



EUROPEAN PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC PROGRAMMES FOR ZERO UNEMPLOYMENT

ONLINE-SURVEY AND QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS: THE RESULTS

ABSTRACT

The coinciding challenges in EU politics, combating the climate crisis and pursuing a just transition, are a call to explore new concepts that help create decent employment and strengthen the social economy. This policy brief aims to shed light on European citizens' perception of the topic of unemployment, the quality of work they experience and wish for, and public policies to address these challenges. It is based on a European-wide online survey that includes comparisons between Germany, Italy, France and Belgium, and qualitative research conducted in Berlin, Germany.

The results show that while people perceive unemployment as a problem and are aware of the burden it can put on people's lives, they find that politics is concerned too little with the issue, and that there is potential for the public sector and regions to bridge the gap between enabling a green transition and a more accessible and just labour market at the same time.



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1. European legislative background

In light of the various climate and environment-related EU policies, new ideas and concepts for creating decent employment and strengthening the social economy in the European Union are attracting more and more attention. It is clear that adequate public management of the risk of becoming unemployed is needed, countering the underlying economics of unemployment, with skill-biased technological change, lower degrees of labour organisation, financialised logic of economic distribution as well as regional disparities. The latest EU investment and regulations programmes, the Green Deal, Next Generation EU (NGEU) and the Fit For 55 package entail mechanisms which speak in different ways to the question of employment and in changing its economic underpinnings. The Green Deal for example introduced the Just Transition Fund to support sectors and regions affected by the path to net zero¹, and the SURE-mechanism (temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency) was initiated alongside the NGEU². The former, however, prescribes a conditionality regarding environmental considerations without featuring any criteria on the question of decent work and employment. The Fit-for-55 package also raised concerns regarding the green transition and related job losses.³ From the perspective of the involuntarily unemployed and precariously employed, this equals a continuation of a dire situation: barriers to more secure labour markets may remain high, work contracts may continue to be short-term, both imposing, as evidence shows, high levels of stress on the individuals affected and their family and friends. At the same time, this labour market situation reinforces discrimination along the lines of gender, race, ability, economic background and sexual orientation, and feeds into frustrations with the political system.

2. International employment programme concepts

The insight that the concern for environmental sustainability needs to be combined with a vision for a just transition in labour markets has led to the development of various policies which ought to

address these different but related challenges. The most popular among such policies is the Universal Basic Income (UBI), next to the somewhat less well-known concepts of a Job Guarantee (JG) and Universal Basic Services (UBS), all of which will shortly be explored here.

The UBI⁴ recently gained popularity throughout Europe, and campaigns and policy programmes formed around its implementation. The challenge remains to introduce it as a new principle of labour markets and social security systems, rendering it politically unfeasible at the current stage of societal development.

The Job Guarantee, as it was theorised by Pavlina Tcherneva,⁵ departs from the principle that the state should grant every person, who seeks employment, a job, as private markets fail to sufficiently do so⁶. This is especially true in the green transition since private actors abstain from providing social services and environmental recreation practices to a sufficient extent due to the narrow economic motive they follow. The JG can set a floor to the wage and type of employment that jobseekers will accept, and it fills the "pockets of unemployment" each labour market faces.⁷ These pockets of unemployment can evolve from regional disparities, like the high level of youth unemployment in the southern European countries, to national specificities, like relatively low female employment in terms of working hours in Germany⁸ or to other forms of discrimination, like quite high unemployment rates under the older age groups in France.⁹

The concept of a Job Guarantee faces two major criticisms. On the one hand, the principle of voluntariness of entering the job is often put into question, and contrasted with the prioritisation of personal liberties, for example, in the UBI. On the other hand, the presumed top-down governance nature and reign in the field of collective bargaining is criticised. From evaluating real-world experimentations with the JG, neither of these criticisms can be confirmed: case studies from Austria, Belgium, France, and Greece show that participation in the programmes was voluntary and that jobs were created on the regional level without curtailing the private sector.

Nevertheless, enhanced awareness of the illiberal capture of social and labour market policies is certainly warranted.

A last concept worth mentioning is the Universal Basic Services (UBS) idea. UBS stresses that prevalent social and economic discriminations are inadequately addressed by primarily improving employment opportunities, while cost-free or low-cost provision in the areas of health care, education, legal services, housing and shelter, food, transport, and information better amount to reducing inequalities. There is evidence that implicitly tying the quality of basic services to wage incomes creates inequality by leaving out the many relevant times in life when people are not in a job. These are periods of time in which citizens are occupied with taking care of others or being taken care of, times of education and re-orientation, or ruptures in life due to migration, structural changes in labour markets or physical or psychological illnesses and disabilities.¹⁰ For all these aspects, UBS offers a convincing concept. Its caveat though is that service provision depends on the financial and personnel resources of a region and does not answer the question of how and which exact services fit the respective local context. A JG addresses this problem by increasing human resource capacity and jobs in the first place and contributes towards setting off positive second-round effects.

This short introduction of policies was to convey differences and similarities between these new labour market and social welfare concepts, while also hinting at their potential complementarity. This policy brief focuses on the JG policy due to its potential macroeconomic steering function in the green transition, and political feasibility.

Current examples of Job Guarantees in Europe and initiatives on the European level

The idea of a Job Guarantee gained more prominence within the Green New Deal proposals by the US Democrats in 2019,¹¹ as an effective employment programme in Greece in 2015 during the euro

crisis,¹² and in a public call organised by a coalition of Polish researchers, political and confessional organisations at the outset of the Corona pandemic.¹³ These initiatives inspired the founding of a European network of like-minded organisations and experts, around the grassroots organisation Our Global Moment and FEPS. In parallel, MEP Aurore Lalucq and Deputy Secretary General of the Party of European Socialists Yonnec Polet promoted the concept to various EU and regional political levels. This European network unites civil societies and grass-root organisations which show a variety of ways a Job Guarantee can speak to different regional challenges and target specific groups.

The largest active programme in Europe to date is the French Territoires Zéro Chômeur de Longue Durée (TZCLD), which counts 2,138 participants and has entered its second phase in 2021. Today, the project has 54 new regions in addition to the previous 10 ones¹⁴. The programme is run on the local level, targets the long-term unemployed and receives national funding since 2016 upon successful experimentation phases. It is accompanied by a consortium of researchers to evaluate the programme's success factors and impact.

Another well-documented case is the Austrian Job Guarantee in Mairienthal. It included 100 participants and evaluated their experience against several control groups in the years 2020 - 2024.¹⁵ Participants in the Job Guarantee showed that their perceived level of stress and financial insecurity decreased, while the subjects felt encouraged to take on potential other jobs. Jobs were tailored to the individuals and designed as meaningful to them and to the community, some getting employed in the private sector through subsidised wages, and others in the public sector, among them many in newly founded social enterprises. One major challenge the Mairienthal example was able to overcome but shared with a Job Guarantee run in Berlin with about 1,000 participants, was the transfer to the regular labour market. Furthermore, despite costs saved in terms of social benefits and the economic benefit of improved human capacities, the longer-term development of JGs as an employment mechanism currently depends on financial support at some level.

A last exemplary case is a programme set up by the "Europe, A Patient" initiative.¹⁶ It runs under the Just Transition Fund, involves many local stakeholders, and is expected to maintain or create a total of 2,200 jobs in the Polish region of Wielkopolska which is affected by a transition away from coal. Two yet more recent cases adopted the concept of zero-unemployment regions in 17 projects in South-Wallonia in Belgium, and in the City of Rome.

These examples show how this new policy concept, tailored to the needs of the future employed and the community, is able to address economic challenges which are currently not covered by the existing toolbox of public labour market management. Putting the programme on a stronger political and financial footing would require the European governance level to step in.

The policy brief proceeds as follows. In the first section, the methodology of the European survey on unemployment and public job programmes is outlined. Then come three sections, on the

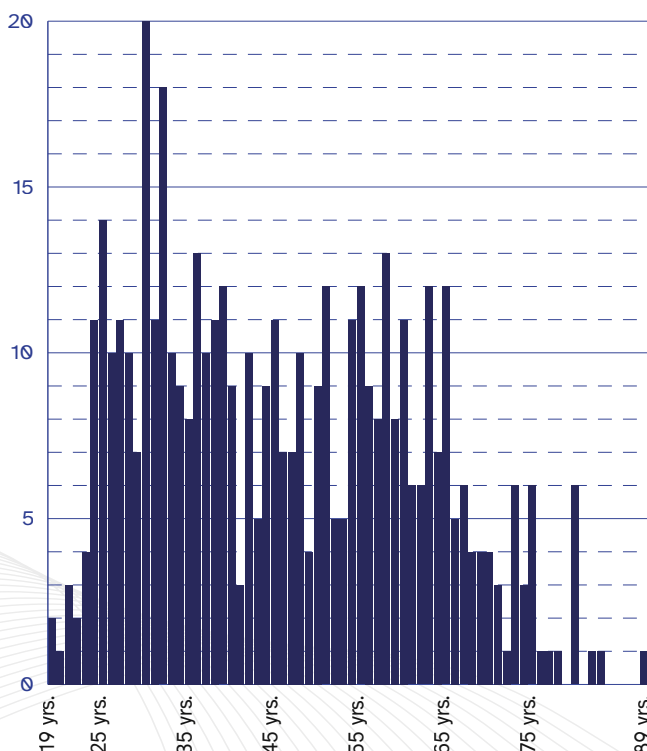


Figure 1. Age distribution. (3 participants did not disclose)
Source: own design / based on the survey results

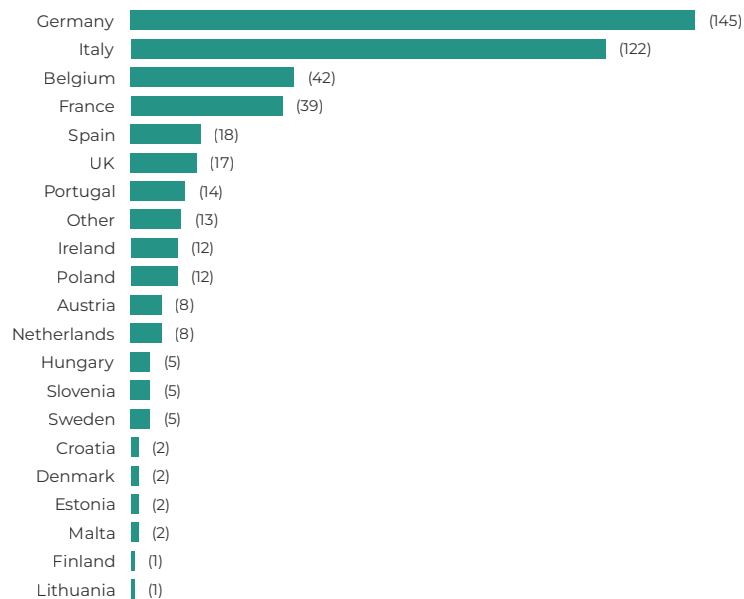


Figure 2. Countries of residence.
Source: own design / based on the survey results

perception of unemployment, its role for the respondents on the individual level, and last, their opinion on questions related to the green transition and public employment programmes. The survey results are complemented with a narrative report on the qualitative research conducted in Berlin in the summer 2022. At times, comparisons between Italy and Germany, the countries with the most respondents in the survey, are drawn, as well as to France and Belgium, for which responses were also deemed sufficiently high.

3. Methodology

The aim of the survey and qualitative study carried out by the organisation Our Global Moment was to test public opinion on questions of unemployment and potential policies to counter it. While the qualitative study was conducted in different quarters in Berlin and tailored to cover different demographic and socio-economic groups, it certainly underlies a (self-)selection bias, as does the larger-N survey. The assumption behind both surveys was that employment might not be perceived as a central political concern anymore. Through decades of deregulation of labour markets, people may have

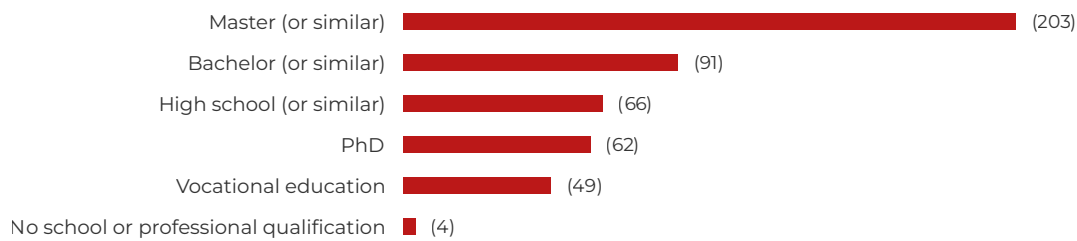


Figure 3. Highest formal education.
Source: own design / based on the survey results

come to accept the conditions under which they and others work and may regard it as politically too conflictive or personally too stressful to have stronger views on it. This assumption, as readers will see, did not prove to be correct. Another aspect that was built into both surveys was to shortly introduce the Job Guarantee as a concept, as it is currently not well-known to people, and to only then ask questions about it. It thus was clear that we were interested in a specific opinion on this policy, rather than getting responses on a variety of possible labour market policies.

The online survey was taken by 475 people. 145 named Germany as their country of residence, 122 Italy. 42 people living in Belgium answered the survey, and 39 were living in France. Other countries of residence that were named included Spain (18), UK (17), Portugal (14), Ireland (12), Poland (12), Netherlands (8), Austria (8), Hungary (5), Sweden (5) and Slovenia (5). The countries of origin were somewhat more numerous, with Germany and Belgium as the main countries of immigration among survey participants. 57% of the respondents identified as male, 38% as female. Two respondents identified as transgender, two as transgender and non-binary, five as non-binary, one as non-binary and male, one as non-binary and female, one person marked their gender as not listed and eleven preferred not to say. All age groups between 25 and 64 were fairly equally represented (17-19%), with a slightly higher participation by the age group of 25- to 34-year-old (25%) and a lower participation of people in the younger middle-age groups. 14% of the surveyed finished high school,

10% acquired vocational training (or similar), and 19% have a Bachelor's degree (or similar) as their highest degree respectively. 43% of participants indicated to hold a Master's degree (or similar) and 13% a PhD. 1% had no school or professional qualification. 234 respondents work full-time, 82 part-time, 53 are retired, 48 self-employed and 42 in education/training, 17 are doing an internship and 30 are volunteers (with some in more than in one type of occupation). Among the participants 28 are unemployed, 14 are not able to work in general or due to health reasons. 10 work at home and/or in the family.

The survey sample is thus skewed towards higher education and more male participants, while the

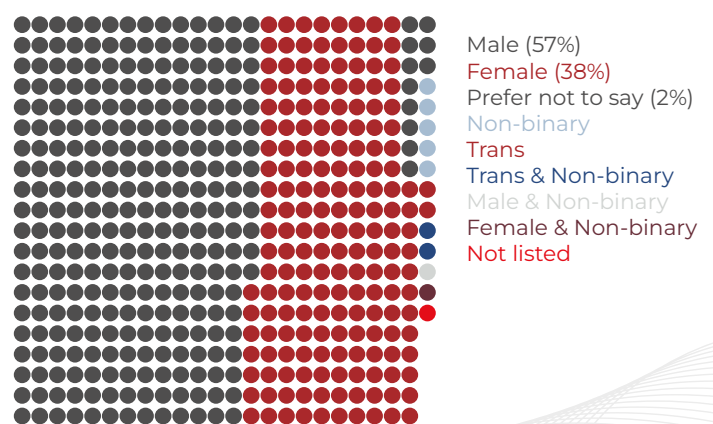


Figure 4. Gender distribution.
Source: own design / based on the survey results

Do you regard unemployment as a pressing issue in general? (Italy n=122; Germany n=145)

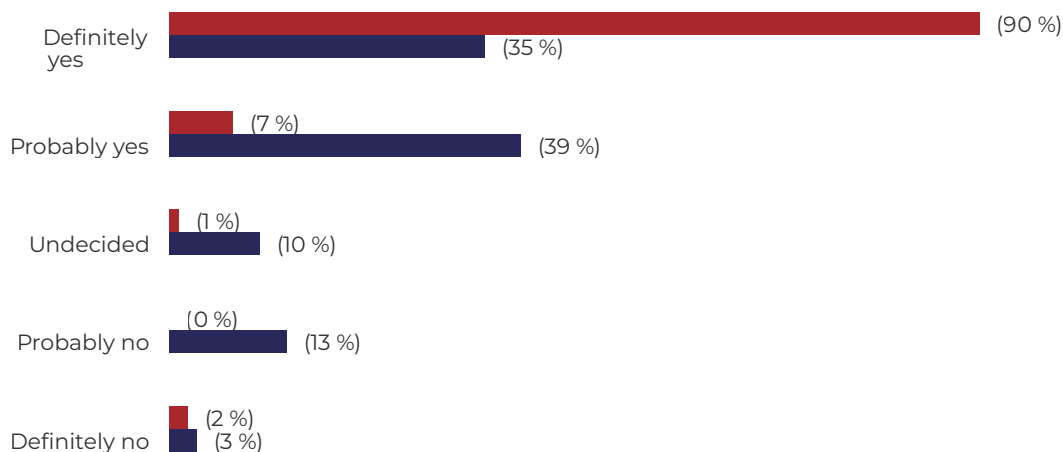


Figure 5. Perception of unemployment as a pressing issue in general.
Source: own design / based on the survey results

middle age groups are a little less represented. For an explorative evaluation, we nevertheless regard the distribution as sufficiently diverse to present some tentative results.

4. Perception of unemployment

The first survey section involved questions on the perception of unemployment in general, and regarding regional and group-specific situations. 85% of overall participants regard unemployment as a pressing issue in general and 71% as an issue in their region. Long-term unemployment is perceived as a slightly bigger problem by survey participants (76%) than youth unemployment (71%).

By comparing the perspectives of Germany and Italy, the two countries with the highest number of respondents (Germany = 145; Italy = 122), a more nuanced perspective can be offered. **A clear majority of 90% of the respondents in Italy expressed strong concern about the issue of unemployment in**

general and another 7% to some extent. In Germany, only 35% of interviewees revealed a deeper worry about unemployment, followed by 39% expressing some concern about it.

When it comes to youth and long-term unemployment, the trend is similar. While in Germany, 49% perceive youth unemployment as a problem, a majority of 93% express a clear unease about this subject in Italy. The same tendency can be observed regarding long-term unemployment, which 92% see as a problem in Italy, and 60% of respondents in Germany.

When asked for reasons for the endurance of unemployment, the strongest support was given by all survey participants to the statements "there is a mismatch in what people want to work and work offered" (30% fully agree, 51% rather agree) and "politicians care too little about creating good employment" (39% fully agree, 37% rather agree). **The lack of recognition of informal and non-formal education, or overseas qualifications (34%**

Results of qualitative research part I: perceptions of unemployment in Berlin

In the summer of 2022, members of the grassroots organisation Our Global Moment set out to gauge public opinion on unemployment by talking to people in the streets of Berlin.

The aim of the survey was to gather accounts of experiences in the labour market as well as political attitudes towards the issue. The results of the total of 37 interviews with 65 people aged about 18-65 provide insights into different areas of labour market experience, especially on the topics of unemployment, job search and working conditions.

The issue of a decent salary

After only a few interviews, it turned out that the issue of pay was a central aspect in the evaluation of a job and its quality. The desire for fair pay for the work done was mentioned in almost every interview, either as a positive demand or in the form of reports of personal experiences of unfairness. Several respondents complained that they felt they were underpaid in their current or previous jobs. The terms "good" and "fair" pay were used most frequently. A 38-year-old man who was unemployed at the time of the interview explained this situation by saying that the salary should be enough to afford a vacation or the purchase of durables. As a jobseeker, he was apt to "get his hands dirty" but there had to be a financial incentive to do so. The issue of a decent salary was particularly emphasised by a woman who had faced unemployment in the past when she was single. Today, she says, she is employed again as a shop assistant in a drug store, but she observes how difficult it is for other women in her workplace to get by on such a low salary. In her opinion, this is the reason why raising children is not compatible with some professions. A similar criticism was voiced in a discussion with a group of young care workers. In the care sector, according to the interviewed, the situation is aggravated by the fact that it is not easy to strike against low wages because of the responsibility for the patients. The bonuses paid to the nurses interviewed during the Corona pandemic as compensation for increased workload were perceived by them as "ridiculous".

In addition to the financial aspect, other criteria were also mentioned with regard to the quality of the job. Both commuting to work and working hours were voiced as decisive factors in evaluating a job in the survey. It was also found that different working conditions were weighed up against one another. For example, a confectioner and single mother reported that her commute was very long, but this was offset by good pay and her interest in the task. She added that childcare facilities were inadequate and that more staff was needed. This criticism was echoed by a young father who felt that more childcare services were needed to relieve the burden on working parents. For him, a particular difficulty of the Corona pandemic was that kindergartens and nurseries had to be temporarily closed.

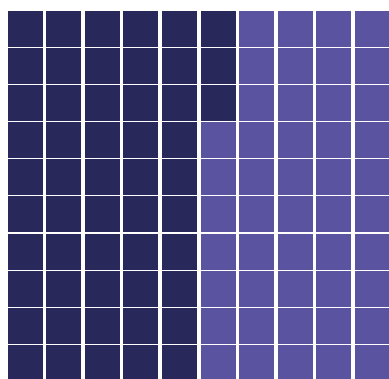
Work that makes sick

The following example illustrates that work can also start being an unanticipated burden on people's health. The seriousness of a psychologically stressful work situation was highlighted by a young man who developed depression as a result of his last job. Initially, as an event manager, he was occasionally asked to work several hours longer than originally agreed. This did not remain the exception, however, but became a regular requirement because the employer refused to take on additional staff. When the working conditions became unbearable for the young man and he began to feel very unwell before the start of his shift, he first went to his family doctor and asked him to write him off sick. This allowed him to escape the situation for a while, but some time later he decided to quit. However, the experience of unemployment also proved to be stressful for the 30-year-old man: for him, work meant "taking part in life and society". Being unemployed made him feel a deficit in this regard. It was important for him to emphasise that "working conditions have a direct influence on health and must therefore be good".

A (lacking) feeling of purpose at the workplace

The aspect of experiencing a sense of purpose at work further demonstrated that the personal relationship with one's own job can have both positive and negative effects on psychological well-being. The pursuit of meaningful work was repeatedly mentioned as a desirable ideal, and was usually contrasted with the respondents' current work situation. One woman reported that she had previously been employed in a counselling centre for a non-profit organisation. She particularly liked the fact that it made her feel "good" to be doing something that she considered to be purposeful. She was currently looking for work and could see herself doing something similar in the future. Another interviewee was working in the marketing department of a start-up company at the time of the interview and summed up that her work in this area had limited meaning but provided her with a high salary and good working conditions. In her opinion, some companies are simply "too big to fail", despite the "often meaningless" activities. Besides the need to do something meaningful with one's work, the opportunity to experience self-efficacy and social recognition were mentioned as measures of good work.

Have you ever suffered from health problems (psychological and/or physical) due to your work? (n=475)



Yes (53%)
No (47%)

Figure 6. Health problems due to work.
Source: own design / based on the survey results

fully agree, 35% rather agree), was a reason for unemployment, participants find. Working hours which do not match family and other relevant obligations can also inhibit people from regularly participating in labour markets (28% fully agree, 44% rather agree). Respondents also perceive that there is a lack of employment opportunities in the area where one lives (24% fully agree, 37% rather agree). High regulation of labour markets was rarely found to be an obstacle (29% rather *disagree*, 27% strongly *disagree*).

Responses to the first section show that there is an awareness of unemployment as a politically relevant issue. The country comparison reveals a sense of urgency in the case of Italy, while participants from Germany are less concerned, likely due to their more comfortable labour market situation. More surprising answers on potential reasons for unemployment are that survey participants found a lack of recognition of qualifications to be a cause, as well as inflexible working hours. This bears potential for political programmes and employers' policies to create the conditions for improving peoples' economic and social situation. Certification of existing and additional skills for example has also

been an integral part of the Greek Job Guarantee programme¹⁷, and can be considered relevant for the overall design of such a policy.

Perception of unemployment regarding participant's own experience

The next section of the survey asked for people's own experiences with unemployment and the working conditions they face and have faced. Here results should be read against the backdrop of a relatively high level of education of survey respondents and higher than average employment numbers, with only 28 persons being unemployed, and 14 not being able to work in general or due to health issues. **52% of respondents indicated to have been negatively affected by unemployment themselves, while 81% of respondents affirmed the question asking for a negative impact on people they know.** The satisfaction with their current employment was reported as quite high (279 answered their current/past job is/was good or good enough). Factors weighing in negatively were indicated as being too little staff for too many tasks (167), low payment (138) and long working days (116) (multiple

Do you think the introduction of a publicly funded job program makes sense? (n=475)



Figure 7. Introduction of a publicly funded job programme: Does it make sense?
Source: own design / based on the survey results

answers possible). **A relatively large proportion of survey participants also said they were having health problems related to their work (53%).** Out of these 53% facing health problems, 60% said to prefer working part-time rather than full-time.

While the bulk of survey participants (234) works full-time and 82 work part-time or are self-employed (48), 50% wish to work full-time, and 50% prefer to work part-time. The difference regarding country levels is quite pronounced. In Germany 77% would prefer to work part-time, while this is different in Italy, where 74% said to prefer working full-time, 62% in France and 55% in Belgium. Also, 55% of respondents with children answered that they would rather work full-time, while people without children chose part-time (55%) over full-time (45%). There is thus reason to suggest that the choice of working time is also tied to financial reasons.

Obstacles when entering the labour market

The survey was furthermore interested in the obstacles people face when trying to enter the job market. Out of a longer list of potential barriers to find employment, five categories stood out, being

1) low pay, 2) limited regional job offers, 3) high entrance competition, 4) short-term employment and 5) discrimination. The results were especially interesting to look at in a country comparison, even though they should be taken with a grain of salt due to a limited number of survey participants in the case of Belgium and France. **38% of respondents in Belgium and 37% in Germany said that they were only offered short-term employment contracts**, while that was somewhat less of an issue in France (28%) and Italy (25%). **45% of survey participants living in Belgium and 44% in Germany expressed that their expected pay was very low.** Last, 20% of respondents in Germany, and 17% in France, indicated to have faced discrimination according to gender, ethnicity, age, disability or other when trying to enter the labour market, while that percentage was reported as lower in Belgium (14%) and Italy (7%).

A potential of job creation in rural areas?

The majority of respondents, both in Italy (80%) and Germany (77%), live in urban areas. Therefore, the question of whether they would consider moving to rural areas if employment opportunities were available there becomes particularly revealing.

A stunning majority of 56% of people living in cities in Italy expressed their preference to relocate to rural areas, while this percentage of people stands at 26% in Germany. Most people in Germany were rather undecided (36%), and 30% ruled out such an option. When looking at the results of France and Belgium, answers were similar to the German case. With the majority in Belgium (83%) and France (82%) living in cities, we find that 31% of Belgian respondents would consider moving to rural areas while 29% would not, and 25% of French respondents consider this as an option and 28% do not.

Comparing the results shows some relevant variation based on the corresponding country. Therefore, it becomes crucial to examine further regional differences rather than solely relying on general trends when thinking about job creation in rural areas. A surprising fact is the percentage of Italians who would be interested in moving to rural areas, which highlights the potential for local job creation.

5. Perception of a Job Guarantee

A third section of the online survey asked for people’s perceptions on how politics could respond to unemployment and labour market challenges in the green transition. **When asked for the agents to drive the transition to a greener economy (multiple answer question), most participants see the public sector (414) at the switch** while a roughly equal important role was given to both, the private sector (294) and municipalities (289) – the latter in fact also being part of the public sector. Somewhat less relevance was given to communities (187), which means the role that neighbourhoods, family and friends networks and other such groups can play, and to the non-profit sector (170). In a country comparison, German and Belgian survey participants expressed higher favour for the public sector as a driver of the transition than did respondents in Italy and France.

The survey then asked which sectors participants saw as most relevant to create jobs in (multiple answer section). Most needs were seen in the area of care jobs, followed by green and blue jobs.

Community and emergency jobs earned somewhat less support, as did the ones in the cultural area.

Evaluate the following job categories which have been suggested for a publicly funded jobs program according to their relevance for the society and economy.

(Small relevance, rather small, neutral, rather large, large)

Care Jobs	Strengthening programmes that attend to children, people with disabilities, families, the elderly, at-risk youths, and migrants	89%
Green Jobs	Environmental conservation, increasing the energy efficiency of buildings and housing, sustainable food supply	87%
Blue Jobs	Water conservation, preventing contamination, waters etc.	84%
Community Jobs	Repairing streets and sidewalks; modernising of schools and other public community-serving facilities and areas	81%
Emergency jobs	Expanding emergency preparedness, supporting relief and recovery from natural and community disasters	78%
Cultural Jobs	Producing, rehabilitating, maintaining works of public art, including creative, artistic, or cultural works	61%

Table 1. Job categories and participants’ perception of relevance for potential publicly funded job programmes. Percentages are the sum of rather large + large. Source: own design / based on the survey results

The next question was concerned with the support for a publicly funded job programme. In the context of some introductory notes to this section in the survey as well as the prior question which introduced examples of such jobs, the "publicly funded programme" can also be read as support for a Job Guarantee. This though does not have to necessarily be the case, and respondents may think of any kind of public job programme. Viewed against this backdrop, 86% of overall respondents favoured such a programme, and 89% of unemployed survey participants. The strongest

Results of qualitative research part II: perceptions of a potential Job Guarantee programme

Another important component of the on-site survey was the collection of attitudes and opinions towards the subject of the Job Guarantee. Since none of the 65 respondents had previously heard of the concept, the idea of a European Job Guarantee was first roughly sketched out. This was meant to convey the core elements of this economic policy approach to the respondents. Accordingly, the programme was presented as an EU-funded public initiative to combat long-term unemployment by creating adequately paid jobs in the areas of green transition, care, and child and youth care in the local economy. The interviewees were then given the opportunity to express their initial thoughts and questions.

The term "Job Guarantee" triggers positive responses

Nearly all interviewees appeared to be in favour of the concept. The terms "good" and "reasonable" were most frequently mentioned among the positive responses. To be sure, some people expressed scepticism about the actual feasibility of introducing a Job Guarantee, as they felt such a programme would face resistance due to its transformative potential. They considered an introduction to be "unrealistic." Nevertheless, they evaluated the concept positively in terms of its content. In particular, the Job Guarantee's intended strengthening of the environmental protection, care and childcare sectors, as well as its claim to effectively combat long-term unemployment, were seen as having benefits for society as a whole. "Good for the people, good for the community," was the verdict of a 32-year-old industrial worker for whom climate projects and environmental protection had become more important since he had become a father. He now wanted to leave the environment intact for future generations. These statements exemplify an awareness that also emerged in conversations with other interviewees. For example, a 62-year-old man who was considered a jobseeker at the time of the interview, and who had worked as a cemetery gardener in the past reported that "although he was not a supporter of the Greens", he thought environmental protection was important. He could see himself doing lighter gardening work as part of a Job Guarantee programme because he liked outdoor work. A young woman, whose current field of work is promoting education through art projects in schools, saw green transition work as "future-oriented jobs" for which she felt there would be a "new appreciation" and social recognition. Several interviewees also saw a need for additional jobs in the care sector. According to the group of young caregivers interviewed, even the assumption of smaller auxiliary tasks, such as disinfecting surfaces, by additional personnel would result in a noticeable reduction in workload. The

problem of low pay and understaffing in the care sector was also mentioned by people who did not work in this field themselves. One young civil engineer felt that more jobs needed to be created in this area. A Job Guarantee scheme would have to constructively address the poor working conditions that often prevail in Germany. Similar sentiments were expressed by a group of young adults from Poland who were visiting Berlin at the time of the interview. They complained that the care sector in Poland had been extremely neglected and that personnel and financial resources were urgently needed. A 32-year-old civil servant in the public sector expressed his disappointment with the lack of caregivers and care options: "It's clear that there is a need for more people and more money in the social sector, but nothing is happening." He criticised the high level of privatisation in the public sector and wished for alternative funding options.

Just another employment programme? Concerns for the quality of job programmes

In addition to positive reactions to the idea of a European Job Guarantee Programme, questions and concerns were also raised, some of which emerged as recurring core issues. In part, they could be ascribed to experiences interviewees had made on their own on the labour market. For example, the issue of pay formed a central theme here as well – mostly as a fear of low pay levels, which the interviewees were familiar with either from previous programmes run by the Job Centre, Germany's unemployment agency, or from working in the private sector. "You have to feel like you're treated fairly," stated a 42-year-old market worker regarding pay under the featured programme, for which he expressed high interest. In one case, a 38-year-old skilled heating engineer explained how he became homeless and unemployed due to a chain of events. Since then, he had been living on the streets and earning his money by selling magazines. He was also very interested in the Job Guarantee concept, especially in the creation of jobs in the environmental and climate protection sectors. Due to his professional expertise, he noticed that water cycles in German cities were often designed in an ecologically inefficient way and lead to waste of water resources. But his personal wish to be able to take up a job again and thus generate a regular income started at a much lower level: to avoid a slip into criminality, he hoped to soon have enough money available on a regular basis through legal channels to improve his current situation.

How to safeguard sufficient training for a job?

Many of the questions asked by the interviewees on the topic of a Job Guarantee concerned the qualification for taking up a placed job. They wanted to know how the

problem of preparing people for a new job in a short period of time would be solved under the Job Guarantee. One interviewee also pointed out that a job must fit the individual person in order to do justice to their individuality. The fact that a person's health is a decisive criterion for this was illustrated by the comment of an older interviewee that physically demanding activities are ruled out for him because of an existing illness. In the area of care provision in particular, it became clear that great importance was attached here to the extent to which a person is suitable for a field of activity. This was reflected in the repeated statement that although work in care was indispensable to society, one could not imagine working in this field oneself. A 45-year-old accountant emphasised the importance of screening mechanisms to select suitable workers. In her opinion, only people who are appropriately qualified and empathetic should work as care providers. She supported her point of view by describing a negative experience during her own hospital stay. She thought it was important that the work be carried out with pleasure, as this was crucial for the quality of care and made a noticeable difference to the people being cared for.

How to account for the political context of job programme implementation

That the aspects of self-determination and voluntariness are also of great importance for the idea of a European Job Guarantee is shown by the concern expressed in various interviews about the implementation of a distorted version of the Job Guarantee as a coercive measure for job creation. In terms of content, the statements ranged between two levels: first, the fear of being forced to take a government-assigned job if one loses one's current employment, and second, the concern of being transferred to another workplace within the programme on official orders. "There shouldn't be pressure like there is now at the Job Centre," stated one interviewee, who was currently unemployed. One comment, made by the interviewed group of young adults from Poland, suggests a particular reason why the element of voluntariness as a feature of the Job Guarantee concept needs to be unequivocally emphasised in the public presentation: according to them, the historical experience of an authoritarian state system is still present in many European countries, which is why state programmes are often met with mistrust.

A publicly funded job program could be implemented on a regional, a national or European level. Which would you prefer?

On which level (regional, national or EU) do you think the job program could be realistically implemented? (n=445)

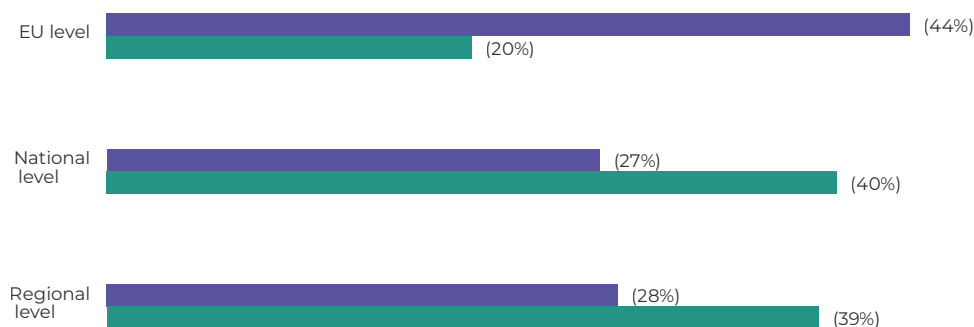


Figure 8. Preferred and as more realistically perceived policy level for the introduction of a publicly funded job programme such as the Job Guarantee. Percentage of survey participants living in EU countries. Source: own design / based on the survey results

support for the idea came from France (64% strong support, 26% somewhat support) and Belgium (45% strong support, 40% somewhat support) – countries in which, interestingly, zero unemployment initiatives are already implemented and tested out. This is followed by Italy (52% strong support, 39% somewhat support) and Germany (37% strong support, 39% somewhat support).

Last, the surveyed could respond to the question, whether they would prefer the implementation of a job creation programme on the European, national or regional level. Despite the wish of the majority to implement it on the EU level (44% of 445 EU-residents), a minority of 20% sees it as realistic. Rather, most respondents living in the EU perceive the national level as a realistic entity of implementation (40%) alongside the regions (39%). The percentage of people preferring an implementation on the regional level is slightly higher (28%) than the ones who prefer seeing it realised at the national level (27%).

Open answer section

The online survey contained three open-answer sections for participants to comment on further aspects raised by the survey and to include perspectives not covered by the questions. Three themes that came up most when people were asked for their own experiences in the workplace, were bad management (e.g. bad communication, no recognition, no fixed schedule), little opportunities for training or promotion, and bad working conditions in the care sector. On the topic of employment in general, people commented again on the question of care jobs, and how they should be upgraded due to their importance. Respondents suggested having a better and real inclusion for disabled people. Alternative concepts were suggested, such as Public Service Employment, the Unconditional Basic Income, the 4-day-week, or the demand to improve public transport in rural areas, and to generally make rural areas more attractive. Some also suggested to focus on sufficient income/fair pay (minimum wage), rather than a Job Guarantee. Last, more and better,

equal, life-long learning and training opportunities were mentioned more than once. On the overall survey, respondents commented to consider the universal basic income, and to increase public funding available for education. Some hinted at the Zero Unemployment region model as a positive example for implementation on the European level. Others stressed that the remuneration of a JG programme has to be competitive with the private sector, inhibiting wage dumping, and that it has to come without penalties or sanctions.

6. Conclusion

This policy brief set out to explore EU citizens' level of problem awareness on the issue of unemployment, the way it affects themselves, and possible political responses to it. It departed from an understanding that EU, national and regional politics need to address the climate crisis alongside the topic of decent and future-oriented employment, and that the Job Guarantee offers an attractive and feasible concept in this regard. The study was based on an online survey with 475 respondents from at least 24 European countries, with most of them either being residents in Germany or Italy, followed by Belgium and France. The online survey was complemented by a prior qualitative study in the city of Berlin to contextualise and crosscheck some of the responses and attitudes that the quantitative part yielded.

The results of the online survey suggest that many people regard unemployment as a relevant issue that is, due to different reasons, currently too little addressed. Economic policies can respond to those reasons quite directly as well as over the longer term. The latter concerns the challenge that employment wishes may diverge from employment possibilities, and that time flexibilities in jobs are not well suited to other obligations, such as family care, phases of education or reorientation. The more easily attainable policies would be making employment a greater concern in general and increasing the recognition of other formal and informal experiences for job qualifications, which respondents found to be major reasons for unemployment. It is not surprising, but still telling, that a country comparison between Italy

and Germany yielded the finding that unemployment is a greater concern in Italy, including youth and long-term unemployment, than in Germany. This hints at higher unemployment rates in Italy as well as respondents' focus on national rather than European political matters.

The next set of findings concerned the personal experience with unemployment and perception of participants' (past) employment situations. The evaluation showed that a considerable number of respondents had either been negatively affected by unemployment themselves or had people in their closer environment facing this situation. Over half of them reported to have health problems related to their work. **Both findings match the prior picture that people find questions of employment and unemployment to be quite central to their lives, while the negative health effects are quite surprising outcome and call for a change.** Effects detrimental to one's health at the workplace may originate from too many tasks, too long working hours or bad pay, as another survey question showed. **People apparently also face a trade-off when considering reducing working hours: the wish for part-time rather resonates with groups that are likely to have higher incomes.**

The survey furthermore explored, from the perspective of the respondents, two issues that EU economic policies could address: entrance barriers to labour markets and work location. In a country comparison, it was firstly found that respondents in Germany and Belgium, more than in France or Italy, had faced wages that were so low as to put them off, were offered work with only short-term contracts and experienced discrimination. These results tentatively match the effects of the large low-wage sector in Germany, while due to the somewhat limited number of respondents per country, results should also be taken with a grain of salt. Second, the survey also found that a high percentage of people residing in Italy would move to rural areas if employment was offered there. In Germany, France and Belgium responses were more mixed, nevertheless suggesting a potential for job creation in rural areas, with programmes such as the Job Guarantee.

Taken together and complemented with the personal notes from the 37 qualitative interviews in Berlin, the research shows that once people's attention is directed to the topic of employment, they have a lot to report on. The strain that people are confronted with at their workplaces became even more obvious in the conversations with respondents in Berlin, covering a variety of socio-demographic groups who spoke about their experiences in the care sector, retail sector, or as unemployed, shaken by unexpected occurrences in their lives. **The country comparison in this survey also clearly shows the differences in the awareness of the problem, and the conclusions people draw from this, for example, with regard to working hour commitments and preferred location of workplace (city/country).** Potential for better employment possibilities is highlighted in the areas of more flexible working hours, more attractive pay, better recognition of skills, as well as an exploration of socially meaningful employment through the state.

Summarising the findings on respondents' perspective of public programmes to address unemployment, three results can be highlighted:

First, when asked to choose central drivers for the needed green transition, **the public sector gained much more support than the private sector.**

Second, respondents showed a **great openness to a publicly funded job programme** which in the context of the survey can be understood as being support for a Job Guarantee. The types of jobs which would find the most support under this umbrella by respondents were in the care, green and blue (water conservation) sectors.

Third, an **implementation of the programme on the EU level was preferred while not seen as the most realistic option**, which also hints at an openness to grant a larger role to this political level. Responses in the qualitative survey suggested that while people welcomed the idea and thought of it as logical or meaningful, there were **some doubts regarding its non-punitive character and aptness from the perspective of tasks demanded.**

European survey on the perception of unemployment and publicly funded jobs

[Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish]

The Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) is undertaking research on the perceptions of unemployment, potential state employment programs and own working conditions related to a green transition. The goal of the survey is to improve policies, from the regional to the European level, which support the living conditions of people. The data will be handled confidentially and publicized in an anonymized form. The survey takes about 7 - 10 minutes. Thank you for your time!

Section A: Perception of unemployment and issues regarding the green transition.

<i>Answer the question on the scale of 1 (definitely no) to 5 (definitely yes)</i>	Definitely no	Probably no	Undecided	Probably yes	Definitely yes
1. Do you regard unemployment as a pressing issue in general?					
2. Is unemployment an issue in your region?					
3. Is youth unemployment an issue in your region?					
4. Is long-term unemployment an issue in your region?					

5. What do you think are the main reasons for unemployment?

<i>Evaluate each statement on the scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (fully agree)</i>	Strongly disagree	Rather disagree	Neutral	Rather agree	Fully agree
The quality of working conditions has been decreasing, so that people drop out of employment.					
Lack of employment opportunities in the area.					
There is a mismatch between what people want to work and jobs in the labor market.					
Politicians care too little about creating good employment.					

Working hours do not match family and other relevant obligations, so that job opportunities are not seized.					
Lack of recognition of experience obtained in non-formal and informal education, or overseas qualifications.					
Markets are too strongly regulated for more job opportunities to emerge.					

<i>Check all that apply</i>	6. Whom do you expect to stabilize incomes in times of economic challenges like currently?	7. Who should be the main driver in the transition to a greener economy?
Private sector (businesses etc.)		
Public sector (except municipalities)		
Municipalities		
Non-profit private sector (like NGOs)		
Communities (neighborhoods, family etc.)		

<i>Check all that apply</i>	8. In which sector do you see the most difficulty for your country to move towards a greener economy? (multiple choice)	9. In which sector do you see the largest potential for your country to move towards a greener economy? (multiple choice)
Agriculture		
Primary goods (fuel etc.)		
Energy production		
Industry		
Manufacturing sector		
Care and health sector		
Financial sector		
Education, social and youth work		
Infrastructure (transport, housing, utilities)		

Section B: Affectedness by unemployment

10. Have you ever been negatively affected by unemployment?

Choose one of the following answers

Yes

No

11. Has someone close to you ever been negatively affected by unemployment?

Choose one of the following answers

- Yes
- No

12. Have you ever suffered from health problems (psychological and/or physical) due to your work?

Choose one of the following answers

- Yes
- No

13. Which obstacles have you faced when entering (or trying to enter) the labor market?

Choose one or more of the following answers

- None
- Limited job offers in the area where I live
- Longer absence from employment was penalized in the application process
- I did not have sufficient skills
- Strong competition when entering the labor market
- The job did not recognise my qualifications or skills obtained overseas
- The job did not recognise my non-formal education (e.g. caring) or volunteering experience
- Working hours did not match my family or other relevant obligations
- The job did not offer social benefits i.e. paternal leave, care leave, a pension
- Work sponsorship/work permits were not provided
- I only got into short-term employment contracts
- The pay offered was very low
- No pay was offered (i.e. internships in the open labour market)
- Discrimination (gender, ethnicity, age, disability, other)

14. Do you experience your current job (if unemployed or retired, past job) as meaningful?

Choose one of the following answers

- Definitely no
- Probably no
- Undecided
- Probably yes
- Definitely yes

15. What are your more general perceptions on issues related to your current job, or past job?

Check all that apply

- My current/past job is/was good or good enough
- Long commute
- Low payment
- Meaningless task
- Supervisor relation not good
- Team atmosphere not good
- Long working days
- Racism/sexism/ableism/ageism
- Too little staff for too many tasks
- Other

If "Other": Please specify:

[Free text field]

16. Which working model would you prefer, if you were guaranteed a fair wage?

Choose one of the following answers

- Work full time
- Work part time

17. Do you live in a rural area or in the city?

Choose one of the following answers

- City
- Rural area

If "city": 17a. Would you move to a rural area if you could get a job there?

Choose one of the following answers

- Definitely no
- Probably no
- Undecided
- Probably yes
- Definitely yes

18. What role would you ideally give employment in your life and in society?

<i>Evaluate each statement on the scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (fully agree)</i>	Strongly disagree	Rather disagree	Undecided	Rather agree	Fully agree
Employment opportunities should be sufficient to pay for spending and well-being.					
Employment should leave enough room for engaging in other activities, like communal engagement.					
Employment status and wages are a mostly just reflection of people's contribution to society.					
Other activities, like caring for children and elders, or engaging in the neighbourhood are an equal contribution to society like employment.					
Formal employment will be less important in the future, due to changes in labor markets like digitization, firm structure, different life models etc.					
Stable employment should be a major concern for politicians (also) in the future.					

19. Do you have other thoughts or comments regarding issues related to jobs and (un-)employment?

[Free text field]

Section C: Publicly funded job program

Some academics and public figures have called for the introduction of a publicly funded job program which would grant everyone who is in need of employment a decently-paid job in the green and social sectors.

20. Evaluate the following job categories which have been suggested for a publicly funded jobs programme according to their relevance for the society and economy.

<i>Evaluate area on the scale of 1 (small) to 5 (large)</i>	Small	Rather small	Neutral	Rather large	Large
Green jobs: environmental conservation, increasing the energy efficiency of buildings and housing; sustainable food supply.					
Blue jobs: water conservation, preventing contamination, protecting and restoring forests, waters etc.					
Care jobs: Strengthening programs that attend to children, people with disabilities, families, the elderly, at-risk youths, and migrants.					
Community jobs: Repairing streets and sidewalks; modernizing of schools and other public community-serving facilities and areas.					
Cultural and Artistic jobs: Producing, rehabilitating, maintaining works of public art, including creative, artistic, or cultural works.					
Emergency jobs: Expanding emergency preparedness, supporting relief and recovery from natural and community disasters.					

21. A publicly funded job program could be implemented on a regional, a national or European level. Which would you prefer?

Choose one of the following answers

- EU level
- National level
- Regional level

22. On which level (regional, national or EU) do you think the job program could be realistically implemented?

Choose one of the following answers

- EU level
- National level
- Regional level

23. Do you think the introduction of a publicly funded job program makes sense?

Choose one of the following answers

- Definitely no
- Probably no
- Undecided
- Probably yes
- Definitely yes

24. Which of the following names for such a program appeals more to you?

Choose one of the following answers

[English survey]

- A European Initiative for Zero Unemployment Regions
- A European Job Creation Initiative
- A European Initiative for Employment Creation
- A European Job Guarantee

[German survey]

- Eine Europäische Initiative für Regionen ohne Arbeitslosigkeit
- Eine Europäische Initiative zur Schaffung von Arbeitsplätzen
- Eine Europäische Beschäftigungsinitiative
- Eine Europäische Jobgarantie

[Spanish survey]

- Iniciativa Europea para las Regiones Cero Desempleo
- Iniciativa Europea para la Creación de Empleo
- Garantía Europea de Empleo

[French survey]

- Une initiative européenne pour des régions sans chômage
- Une initiative pour une création d'emplois européenne
- Une initiative européenne pour la création d'emplois
- Une garantie européenne de l'emploi

[Italian survey]

- Un'iniziativa europea per la disoccupazione zero nelle regioni
- Un'iniziativa europea per la creazione di posti di lavoro
- Un'iniziativa europea per la creazione di impiego
- Una garanzia europea per l'occupazione

[Dutch survey]

- Een Europees initiatief voor regio's zonder werkloosheid
- Een Europees jobcreatie initiatief
- Een Europees initiatief voor het scheppen van werkgelegenheid
- Een Europese jobgarantie

[Polish survey]

- Europejska Inicjatywa Regionów Zerowego Bezrobocia
- Europejska Inicjatywa Tworzenia Miejsc Pracy
- Europejska Inicjatywa na Rzecz Tworzenia Zatrudnienia
- Europejska Gwarancja Zatrudnienia

[Portuguese survey]

- Uma Iniciativa Europeia para Regiões de Desemprego Zero
- Uma Iniciativa Europeia para a Criação de Emprego
- Uma Iniciativa Europeia para a Criação de Empregabilidade
- Uma Garantia de Emprego Europeia

Section D: Socio-Demographic Questions

25. Which country do you currently live in?

Choose one of the following answers

Austria	Czech Republic	Germany	Latvia	Norway	Slovenia
Belgium	Denmark	Greece	Lithuania	Poland	Spain
Bulgaria	Estonia	Hungary	Luxembourg	Portugal	Sweden
Croatia	Finland	Ireland	Malta	Romania	UK
Cyprus	France	Italy	Netherlands	Slovakia	Other

26. In which administrative or federated region do you live in your country?

Example: for Italy, Lazio. For Germany, North-Rhine Westphalia

[Free text field]

27. In which city or town do you live?

[Free text field]

28. In which country were you born?

Choose one of the following answers

Austria	Czech Republic	Germany	Latvia	Norway	Slovenia
Belgium	Denmark	Greece	Lithuania	Poland	Spain
Bulgaria	Estonia	Hungary	Luxembourg	Portugal	Sweden
Croatia	Finland	Ireland	Malta	Romania	UK
Cyprus	France	Italy	Netherlands	Slovakia	Other

29. How well do you speak the official language(s) of the country you are currently living in?

Choose one of the following answers

Not at all
Beginner
Good
Professional working
Native/bilingual

30. What is your age?

Enter a number
[Free text field]

31. What is your marital status?

Check all that apply
Single
Married
Divorced
Widowed
Civil partnership

32. What is your gender?

Check all that apply
Female
Male
Transgender
Non-binary
Not listed here
Prefer not say

33. Do you have children?

Choose one of the following answers

Yes
No

34. What is your current employment status?

Check all that apply

Full time employed
Part time employed
Volunteering
Intern
In education or training
Looking after home/family
Retired
Not working because of health issues or disability
Not able to work due to illness or disability
Unemployed
Self-employed

35. What is your highest level of education?

Choose one of the following answers

High school
Vocational education
Bachelor
Master
PhD
No school or professional education

Section D: Comments section

If you have any other thoughts or comments, please add them here. [Free text field]

Endnotes

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About the authors

The grassroots organisation Our Global Moment is building people power to increase social justice with members in Berlin, Belfast, Cologne and Málaga. The group has focused on the concept of the job guarantee since 2021.

Mirjam Langer, Andreas Hafner, Janina Urban, David Schwertgen, Ioannis Theocharis and Philine Edbauer jointly conducted and evaluated the research project. They bring different academic disciplines and professional backgrounds to the project.

European Job Guarantee Coalition

In partnership with FEPS, Fondazione Pietro Nenni, TZCLD and Europe, A Patient, and in frequent exchange with researchers and practitioners, Our Global Moment has built the European Job Guarantee Coalition networking and exchange platform. The research presented in this policy brief is linked to this project. Subscribe to the newsletter here: www.job-guarantee.eu/newsletter

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About FEPS

The Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) is the think tank of the progressive political family at EU level. Its mission is to develop innovative research, policy advice, training and debates to inspire and inform progressive politics and policies across Europe.

FEPS works in close partnership with its 68 members and other partners -including renowned universities, scholars, policymakers and activists-, forging connections among stakeholders from the world of politics, academia and civil society at local, regional, national, European and global levels.

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ON SIMILAR TOPICS

POLICY BRIEF
September 2022

FEPS
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PROGRESSIVE STUDIES

A JOB GUARANTEE FOR EUROPE

ECONOMIC POLICY INNOVATION FOR STABILITY, SECURITY AND SUSTAINABILITY



ABSTRACT

As Europe faces structural unemployment, this policy brief proposes the establishment of a public Job Guarantee for job creation. The Guarantee would reduce the significant costs and deleterious effects of unemployment while providing the labour force and public sector with the capacity to start immediately tackling the social and environmental challenges communities face. It can achieve this by creating employment in areas of unmet social need, prioritising care and environmental services. As such, the Job Guarantee is a key piece of an effective environmental strategy, creating millions of new jobs and supporting a just transition of the workforce. The programme could be implemented and financed by the European Union through new or existing mechanisms, like SURE.

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The European Job Guarantee is ambitious in scope and scale, but it is also based on real-world experiences. Many direct employment programmes around the world have provided employment to those most vulnerable. They have increased economic stability and reduced scarring effects. Moreover, evidence shows that the Job Guarantee enjoys significant public support. The programme also serves as a powerful macroeconomic stabilising mechanism: it provides a strong contrast to traditional stabilisation policies, especially on the supply side, which have failed to stimulate job creation and left almost 13.5 million people unemployed in the EU. Ultimately, the Job Guarantee programme is an opportunity to create a truly transformative employment policy, which provides lasting, quality employment while delivering social and environmental good.

POLICY BRIEF
April 2023

FEPS
FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES

THE ROAD TO A JUST TRANSITION

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TERRITORIAL JUST TRANSITION PLANS



ABSTRACT

This policy brief analyses the Territorial Just Transition Plans (TJTPs) of seven countries, with the aim of understanding the envisioned just transition in these regions. The brief scrutinises and evaluates the economic, environmental and social aspects of the plans to map the kind of justice to be expected from their implementation. It finds that the TJTPs primarily direct funding towards economic policies, with the aim of supporting SMEs and large corporations to decarbonise and generate or maintain employment opportunities in the regions. There are lesser investments in environmental policies, mainly focused on the decontamination of polluted land, and social policies, such as elderly and childcare.

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The TJTPs can be grouped into three categories. The first group has a relatively balanced approach in dividing investments among economic, social and environmental policies. The second group focuses mostly on economic policies and decarbonising large corporations and SMEs. The last group mostly focuses on environmental policies.

The envisioned justice in the TJTPs is primarily directed towards employment opportunities; this poses the risk of benefiting people and organisations that already receive support from the European Commission. A different kind of justice, one focused on improving social conditions, could be better positioned to help those who are typically left behind.

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THE EUROPEAN CARE STRATEGY A CHANCE TO ENSURE INCLUSIVE CARE FOR ALL?

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