of powerlessness are at the core of the problem.

→ *What is needed are legitimate forms to express pains of work, public recognition of related problems and of course sincere efforts to improve working conditions.*

Negative consequences of detrimental working conditions are exacerbated by long working hours, the incidence of which seems to be on the rise: In the European Union more than 4 million people, or 16% of the workforce, now work more than 48 hours a week compared to 3.3 million (or 15%) at the beginning of the 1990s (European Commission 2003).

The debate on working hours is of course a difficult one: On the one hand stress and strain at work seem to make it necessary to reverse the tendency towards the prolongation of working hours and revive the long-term process of working time reduction. Although changing organisational structures and forms of employment make it more and more difficult to limit working hours, in particular by way of statutory regulation, research shows that working-hours regulation through legislation or multi-employer bargaining still impacts on societal working time standards and therefore is an appropriate means to limit and reduce working time (Lehndorff 2003). On the other hand, previous reductions of working hours have led to even more stress and strain through an intensification of work. In France the introduction of the 35-hour week and the increased flexibility have led to ambiguous results for workers, namely further intensification of work and a decrease in income. What is more, it often is not as much the number of hours worked but the subjective meaningfulness of work and the degree of time sovereignty, which is increasingly threatened by fragmentation of work and lack of control, that most concerns workers.

→ *Effective regulations of working time and workloads need to be developed that are sensitive to the diversity of employment relations, vocational identities and living situations. These regulations should consider the different needs of women and men.*

Apart from regulating working time, shaping working conditions and designing work organisation would need much more attention. The need might be comparable to the situation at the end of the 1960s, when workers started revolts against Taylorist work organisation. However, only few programmes or policy initiatives are currently available in the area of work organisation and improvement of working conditions (e.g. the Danish programme against repetitious work or the Finnish Workplace Development Programme).

→ *Workplace development programmes need to be generalised, with the required adaptations to different societal conditions throughout the European Union and policies aimed at improving the work-life balance have to be implemented.*

Programmes to support new forms of work organisation and to improve working conditions and the regulation of health and safety and of working time are necessary but not sufficient. It is obvious that the shaping of markets has a more or less direct impact on working conditions. The political decisions creating and regulating markets for goods and services need to be taken into consideration when dealing with the problem of the quality of work. This becomes most obvious with the current “liberalisation” and restructuring of public services. This giant “societal experiment” calls for evaluation, reflection and, if needed, policy reconsideration. Currently, however, hardly any data are available on the consequences of liberalisation and privatisation on employment and working conditions. Within the SIREN project it was only possible to investigate subjective perceptions of change and individual reactions in some sectors and countries.

Problems of governance in the area of work organisation and working conditions indicate that workers’ bargaining positions need to be improved in combination with the enhancement of public awareness. As the power position of the majority of individual workers is restricted by high levels of unemployment, and the bargaining power of collective labour threatened by increased capital mobility, it seems that, if little choice is available on the labour market, only decisive steps towards viable alternatives for individuals to paid work may create the conditions for far-reaching improvements in working conditions (e.g. “de-commodification” of labour through the introduction of a basic income). If not, it is difficult to imagine how workers will not perceive themselves as passive victims of structural change and corporate strategies. And it is precisely as a passive victim that right-wing populism addresses the “little man”.

In restructuring processes, workers’ experiences, attitudes and tacit knowledge need to be taken more seriously. Serious involvement of workers is required, which has various advantages: First, it may reduce the negative and expensive consequences of restructuring, which to some extent are produced by an underestimation of the complexity and too little investigation into work content, informal aspects of co-operation and distribution of work, workflows, communication processes, etc. Second, workers’ sentiments of frustration and anger resulting from far-reaching top-down decisions, which we frequently encountered in the qualitative interviews, “victimise” those affected in the sense that they perceive themselves as helpless objects of management and politics: often our interviewees complained about “them up there” who “know nothing and don’t care” about their real world of work “down here” – it is therefore important for trade unions and policy makers not only to address the material consequences of restructuring and continuous organisational change. It became obvious in the research that often workers find it harder to suffer violations of human dignity than material losses.

→ *Opening up, instead of narrowing, options for safeguarding material existence outside paid work, and giving workers a strong voice in restructuring and*

organisational change may be both a lever for improving working conditions and a measure against feelings of powerlessness.

Right-wing populism does offer workers who are negatively affected by change an apparent interest in, and caring for, the “little man”. However, the “winners” route described above suggests that employees and self-employed people who have benefited from recent changes might also, if for a different reason, be attracted to extreme right-wing ideologies: They believe in the power of the individual’s abilities, internalise the rules of a neoliberal capitalist system and often seem to share an ideology of social Darwinism, i.e. the “survival of the fittest” on the (labour) market. Strong competition which leads to long working hours, high workloads and an increase in the often repressed pains of work seems to strengthen such views. Ubiquitous and enforced competition may threaten the integration of society. The emergence of extreme right-wing political orientations is only a symptom of this process and, partly, represents only mainstream views come to a head.

→Regarding the “winners” from recent socio-economic changes who have become attracted to right-wing populism, further research is needed on how trade unions and companies can act against unitary organisational cultures fixated on competitiveness and denying a multiplicity of interests and organisational goals, because these nurture undemocratic and exclusionist stances. At the societal level this would mean preventing competitiveness from becoming a dominant value. This in turn might make it necessary to tame the ferocious economic competition between individuals, companies and countries.

2. *WORK AND EMPLOYMENT: INSECURITY AND INEQUALITY*

2.1. *The empirical findings of the SIREN project*

Many of the perceived negative consequences of socio-economic change and, in particular, change in work can be subsumed under the headings of insecurity and inequality. Within the qualitative interviews, perceived insecurities with regard to work and employment were a crucial concern. Taking the ILO concept of insecurity (cf. Standing 1997) as a point of departure, the most important forms of perceived insecurity are:

- job insecurity in the sense of doubts regarding the mid-term perspectives of a particular job within a company
- employment insecurity, meaning fear of losing current employment in impending redundancies, problems of coping with demands for performance, health worries or concerns about the economic viability of the company
- income insecurity and perceived threats to the standard of living or material subsistence due to unemployment, early retirement or precarious employment, and
- skill reproduction insecurity due to computerisation, increasing demands for theoretical knowledge, restructuring, decline of the industry or the occupation.

Relating to *job insecurity*, corporate restructuring and continuous change at workplace level lead to a general feeling of insecurity which is aggravated by the fact that change processes are rarely participatory in nature and people have hardly any voice regarding the design of their jobs. These very processes often contribute, in the view of many respondents, to a devaluation of knowledge, skills and work-related orientations. Information technologies and new forms of work organisation affect the qualifications of people who have mainly had traditional, technical vocational training, while young people may see the reproduction of their skills acquired in education and vocational training threatened by new Taylorism. Job insecurity is further strengthened by intensified competition between workers, which leads to a deterioration of the social atmosphere at work.

Relating to *employment insecurity*, “downsizing” and restructuring are felt even more strongly. Insecurity also stems from changed forms of employment. The proportion of temporary work and fixed-term contracts is increasing, and those in such work arrangements expressed the feeling of being exploited because they felt that the company was not investing in them while at the same time it was trying to benefit from their work as much as possible. Insecurity impacts heavily on people’s ability to plan their occupational and private future: interviewees in very precarious employment situations simply stated that they could not imagine themselves in three or five years from now because they had given up thinking about the future. They seemed to have resigned themselves to the impossibility of making any plans and being forced to adapt

to anything that happens to them. This is an alarming signal of loss of control and it has obvious consequences on people's well-being, their integration into society, their participation in further training as well as their ability to participate in consumption.

In contrast to those negatively affected by restructuring or changes in forms of employment, the successful, highly qualified and mostly younger people often showed themselves confident that their training, their competencies and social relations will allow them to actively adapt to the ever-changing requirements of working life. Their accounts are largely shaped by a discourse of challenge, risk and adventure, which might be a specific way of coping with insecurities via positively embracing them. Young workers show a different work ethic; they seem more hedonistic and they job-hop more. They say they want to look around, see what working life is about by trying out different things. They can do this because this generation postpones "big responsibilities" (like founding a family, buying a house, etc.). Nevertheless, we found ambivalent feelings of insecurity among this group too. Highly skilled younger workers say they don't think they can keep up this way of working and make a living from it very long, and they see this loose professional phase ("riding the wave") as a preparation for a consolidation of their overall life. Long working hours, partly unpaid work and high levels of flexibility and mobility are sacrifices they are prepared to make in order to secure their professional future or to reach a steady job. This should be a cause for concern given the prolongation of these entry-phases into the employment system and the scarcity of secure employment in many regions and sectors. It also contributes to the growing competition between younger and older workers which leads to a more widespread adoption of social-Darwinist value orientations in working life.

Income insecurity is on the increase due to the spread of precarious work, low-wage jobs and non-standard employment as well as through continuous restructuring. The situation is exacerbated by reductions in, and limitations of access to social security benefits. Old-age pensions are a particularly sensitive issue in this context. Pension reforms and questioning the viability of the public pension systems combined with the fragility of private pension funds has left many people extremely insecure regarding their income after retirement. "What is secure at all nowadays?", asked one of our interlocutors in this context. The related frustrations are especially far-reaching for people who have been working in former state enterprises as unequivocal findings from all the countries show: People working in the public sector feel they have made sacrifices during their career (lower wages as compared to the private sector) mostly in view of secure employment and a good pension. Now, as this perspective is under serious threat insecurity is hitting these workers particularly hard.

Skill-reproduction insecurity is particularly sharply felt by many blue- and white-collar workers. Some interviewees with low-level education complained that in working life more and more theoretical knowledge is needed and employers are looking for intelligent workers for almost every job. To them, the levels of education and intelligence needed appears simply out of reach. Information technologies entail important risks of social exclusion for people with poor reading and writing skills. Just like some older workers in the interviews, functionally illiterate people may be afraid of

the new technologies. Functional illiteracy therefore seems to be an important point of attention in relation to labour-market policy.

Others are concerned that the changes in work are devaluing their knowledge, skills and competencies or their cultural capital more widely. The understanding of their occupational situation we arrived at leads us to the conclusion that, though further training is much needed, it is not the only remedy. First, the question needs to be raised of whether an organisational and technological development that builds on, and enhances, workers' knowledge and skills rather than destroying them is possible. Second, learning opportunities should be provided that make it possible for workers to adapt to new requirements on the basis of already acquired theoretical and experiential knowledge.

What is at stake is not only skills, but often the fact that people feel their work-related orientations such as internalised norms and values are being devalued. This relates to such diverse aspects as product or service quality no longer being an organisational goal, or the principle of honesty towards a customer needing to be violated in order to achieve sales targets. Some workers express their ensuing problems of identification with their work with feelings of shame or even disgust. Our interpretation of the qualitative material showed that this alienation is part of the political subjectivity addressed by right-wing populists in targeting the "decent" people and in idealising traditional communities or the past in general.

According to the interpretation of the qualitative material growing *social inequality* is a key issue for many citizens and, in particular, for those in precarious living situations or threatened by social decline. Some expressed their anxiety regarding their social position through the observation that there is hardly any middle class in society any more and that the gap between rich and poor is widening. What is crucial in our context is that the inequality, in the view of many respondents, is no longer legitimate because it deviates too strongly from distributional patterns based on meritocracy. The frustrations and injuries that were expressed in many interviews mirror the partial abandonment of previously dominant principles of justice, namely the distribution of rewards according to performance or contribution – let alone according to need.

Growing inequality affects women especially. With regard to perceived insecurities and feelings of injustice most of the qualitative research showed that their perspectives were decidedly different from men's: female interviewees were very occupied with experiencing a double disadvantage they suffer as (blue-collar) workers and as women; women are more severely affected by socio-economic change and increasing insecurities and inequalities, as they are also confronted with experiences of sex discrimination, problems at work and in employment stemming from patriarchal family relations and the virtual impossibility of reconciling paid labour with motherhood.

Not being able to maintain economic independence from a life partner in spite of hard work and far-reaching sacrifices is what hurts some of them most. Others, after having given up their own career-related hopes and dreams, are more concerned about the fate of their children. What makes some of the reproduction-oriented women attracted to

right-wing populist views is, on the one hand, a lack of childcare facilities, school quality or access to vocational training and, on the other, the recognition of their motherly self-image, which is denied to them by the centre-left middle class.

The situation of women is reflected by the quantitative results where the only variables that showed significant gender effects with regard to perceptions of socio-economic change were the assessment of the financial situation and how one subjectively gets by on one's income: Male respondents show a bigger increase (or smaller decrease) in their (family's) financial situation. And not surprisingly men find it easier to get by on their income than women.

The quantitative findings regarding insecurity and injustice in general show a somewhat different picture to the qualitative ones – the basic material dimensions of change (job security, income) seem less problematic than the psychological and symbolic ones (perceived insecurity, social atmosphere): First, while most people in work in the eight countries consider the chance of losing their jobs or having to close down their business rather small, a large minority (27%) have experienced a decrease of job security in recent years (compared to only 18% who have experienced an increase). Second, on average an improvement in family income in seven out of eight countries (except Germany) was reported. Third, however, the social atmosphere at work is found to be deteriorating somewhat in Austria, France and Germany; a small increase is found in Denmark, Italy and the strongest in Hungary; in this context age turned out to be the most important variable (see chapter 3 on older workers). Fourth, interviewees who have seen their family income decrease over the last five years show a stronger feeling of political powerlessness.

People who have experienced an improvement in their family financial situation in the last five years show lower levels of prejudice against immigrants as compared to people who have seen their family income decrease in the same period. One general result was that a higher or increased income relates to lower levels of receptiveness towards right-wing extremism. What is alarming in this context is that on average more than 20% of the respondents expect that their financial situation is going to deteriorate during the next five years.

We can conclude that many people consider the pressures of flexible capitalism as a great restriction on their personal well-being and freedom and would feel far more comfortable if they could rely on basic protection against at least some of the most severe insecurities inherent in contemporary societies. Long before talking about the dangers of right-wing populism, this is already an important message of our research: though discontent among working people has risen significantly in the course of the last two decades, a commitment by policy makers to fighting unemployment, social insecurity and growing inequality, as important causes of this discontent, seems to be widely missed by European citizens.

2.2. *The policy environment*

The European social model is usually seen as being able to combine economic performance with social justice. “The key features of that model . . . are extensive basic social security cover for all citizens: a high degree of interest organisation and co-ordinated bargaining; and a more equal wage and income structure than in many other parts of the world. . . . Europe continues to commit itself to the implicit guarantee that its citizens will not be abandoned to cope on their own in the market place and resists pressures for a ‘race to the bottom’.” (Ferrera et al. 2000:13)

Defenders of the European social model point out that the expanded welfare systems of Europe and better employment relations allow for a more socially acceptable and less conflictive adjustment to globalisation (Ferrera et al 2000:14, The Social Protection Committee 2003). According to this position the avoidance of large inequalities, long-term skill investment and more or less generous systems of social protection count as comparative advantages of the EU.

Social standards, in this perspective, not only support solidarity and justice but are also conducive to economic development. Based on these convictions, social cohesion has increasingly become a major concern in European Union policies. Nevertheless, while important competencies in economic policy have been transferred to the European Union level, social policy is in the main left under the responsibility of the member states and only subject to coordination.

At the European level, questions of social policy have gained importance since the second half of the 1990s when a number of processes, such as the European Employment Strategy or the “second generation” of NAPs on poverty and social inclusion were created. Even more so, at the Lisbon summit in 2000 the EU declared that it wanted to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economic region in the world, capable of sustained economic growth leading to more and better jobs and improved social cohesion. A strategy for which the principle of mutually reinforcing relations between social protection, employment and economic policies was affirmed (The Social Protection Committee 2004:4).

The processes and strategies created at the Community level have to take into account a number of fundamental problems. Though there is a lot of debate about the European Social Model, there is consensus about a high degree of variation of welfare systems among member states. These varieties are said to be centred around three or four models following the seminal analyses of Esping-Andersen (Esping-Andersen 1990, 2003): the universalist or social democratic model of Scandinavia, the conservative or statist Bismarckian models of continental Europe, the southern-European familialist model, and the liberal/residual/Beveridgean Model in the UK). As the principle of subsidiarity concerning social policies is still valid these varieties have to be taken into account by the EU in the process of modernising social protection in the member states. Thus a number of new processes and strategies such as the open method of coordination were created and implemented to allow for national particularities.

The cornerstones of European economic and monetary policies raise doubts whether the components of this triangle have equal weight for the EU, as the debates about EMU, employment and wage bargaining have shown (Schulten 2004). It is evident that European economic policies, however, strongly impact not only on social cohesion but also on the room for manoeuvre in social policy. As a consequence of monetary and fiscal policy, many member states' social policy budgets have had to be reduced and access to transfer payments has been made more difficult, while at the same time the single-market strategy, by causing accelerated restructuring, has increased the need for social protection. In addition, an adaptation of social protection to more flexible forms of employment is still largely absent.

A number of problems dominate the European strategies of "modernising" social protection. These problems cannot be understood completely without consideration of the monetary and fiscal pressures concerning inflation, government spending and public budgets member states are confronted with. Demographic changes and the ageing of the European population together with a decrease in employment rates for older workers in most European countries (the employment levels of older workers in Scandinavia is the most remarkable exception) have put severe strains on national pension and health systems. With the alleged aim of securing sound finances for European pensions systems, European member states are implementing reforms affecting benefit levels, pension entitlements and retirement ages on the one hand. On the other hand, in the name of creating a pension system based on three pillars, these reforms aim at the creation of a funded pensions system, thus replacing a model based on solidarity and redistribution between generations by individual responsibility and investment on capital markets.

The debate on social protection within the EU is strongly focused on activation and employment to increase employment rates and to overcome alleged employment pathologies of the European welfare models (Hemerijck 2003). On the one hand low employment levels and high levels of unemployment among low-skilled workers are said to be linked to wage and labour cost rigidities (high levels of social contributions) caused by high wage employment in the export-oriented sectors in a number of continental countries. Thus low-wage, low-skilled employment is priced out of the market; a service gap is emerging. Due to growing budgetary restrictions and the obligation to bring down public deficits, these employees can no longer be absorbed by the public sectors as was the case in Scandinavia for a long time. On the other hand highly polarised labour markets, growing wage inequalities, the emergence of working poor characterise labour market developments in the Anglo-Saxon, liberal models of welfare capitalism. Thus there is a consensus emerging that different European welfare models suffer from different employment pathologies. The European Employment Strategies and the European Policies on Social Protection propose a number of measures for how different member states might tackle their employment problems (cf. Ferrara et al. 2000, Hemerijck 2003).

2.3. *The policy implications of the SIREN findings*

Focusing on individual perceptions, our research reflects the increasing tension between high levels of unemployment, the spread of flexible and precarious labour and the dynamics of restructuring on the one hand and, on the other, a tendency to the weakening instead of strengthening of social protection. Recent results from an EU project on social protection and guaranteed minimum income systems shows an astonishingly high rate of insufficient protection: in the mid-1990s between 2% and 13% of the population at some point lived with less than the national minimum income standard (Groenez 2004:10).

The findings of the empirical phases of the SIREN project point to the following main political problems.

Working conditions: The situation at work already described in the first chapter is important also in this context because poor working conditions have negative consequences for job and employment security. With regard to the work design, to high workloads or long working hours, respondents often expressed concern about the mid or long-term viability of their jobs. This is in line with other European research: “Poor task quality can be seen as an important long-term risk factor for social exclusion in that it is likely to reduce commitment to employment and to undermine the maintenance of learning skills. Poor quality tasks, in particular those with low job control, can also increase people’s vulnerability to ill health from work pressure.” (Gallie/Paugam 2002:iv).

Low wages: Precarious employment and living situations and problems of maintaining living standards indicate that low income levels are among the most pressing concerns of many people. This reflects the incidence of low-wage employment which (including part time work) amounted to some 15% in the EU-15 and has been on the increase in many member states since the 1980s (Schulten 2004). This development especially affects women – in particular those with low qualifications. Income discrimination is well documented for all European countries. In Austria, for example, wage differentials between men and women hardly changed between 1983 and the end of the 1990s in spite of the relatively strong growth the female participation rate, with average wages (controlled for working hours) of men 23% above those of women (cf. Böheim/Hofer/Zulehner 2001). In the UK the situation is similar: At the end of the 1990s women in full-time employment earned 82% of the average hourly wage of men in full employment, while women in part-time employment even earned only 60% of the average hourly wage of men in full employment (Grimshaw/Rubery 2000). The increase in precarious employment, which disproportionately affects women, has further increased wage inequality, with women being more likely to be in low-paid employment (Robson et al. 1999).

In this context, focusing on the employment level and less on the quality of employment and, in particular, creating employment in the low-wage sector may contribute to tendencies towards precarisation and increased inequality. The strong feelings of

injustice and powerlessness caused by growing inequality as revealed in the SIREN research point to the limitations of such strategies.

→ *Against this background the SIREN research once more points at the necessity to strengthen initiatives for equal pay for women and men at the level of legislation, collective agreements and companies' human resource management. The expansion of a low-wage sector as a means of fighting unemployment obviously entails high psychological, social and political costs.*

Social protection: In view of our research findings, old-age pensions are of paramount importance in the debate on social insecurity. An earlier, specialised European survey on the issue showed that only 21% of the working-age population expect that they will not have problems getting by on the state pension. However, the state pension is expected to be the main source of income. In order to secure pensions, the majority is in favour of raising taxes and contributions, while raising the age of retirement is only favoured by 23% – which means that “many recent reform measures undertaken by national governments are at odds with the order of preferences as revealed by this survey” (European Commission 2004:9). Furthermore, the survey showed that more people disagree than agree with financial disincentives to early requirement.

The SIREN findings underline the sensitivity of the issue: Withholding the expected rewards for a long life of hard work and denying access to early retirement with an acceptable income for those who have sacrificed their health at work or cannot find employment provokes particularly strong feelings of injustice. The issue triggers particularly strong emotions and may further alienate citizens from mainstream politics.

→ *It seems to be crucial to restore security and calculability after a period of pension reforms and to reconsider the introduction of financial disincentives to early retirement as a means to raise the factual retirement age.*

The second equally pressing problem relates to social protection of flexible workers. Employment that deviates from the standard employment relationship usually involves fewer social rights. In an attempt to cut costs, member states have made access to benefits even more difficult and thereby made social protection even more dependent on permanent standard employment. Again, this development affects women in particular ways: non-standard and flexible forms of employment are of special importance to women because they often make it possible to take up employment and are therefore typical of the labour market integration of women. For a long time, only few women and hardly any mothers have been in standard employment relationships (Anxo/O'Reilly 2000). In the continental-conservative model of social security non-standard employment does not involve adequate social protection (Bettio/Rubery/Smith 2000, Heidenreich 1999). In order to increase social protection, in particular for temporary workers, self-employed and quasi-subordinate employees, it is crucial to expand the concept of work under an employment contract and to create a minimum level of social rights common to all forms of work regardless of the type of employment.

The SIREN findings underpin the salience of an argument recently put forward by Swank and Betz (2003). They argue that globalisation, because of increasing insecurity, contributes to the electoral success of the extreme right, and they show that right-wing populist parties are less successful in countries with universal and generous social security systems, because these reduce insecurity. This leads to the recommendation that countries with a continental-conservative system, for example, should make social protection less dependent on employment and thereby move towards the Scandinavian model.

→ *The research findings once more underline the necessity to adapt social protection to the spread of flexible labour and to the increased female labour market participation.*

EU enlargement: Possible consequences of EU enlargement need to be monitored carefully: Workers in “old” member states may be concerned about possible negative impacts on their labour-market opportunities. Taking the SIREN findings, for example, the relocation of jobs to low-wage countries and competition from legally or illegally employed migrants were the source of major concerns of people in vulnerable labour market positions. There is a danger that the generally positive picture of EU enlargement presented by mainstream politicians contrasts with the experiences of many people and therefore aggravates the alienation of many workers from politics.

3. OLDER WORKERS

3.1. *The empirical findings of the SIREN project*

The empirical results from the SIREN project point out that the far-reaching changes in working life experienced by many workers have a more severe impact on older workers. One phenomenon found again and again in differing shapes and sizes in the qualitative interviews was the experience of breaches of implicit contracts: workers have the impression that their performance orientation, actual performance and work and – what it comes down to – their subordination to societal norms go unrecognised or unrewarded. For older workers this obviously takes on more weight as they look back on a working lifetime or decades of hard work and loyalty to one (or several) companies.

Aspects of such perceived breaches of implicit contracts include the exposure to increasing insecurities and the devaluation of qualifications and work-related values. Both affect older workers more seriously: employees approaching or above the age of 50 realise that losing their job would mean long-term unemployment because they see no opportunities for themselves on the labour market. At the same time, older workers in particular recognise that they are the ones who will have to leave in the case of closures or redundancies accompanying privatisation and restructuring.

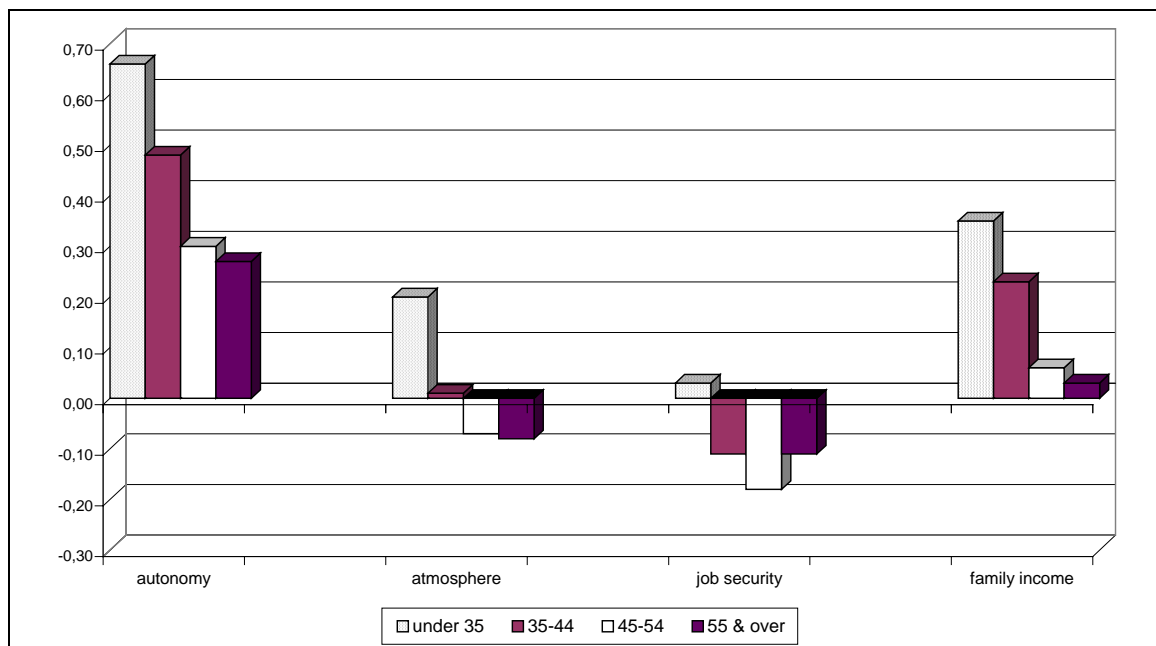
The qualitative research of the SIREN project also showed that redundancy, for older workers, often means a deep shock and the shattering of identities. Some older employees, who have experienced being transferred to some dead-end department or position, felt excluded and dumped in preparation for (early) retirement or dismissal. In a number of cases, clear violations of human dignity were reported by our interviewees. Not surprisingly therefore, middle-aged and older workers in many interviews took on a rather nostalgic perspective, dwelling and focusing on a far brighter past.

Some interviewees expressed feelings of uselessness and failure after being made redundant. Such feelings must be understood in the context of societal norms shaped by individualisation and competition, which encourage people to base the meaning they attribute to life on gainful employment and which foster the perception that only economically productive people are entitled to respect and appreciation. In the case of people who are excluded (or at risk of being excluded) from the labour market, for instance, these internalised norms can lead to either self-destructive self-blaming or to a projection of the responsibility for this exclusion (or *déclassement*) onto other social groups (“scapegoating”), such as migrants.

The quantitative data confirm the qualitative results, i.e. that older workers are more intensely affected by socio-economic change. Age seems to be the most relevant variable with regard to perceived changes in job security: under 35-year-olds report no clear decrease in job security. It can be expected that, due to the prolonged phases of

entry into the employment system with high ratios of non-standard employment, younger workers will start with high levels of insecurity and gain job security later on. Interestingly, it is not necessarily the “over 55-year-olds” who report the strongest decrease in job security, but the category of people aged 45-54. This is alarming given the time period this age group still needs to stay in the employment system – and in view of the meagre chance of finding a new job once having become unemployed.

Graph 3-1: Changes in work by age groups



Source: Yves De Weerd, Hans De Witte, Patrizia Catellani, Patrizia Milesi, Turning right? Socio-economic change and the receptiveness of European workers to the extreme right: Report on the survey Analysis and Results. Deliverable 4 for the project SIREN (2004).

The survey results show that older workers identify slightly more strongly with the company or organisation they work for. This could be interpreted as being due to loyalty bonds emerging from long-term employment relationships or the consequence of knowing that outside or after their existing jobs they most likely face long-term unemployment – which may strengthen their attachment to the employer owing to the sheer lack of alternatives.

With regard to perceived job autonomy, older people in all countries also report a significantly lower increase compared to young people. Last but not least, older workers also show themselves as being more pessimistic about the social atmosphere – the older the worker the more pronounced is the complaint about a deteriorating working climate; this mirrors the nostalgic stories by some older workers in the qualitative interviews.

In the light of the SIREN results, age does not appear to be a significant factor influencing an affinity towards right-wing extremism in any of the countries apart from Hungary, where a significant effect of age on extreme right-wing party affinity can be

found. The variables of prejudice against immigrants, political powerlessness, authoritarianism, and chauvinism were chosen to determine this affinity. Interestingly, only chauvinism¹ turned out to be connected with age: except for Switzerland, where older people were assessed as being less chauvinist, increasing age in the other countries seems to be associated with chauvinist attitudes.

The middle-aged and older workers who showed an attraction to right-wing populism are a majority in the group that follows what we called the “losers’ route” to right-wing populism, in which negative changes in work, strong feelings of injustice and feelings of political powerlessness play a major role.

3.2. *The policy environment*

In recent years, work and employment of older workers has been high on the agenda of the European Union. At the Council of Stockholm in 2001 the goal was set to increase the average employment ratio of men and women between 55 and 64 to 50% by 2001. As early as the Finnish presidency in 1999, active measures were being discussed to support the employment of aging workers. The main approaches and areas discussed in which measures can and should be taken are the following: the trend towards early exit schemes should be reversed; active and preventive measures should take a “whole working life” perspective and be embedded in the concept of “age neutrality”; lifelong learning approaches that do not solely aim at improving vocational skills should be pursued; all aspects relevant to an aging workforce have to be addressed via measures, i.e. education, health, training, social protection, equal opportunities (www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/files/EF9962EN.pdf).

At the Council of Barcelona a report was presented on the ways in which the employment ratio could be increased and an active old age could be achieved. The goal of increased employment participation of older workers was seen as an important means in the attempt to adapt pension systems to demographic developments. In a dynamic approach taking into consideration the life cycle, the following goals were defined (Joint Report from the Commission and the Council 2002):

- more jobs and better quality in work
- making work pay
- higher and adaptable skills at work
- making work a real option for all

Priority was given to joint initiatives by governments and social partners to keep workers in employment longer. In addition, an examination of tax and social security systems was recommended with a focus on the incentives and disincentives to

¹ Chauvinism was defined as a general national pride, a view of uniqueness and superiority of one's own country and national in-group. It refers to a rather uncritical attachment to one's own country and national in-group, and implies a downward comparison of other countries (DeWeerd/DeWitte/Catellani/Milesi 2004:59).

individuals and enterprises. In support of these policies, research was carried out on good practice in the area of productive aging and fighting age barriers in working life (Walker/Taylor 1998).

In a communication of March 2004,² the European Commission states that although progress has been made in terms the Stockholm and Barcelona goals this progress is insufficient. In particular, the employment ratio of women is still as low as 30%. The EC concludes that member states will have to take drastic measures in the area of active aging, in particular financial incentives, access to training and lifelong learning and active labour-market policy, good working conditions, flexible working hours and counselling. The communication also argues for a close involvement of the social partners. Social partners are asked to examine the role of seniority in their collective bargaining policies with the aim of linking wages more closely to productivity and performance, work organisation and health and safety and lifelong learning, and the removal of incentives for early retirement etc. (p. 4). Policies for active aging are supported by the EU through coordination, exchange of experiences and best practice and financial instruments, e.g. in the framework of the ESF.

Already in the Joint Employment Report, the Commission spoke of a “lack of comprehensive approaches on active ageing” and calls the strategies of most member states piecemeal. Evidently, measures to reform benefit and pension systems and to reduce incentives for early retirement prevail (cf. Commission 2001:23). This seems to be one of the reasons for the crisis of legitimacy that became obvious in the SIREN research: Access to adequate benefits and pensions has been made more difficult although the underlying problems driving older workers out of the employment system, such as poor working conditions, illness and unemployment, are far from being solved.

3.3. Policy-oriented conclusions from the research findings

The perception of older workers seeing no or few opportunities on the labour market if they lose their jobs is in line with research showing that it is very difficult for older workers to re-enter employment once they have become unemployed (Behrens 2000). Measures by social partners to support outplacement strategies and active labour market policies are important to improve the situation. However, the main conclusion should be that keeping older workers in employment has to have top priority. Few countries are pursuing policies in this area. One of the most famous initiatives in this respect is the Finnish National Programme for Older Workers (FINPAW) and its emphasis on work ability.

To attain this goal, additional efforts seem to be necessary to fight age discrimination, e.g. in cases of restructuring. Regulation can support this: in Sweden, for example, the “last in, first out” rule limits the possibility of selecting older workers for redundancy. Although in practice the effects of the law are limited by a range of exemptions, job

² KOM (2004) 146 endgültig.

protection may be a means to limit companies' strategies to externalise costs caused by unsuitable working conditions (Calleman 1999).

As already pointed out, the issue of incentives for a longer working life and of disincentives for early retirement is a very delicate one. As our research findings show, early retirement is not always voluntary. This relates in particular to cases of retirement in the process of restructuring and headcount reductions in the public services. Being forced to leave early and to accept a lower pension after a life of hard work and loyalty to the company and in view of age-discrimination and missing job-offers for older workers leaves people with severe disappointments and strong feelings of injustice.

→ *The policy to introduce disincentives to early retirement may aggravate the situation because it increases the loss of income. A more sensitive approach to companies' strategies seems to be needed to externalise the cost of workforce reduction.*

The findings of the SIREN project, as well as other research, show that the intensity of work is on the increase and that overall working conditions for older workers are deteriorating (European Foundation 2003, Molinié 2003). This not only means an increasing disincentive to stay in employment, it also makes it more likely that a number of people cannot work until the regular retirement age because of health problems. Policy objectives at national and European level clearly address this issue pointing out the salience of work organisation and health and safety issues. For some groups of workers it nevertheless seems premature to try to keep people in employment longer while working conditions are still deteriorating and health conditions are worsening. In view of the research findings it seems particularly important that anti-discrimination policies such as the relevant EC directive are implemented and applied in all member states.

→ *It seems crucial to improve working conditions, to fight age discrimination and to provide employment for older workers and thus create the preconditions for raising the factual retirement age.*

The SIREN findings show that employment and income insecurity are particularly pressing problems for older workers. Increasing workloads, fiercer competition and a lack of opportunities on the labour market are contributing to this perception. As already mentioned, the chances of older workers finding employment are slim once they lose their jobs. This means that the appropriateness of "employability" in the sense of increasing people's value on the external labour market as one main goal of the employment strategy needs to be questioned for this age group. In contrast, supporting adaptability within employment and employment protection are of primary importance.

These policy-oriented conclusions would be incomplete if they only related to labour market regulation without also addressing policies that deal with the formation and organisation of markets, e.g. for public services. "Liberalisation" policies, but of course also the single market and EMU, have triggered large parts of the current restructuring waves. The ensuing problems of the employment of older workers therefore need to be addressed at this level and in these areas of policy making too.

4. *MIGRATION*

4.1. *The empirical findings of the SIREN project*

Immigration is currently the most important political issue of the extreme right in nearly all countries under investigation. As a consequence, it played a crucial role in the SIREN research. Most workers, whether so-called “losers” or “winners” of modernisation, are affected by changes in working life that entail more competition, more pressure to achieve, more speed, stress and intensity in performing one’s work, etc. At the same time, the rewards for this intense involvement in work are becoming increasingly insecure or are subjectively assessed by many as no longer adequate. It may imply that people are slowly realising the decrease in and the insecurity of rewards for hard work and subordination in terms of living standards and societal integration.

Internalised norms of achievement as well as the suffering entailed by subjecting oneself to the demands of working life may make many people merciless towards others who apparently do not conform in the same way. The qualitative research of the SIREN project showed that, in a process termed “double demarcation”, some workers direct their frustrations and feelings of injustice against “those up there” (politicians, management, and maybe also academics) or those “further down” (long-term unemployed, immigrants, asylum seekers, in some countries also against people living on social benefits and people in early retirement), who are in their views privileged, deceitful or lazy enough not to have to function according to the norms of the “hard-working and decent” community. The emotions involved cannot be understood without reference to the pains of work, the physical and psychological strains that people have to accept while often living in rather precarious circumstances.

With regard to resentment and prejudice against “foreigners” we encountered various modes of discourse within the qualitative interviews:

First, there are workers who, because of their position on the labour market, see “foreigners” as direct competitors for jobs. This includes competition within the country when employers officially or unofficially hire immigrants prepared or forced to accept lower wages as well as transnational competition, when companies relocate plants to lower-wage countries. Understandably, clandestine employment of immigrants in the tourist industry, for example, is a bone of contention for unemployed waiters. But in the construction industry, too, undocumented employment and wage dumping have given rise to conflicts between local workers and immigrants from central and eastern Europe. In Germany, competition between eastern and western Germans following German reunification is a similar issue. Usually, feelings of resentment are directed against the immigrants taking the jobs rather than the employers involved, who make the decisions. Although, in this context, “foreigners” can be seen as a real threat enhancing fears of unemployment and insecurity, the fact of employers not significantly appearing to be

responsible for this already points at a process of problem displacement taking place that is in the interest of economic and political elites.

Second, strong emotional reactions of respondents revealed intense feelings of injustice. These may be due to precarious living situations, fears of social exclusion, pains of work or the perceived high price that is paid for keeping up standards of living. The ensuing aggression is directed, under the influence of dominant ideologies and the media, to social groups that are perceived as benefiting from society without contributing to it: politicians, asylum seekers and “social security scroungers” are among the groups most often referred to. Most respondents who exhibited anti-immigrant feelings made a clear distinction between foreigners who work and contribute to society and those who do not work but receive benefits. This shows that it is usually issues of distribution, and not racism, that are at the core of the problem, although in the definition of the problems and in the suggested solutions the ethnic dimension becomes paramount. Depending on the country and on the social position of the respondents, the main issues of distribution related to the welfare state, including elderly care, to the labour market or to housing and schools. In contrast to the reactions referred to above, competition is not the main mechanism here. Rather, foreigners who allegedly or apparently do not work, such as asylum seekers, are perceived as a provocation and therefore attract aggressions stemming from strong feelings of injustice (which may originate from completely different social relations).

Third, there are white-collar, middle-class workers who show themselves threatened by “foreigners” in another way: for them immigrants in a symbolic way stand for societal change perceived negatively as threatening them with symbolic *déclassement* — “foreigners” in their neighbourhood or in their children’s schools for them symbolise social decline. Some interviewees gave the impression of having retreated from society, for instance, because they feel they can no longer keep up with consumption standards. To them, immigrants, whom they perceive as being conspicuously present in the public sphere, become symbols of a social life they no longer enjoy. Often it is therefore alienation from society that can be seen as a basis of xenophobic resentment. The phrase “soon we will be the foreigners” used by some interviewees should therefore not be misunderstood as simply expressing a perceived threat to cultural identity by immigration. Rather, it seems to express alienation channelled to the migration issue by the dominant discourse on problems of society.

In the quantitative results, prejudice against immigrants, defined as a rejection of immigrants for economic and cultural reasons, turned out to be the strongest indicator of right-wing extremist affinity. In all countries under investigation, educational level is related to this prejudice: people with a lower educational level show higher levels of prejudice against immigrants. Occupational position is a significant factor in five out of eight countries: the pattern for wage-earning categories is clear-cut – the blue-collar and executive-manager categories are at opposite ends, with the former showing more pronounced prejudice against immigrants. Perceived positive change in job conditions on the other hand seems to assuage prejudice against immigrants. A change in family finance also seems to affect xenophobia: people who have seen their family income

decrease in the last five years show higher levels of prejudice against immigrants as compared to people who have experienced an improvement of their family's financial situation during the same period. Finally, in half of the countries under investigation, subjective income matters as well: people who indicated that they do not get by well on their income also showed stronger prejudice against immigrants.

Among people who have experienced positive changes in job conditions and who have a medium level of education prejudice may nevertheless be observed if these people put competition and inequality among their major values (e.g. social dominance orientation, see the psychological 'winners' route' already mentioned above).

4.2. Policy-oriented conclusions from the research findings

The findings referred to above clearly emphasise the importance of policies directed at reducing feelings of insecurity and injustice through concrete measures of providing secure and stable employment and income resulting in satisfactory living conditions and a subjectively meaningful integration into society. Experience in various countries has shown that not tackling the underlying problems but asking for tolerance and political correctness instead has certainly contributed enormously to the success of right-wing populism.

Policy recommendations in this area are rather delicate: While anti-discrimination and affirmative action measures are needed to reduce the disadvantages for immigrants, these very measures may be used to argue that migrants receive preferential treatment. Another problem is that the demand for tolerance on the part of the national population may exacerbate the problem if structural difficulties are not tackled. This also refers to the EC proposal for an anti-discrimination directive which, from this vantage point, doesn't seem to be sufficient. We can conclude from our research that it is difficult to reduce aggression without turning to those who are actually responsible for social misery. Unless structural problems are addressed, we are caught in a double-bind situation: if migrants are not allowed to work they are blamed for being a financial burden on the state; if they are allowed to work they are blamed for taking away work from nationals.

Research on social identity indicates that policy makers need to stress similarities rather than differences among people (e.g. being workers, parents, contribution to welfare as tax payers). This idea has to be endorsed by trade unions, who may, through their focus on the target group of male skilled workers, be contributing to a desolidarising segmentation of the workforce. Although solidarity has always been a core value in the self-perception of trade unions, this concept did not fully embrace, for instance, women, migrants or other disadvantaged and discriminated groups on the labour market. At the same time concepts of solidarity and stressing similarity need to take into consideration the effective discrimination and disadvantages of special groups and be flexible enough to work out differentiated approaches for different groups.

At the same time, politicians, policy makers and the media should not try to create a social community in which all differences disappear, but instead communicate in ways that create a community feeling in which differences are perceived as values contributing to the enrichment of the society but where problems of living together in a multi-cultural society may also be addressed. In Germany, for example, the ideology of an ethnically homogeneous nation contributed to xenophobia amongst those who experienced the disadvantages of a multi-cultural society (Hentges/Butterwegge 2000, Jaschke 2001). Activities such as the grassroots initiative in Thüringen, Germany, against low pay supported by the trade union Verdi³ seems to be a good-practice example as it aims at drawing attention to those who are responsible for social problems thereby reducing the danger of scapegoating and ethnic tension.

→ *The first conclusion to be drawn from the research is that there is a need for recognising problems caused by social inequality and socio-economic change. In doing so, trade unions and policy makers should stress similarities instead of differences between the various groups of workers and, in particular, between the national population and “foreigners”.*

In 2003, there were 19 million non-nationals (i.e. people resident in a country of which they are not a national) living in the 15 EU member states, accounting for 5.1% of the Union’s total population (Grünell/van het Kaar, 2003). 13 million (or 3.4% of the total EU population) of those were non-EU nationals. In a recent report on “Migrants, Minorities and Employment”, the EUMC recommends that the European Union continue its work towards the approximation of national legislations with regard to conditions for admission and residence of third-country migrants.

“This involves setting out a legally prescribed route to a long-term status that acknowledges that migrants who are legally resident in a Member state on a long-term basis should not be denied the civic, social and economic rights enjoyed by Union citizens.” (2003:90)

With regard to employment the EUMC suggests efforts to improve the employability of immigrants by placing more stress on the special educational needs of immigrants. Also, more severe measures against the exploitation of irregular migrants are called for:

“In the field of illegal employment of aliens such measures could also include higher obligatory sanctions against employers, who are found to have violated labour laws, as well as efforts to recover lost wages and withheld benefits for illegal migrants.” (2003:91)

In this context, regulations like those forbidding asylum seekers to work⁴ should be changed, as this fosters hostilities: work permits for asylum seekers and refugees would reduce the “provocation”, often deplored in the qualitative interviews of SIREN, that

³ BürgerInnen gegen Billiglohn – für Gleichbehandlung, Soziales Netzwerk Thüringen, <http://www.bi-gb.de>.

⁴ According to Grünell/van het Kaar, in the EU, the “general rule is that asylum-seekers are not allowed to enter the labour market. ... Usually, only asylum-seekers who are granted refugee status are free to enter the labour market” (Grünell/van het Kaar 2003).

asylum seekers are “fed by the State”. Again here it is interesting in terms of a displacement of problems that it is the refugees themselves rather than legislators who are criticised for this situation. The differentiation between migrants and refugees, i.e. treating refugees as transitory aliens, aggravates their position and the consequences at a societal level: it would be necessary to acknowledge that the presence of the majority of refugees is not transitory but – in the light of continuing threatening conditions in numerous countries of origin – is of a long-term character (Kühne 2000).

→ *Granting migrants the same civic, social and economic rights as those enjoyed by Union citizens seems an important precondition for more solidarity with migrant workers. Enabling refugees and asylum seekers to work would help to avoid “scapegoating”. The prescription of ethical codes for employers with regard to the employment of migrants and the enforcement of rules regarding terms and conditions of all workers could be effective measures.*

In most European countries two issues appear to a large extent to determine the principles and positions of employers’ organisations and trade unions – labour shortages and equal rights for migrants. Employers and their organisations generally stress the importance and advantages of the free movement of labour, although there are obvious national nuances in their views. Although trade unions and their federations acknowledge that to fill certain jobs (new) migrants are “unavoidable”, the general attitude towards migration is hesitant; unions generally stress the need to improve the situation of migrants already in the country, regardless of whether they are employed or unemployed. In most countries trade unions are increasingly active in working to combat racism and promote equal treatment (Grünell/van het Kaar 2003).

These initiatives should not remain restricted to union members or blue- and white-collar workers in general, however. The SIREN research findings, as other studies, show that different social groups show similar levels of xenophobia and of attraction to right-wing populism. Among the self-employed the category of “traders, farmers and craftspeople” seems to be highly receptive to right-wing extremism.

→ *It seems important that trade unions are supported in their initiatives and mainly that other interest groups, such as chambers of commerce and farmers’ associations, follow the example of the trade unions and start initiatives against racism and xenophobia.*

A crucial protagonist involved in the creation of “foreigners” as scapegoats is the media: hence, personal experience or observations of daily life with immigrants become confirmations of a “truth” manufactured by the mass media and that comes down to the identification of “foreigners”, criminals and “social scroungers” as exploiting the “hard-working national population”. The mass media have played a significant role in preparing the breeding ground for right-wing populism and extremism: even though a few interviewees refer to their own experiences with criminal and violent immigrants, most of them quote and reproduce the press coverage of the primarily problematic effects of immigration (see also the research carried out by the EUMC (2002) on racism in the mass media and also the SIREN report on the qualitative research 2003:64 ff).

→ *At a European level, politicians and journalists should be issued with guidelines and recommendations (like those from the German Press Council) on how to deal with the topic of migrants in a non-discriminatory way: measures such as self-obligations not to use discriminating stereotypes in words and deeds and not to mention the nationality of perpetrators when reporting crimes are substantial steps in the right direction.*

Public discourse on migration issues in general – and not only the tabloids, which are most crude in scapegoating processes – will have to change direction. Achieving such a change in discourse is a prime responsibility of politicians at European, national and regional level. So far, hard facts with regard to migration have not been sufficiently publicised:

First, the discourse on refugees would be entirely different if the societal value of humanitarian rights came into the picture (instead of continually problematicising the costs or criminality issues). Second, demographic trends show that aging western European societies with low birth rates are increasingly dependent on immigration as an important resource for economic and societal development. Third, the actual statistics and calculations (e.g. for Austria) prove that “foreigners” pay more in terms of taxes and financial contributions to social security, unemployment benefits, etc. than they get out of this system. That means there are enough facts, arguments and reasons that could be used but they would mean a different orientation in terms of political decisions and value orientation: as long as established conservative and social democratic parties all over Europe decide not to highlight some facts and shape public discourse in a more humanitarian and solidarity-oriented fashion they are riding the right-wing populist wave. This brings us to the following, final chapter on politics and political representation.

5. *POLITICS AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION*

5.1. *The empirical findings of the SIREN project*

Although the SIREN project's main focus is on changes in working life and the appeal of the extreme right, different political reactions to the consequences of socio-economic change were analysed. Apart from an attraction to right-wing extremism, perceived negative changes in particular also triggered a strengthening of socialist, conservative or liberal political orientations. These differences in individual reactions are partly due to mentalities mainly shaped by social milieus and family socialisation, but they also result from differences in the individuals' educational and political capital and, in particular relating to comparisons between countries, from the mainstream parties' programmes and messages on offer in a particular situation.

In general, the qualitative interviews brought out the quite negative relationship many interviewees had towards politics: experiences and disappointments include observations of, and conflicts with, undemocratic structures in, or attributed to, the established parties. The perception that politicians are unable or unwilling to promote changes in favour of workers, or accusations against shop stewards and trade unions of having changed sides and playing the role of co-managers.

Lack of interest in politics has been diagnosed by political scientists as a crisis of the legitimacy of representative democracy as well as of the established conservative and social-democratic parties. This diagnosis of "de-politicising" trends raises the question of how this lack of interest has emerged. Our research provides important indications for what is often marginalised in the dominant discourse of political science: the disqualification of the traditional "game" of politics in the eyes of many interviewees, rests notably on the disappearance of the workers' world from the political scene and the national media. Workers' apparent "lack of interest" in politics comes back to politicians' "lack of interest" in workers' problems.

Many interviewees felt themselves let down and not satisfactorily represented by parties from the social-democratic camp (or their trade unions). The public acknowledgement of people's problems and, in recent years, the political interest in the workers' world appear to be among the populists' strong points. Some interviewees show themselves as pragmatic and realistic on the question of right-wing parties being the better workers' party and the party of the "little people": they are convinced that the right-wing populist parties are on the side of the "bosses" and explain their voting for them as being the most powerful means they possess to annoy the established parties.

Last but not least, anti-EU attitudes were very strong among many of those who showed strong affinity with right-wing populism. Partly, such orientations came up when people presented themselves and their country as a passive victim of overwhelming, anonymous powers, partly in the context of a loss of national identity, partly

respondents accused the European Union of corruption and a lack of democracy. Some interviewees who were concerned about EU enlargement had especially virulent fears about the effects on the labour market. For example, interviewees in Austria who find it difficult to earn sufficient income in tourism or who had experienced the relocation of their job to Hungary expressed feelings of panic because of the enlargement of the European Union. Such reactions are in stark contrast to the official information, which mainly presents positive consequences – a gap which may exacerbate the impression people have that their concerns are not taken into account in the sphere of politics.

As mentioned above, for some interviewees voting for right-wing populist parties is their form of protest, but they do not trust those parties either. However, the fact that the racist and social-Darwinist ideologies of these parties are not recognised as such or at least do not interfere with sympathies or voting behaviour can be interpreted as disquieting testimony to the prevailing societal and political culture: on the one hand we are faced with authoritarian and historical legacies such as those of fascism and Nazism in some countries. On the other hand, in all eight countries we encounter a political climate that – under the influence of neoliberal restructuring and thinking – is drifting towards far right-wing ideologies: apart from “trendsetters” like Christoph Blocher, Umberto Bossi, Jörg Haider, Pia Kjaersgaard etc., the political elites of nearly all established parties are at present architects or fellow travellers of this societal development.

Established political elites are also powerful stimulating forces for racism through their promotion of competitive nationalism for economic reasons or through jumping on the discursive tracks of right-wing populists, mainly relating to the issue of immigration, in order to increase or secure their electorate. However, one should take into account that another facet interwoven into contemporary racism is economic utilitarianism. The bonds of nationality are not as strong as economic usefulness of “foreigners” and nationals. Under conditions of competitive nationalism, individual performance orientation and self-sacrifice have become much more important than the origin of the passport.

Additionally, an increase in the personalisation of politics became evident in the qualitative interviews, which is mainly due to the reception of politics via television. This form of reception gives a strongly personality-related and personalised approach to politics (Butterwegge et al. 2002), which is communicated in many interviews. People often orient themselves less towards political positions or programmatic points than to the way, and by whom, some issues are expressed. Thus politicians’ charisma and appearance become the decisive marketing qualities. It can be assumed from our analyses that the increasing personalisation of politics is a highly relevant factor for the success of populists.

Another reason for political support for right-wing populists or extremists can be found in the perceived lack of democracy – whether it is experiences of nepotism and corruption or the feeling of not being able to participate and of not being represented in the political game. This means that, while right-wing populists are rightly seen as a threat to representative democracy, the reasons for their success can partly be found in

undemocratic conditions of contemporary European societies at local, regional and national levels, but also at the level of the European Union. With many interview partners the impression arises that they see themselves only as a powerless object and not the subject of politics. They have never had experience or success in political action and activity and conclude that ordinary people in general have no say and cannot change anything. As a result of this experienced passivity, politics is seen as being “up there”, while they themselves are down below and powerless.

Turning to the quantitative results, the question of “political powerlessness” appears to be highly relevant in the light of the findings given above. Political powerlessness was defined in terms of an assessment as to both (a lack of) political efficacy and political trust – political efficacy concerns an individual’s sense of personal competence in influencing the political system; political trust stresses perceptions that the political system and authorities are responsive to the public’s interests and demands. Here we find, not surprisingly, a correlation with education: apart from Austria, where the relationship is not significant, educational level is strongly negatively related to political powerlessness in all countries. The lower educated clearly feel more powerless when it comes to politics, elections, voting, etc.

Another strong element in relation to political powerlessness is occupational position. Within the wage-earning categories, the blue-collar and farm workers, at one end, and the senior manager category, at the other, form the extreme opposites, with the blue-collar category feeling most powerless politically. Next, a change in family finance is also related to political powerlessness. People who have seen their family income decrease over the last five years show a stronger feeling of political powerlessness. Another important element is collective deprivation, which shows a strong reinforcing effect on political powerlessness. Last, except for France, subjective income is related to political powerlessness as well: people who feel they have difficulties getting by financially feel politically more powerless.

Political powerlessness is a relevant factor enforcing extreme-right party affinity in Austria, Belgium, France, and Switzerland; however, the effect of other receptiveness variables, e.g. prejudice against immigrants or authoritarian attitudes, is much stronger. The path analyses dealing with the links between the perception of changes within working life, social identity, and right-wing party affinity, includes “political powerlessness” as one relevant factor on the “losers” pathway to right-wing extremist party affinity.

We can conclude that the findings from the SIREN project are indicative of a crisis of representation which seems to exist in industrial relations but which is strongest in the field of party politics and regarding the institutions of the state and the European Union. According to the research results, this crisis seems to be due to a lack of interest and recognition of many people’s living situations on the part of politics on the one hand and, on the other, to the perception of being unable and not having the opportunity to actively engage in decision-making that affects one’s life. It is an alarming finding in a democratic society that citizens consider themselves as passive victims of economic and political forces that are beyond their influence, and often even beyond their

comprehension. Not surprisingly, right-wing populists successfully address people as passive and as victims.

5.2. *The policy implications of the research*

It is quite obvious that the main issues mentioned above, i.e. feelings of powerlessness, lack of representation and lacking public acknowledgement of societal problems, should be major concerns for policy makers both at national and EU levels. The findings not only point to problematic forms or structures of representation and political deliberation, they also relate to the content of policy making. Many workers argued that the social democratic party of their country no longer represented the working class. In general, the ideological and programmatic differences between the mainstream parties seem to have disappeared, which adds to disenchantment with politics and leaves room for populist political entrepreneurs.

Regarding the EU level, it is not very surprising that the main political projects of the last decade or so, the single market, the European Monetary Union, the single currency and the recent enlargement, are perceived as decisions that were taken by political and economic elites and, while strongly impacting on people's lives, were neither open to influence by the majority of European citizens nor furthered their interests. Demands for protectionism, defending the welfare state and distribution politics in the guise of exclusionary policies seem to be an attractive approach to many people who are concerned about growing insecurity and high levels of social inequality.

→ *These observations suggest that at European Union level economic policy needs to be informed by social concerns and complemented more strongly by social policy.*

What is more, the respondents' views mirror the fact that politics in particular at regional and national level is increasingly constrained by the economic and political framework defined at supra-national level. Often, in an attempt to pass on the blame for detrimental developments, politicians present these constraints as being even stronger than they actually are. Under such circumstances, (populist) politicians and entrepreneurs who signal the ability and the power to act become more attractive. Directly addressing problems and offering simple solutions are core aspects of this image.

In addition, if people have never had the chance to have the experience that their voice does indeed make a difference (in the family, in school, at work or in politics), then democracy for them is nothing more than just a word denoting, in their view, a deeply corrupt society that only benefits the well-off. Right-wing populists do not only address these experiences of powerlessness, they also abuse them by pretending that there is no alternative to an authoritarian system. This is why fighting right-wing populism makes it necessary to make not only the sphere of politics but also civil society as a whole more democratic. Only if people are able to identify their own life with the operation of democracy at the grassroots will they also be able to identify with democratic ends.

Trade unions and local government need to increase possibilities for participation, not only giving people a voice but also by involving them in political processes in an active

way. Politicians and trade unionists have to realise that political representation needs to be complemented by political participation. The lack of democracy at local level and in enterprises needs to be addressed. In this context, the objective of “human dignity” could provide an orientation for analysis as well as for activities. To take an example that played an important role in the research: while restructuring is often carried out in a “socially acceptable way” (i.e. without direct lay-offs), human dignity is still often violated if, for example, people are more or less forced to accept a loss of income through early retirement, if workers have to train other workers who are going to take over their jobs in a process of relocation to a CEE country, or if workers in public services are employed, after being transferred to “human resource pools”, without being given any work.

→ *Making the various spheres of life more democratic and actively searching for ways to enhance the control people have over their lives by empowering them to directly influence conditions that impact on their living situations seems to be crucial in this respect. Consequently, the impact assessment of European-level policies should include a consideration of their effect on the actual scope of policy-making at local, regional and national level. Scope for decision-making and support needs to be given to initiatives that aim at empowering people to influence their living situation.*

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