

Initiatives of social partners for the improvement of labour market access for disadvantaged groups

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1. Introduction: the Spanish Social Dialogue

The Spanish social dialogue has gained during the last years a remarkable relevance, thanks to the progressive extension of the areas of debate and the creation of new institutional arrangements. Although there are no legal provisions about the scope and coverage of social dialogue, the Government and the main social partners established at the beginning of the previous term a comprehensive agenda¹ containing the main issues to be debated for the next four years and the methodology to be followed. In this concern, the Government and the main representatives agreed upon the following issues as the main areas of the social dialogue:

- Employment level and temporality in the labour market
- The fulfilment of the European Employment Strategy
- Immigration and the labour market
- Life-long learning policies
- Active employment policies
- Industrial policy
- Minimum salary
- Occupational injuries
- Collective bargaining
- Social Security
- Trade unions institutional arrangements

The agreement also contains the creation of a Commission for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Social Dialogue, which has been in charge of the working schedule of the social dialogue process during the last four years. As a result, most of the comprehensive reforms affecting the labour market, such as the incentive scheme to cut down temporality, the reform of the social security system or the National Reform program have been subject to social dialogue with social partners.

All in all, trade unions and employers representatives have demanded further participation and an extension of the ambits of social dialogue. This aspects have been recently taken into consideration, and the Government has announced a reform of the social dialogue system (still without any legal or formal provisions), including new areas suitable to be discussed with social partners (public investments, research and development, sustainable development, health policy, energy policy) and new government departments involved in the process apart from the Ministry of Labour and Social Issues.

¹ "Competitiveness, stable employment and social cohesion. A declaration for social dialogue 2004"

1. Brief assessment of the relevance of the policy to Spain

Despite the favourable evolution of the Spanish labour market during the last years, reflected in the most common indicators for the overall population, certain collective have persistently encountered important disadvantages. Some of these collectives refer to large population groups, whose degree of disadvantage is easy to monitor, most of them coinciding with specific age groups, whereas in other cases the identification and evaluation of labour conditions are less available (people with disabilities, homeless people, etc.). Taking into account the broadest and most disadvantaged population groups, we can affirm that the Spanish labour market does not provide any striking differences in comparison to the most common trends regarding social inclusion. That is to say that, as in many other Member States, youngsters, the elderly and people with disabilities are among the most disadvantaged groups. Whereas the youngsters are the most likely to be unemployed (18,8% in 2007), the elderly show low levels of employment (specially among women). People with disabilities are clearly disadvantaged concerning both aspects.

Table 1. Main indicators of the Spanish labour market by population groups. 2007

	Employment rate			Unemployment rate		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
16-24 years old	42.7	48.6	36.6	18.8	15.2	22.0
Elderly (**)	53.5	69.3	38.3	5.4	4.6	6.9
People with disabilities(**)	28.5	34.3	21.7	15.3	12.8	19.7
Overall population	54.18	65.1	43.7	8.0	6.1	10.5

(*) Between 55 and 64 years old in the case of employment rate, older than 55 in the case of unemployment.

(**) 2002

Source: National Institute of Statistics and Eurostat

However, an aspect that deserves a special attention is the fact that most of the differences between EU and Spanish labour markets are mainly due to the differences with women, since men's situations are very similar. This leads us to the conclusion that a gender approach must be an essential point to be present in all actions aiming to excluded groups.

As regards accidents at work, one of the main aspects to monitor concerning quality at work, Spain has traditionally shown very high rates of occupational injuries, which is one of the latest concerns prioritized by the government during the last year. As a result, figures seem to have responded to the implemented measures (15.7% decrease in the 'incidence index' for fatal accidents and 3.9% for other serious injuries), although they still remain at very high levels.

That means, the problems the initiatives intend to solve (employment for those furthest from the labour market) seem to be quite relevant for the Spanish labour market

As for the approach, the Spanish Social Dialogue is also a very strong one. We have already seen how social partners have participated in wide policy reforms concerning the labour market, and how social dialogue is gaining increasing relevance in policy making, not only in labour market related issues. Nevertheless, trade unions and employers representatives have demanded further participation and an extension of the ambits of social dialogue. Hence, any initiative stemming from other countries' experiences in this field must be closely taken into

consideration, as the Spanish system of social dialogue is currently seeking new developments and further arrangements to achieve a more cohesive and inclusive policy making process.

2. Brief assessment of the similarities/differences of the policy with the experience of Spain

Spanish social partners do not count /participate in such initiatives, though it is true that – as far as I know- they have participated (more or less) and even co-financed some Equal projects (have a look at the pages of UGT, CCOO, CEPYME, etc to see what they have).

For the elderly and people with disabilities, the IMSERSO², as a public institution, has an extraordinary information platform including very similar contents to the one described in the discussed Austrian programs, although it is not explicitly addressed to employers. On the other hand, the Project APTRA³, "Adaptation of working place, recommendations and technical assistance" is carried out by the ONCE Foundation – privately owned entity, though not belonging to Social Dialogue- for the cooperation and social integration of people with disabilities, counting with the collaboration of the European Social Fund (through the Operative Programme 'Fighting against Discrimination') and European Fund for Regional Development. Although the purpose of this experiences coincides to a large extent to the ones described in the referred discussion paper, the main difference is that social partners have not participated at all in the initiative nor in the development.

With regard to the measures aiming to the youth, The Ministry of Labour and Social Issues, by means of the Youth's Institute, has launched a virtual office for the emancipation of youngsters, containing extensive information about labour market related issues and housing. The website⁴ also provides consulting services through some dynamic tools that allow obtaining quick individualized answers and solutions to users. In connection to the active employment measures aiming to youth, there are three important initiatives with very similar purpose and characteristics to the Austrian experience: the "Workshop-Schools and Occupational Centres" ('Escuela Taller y Casas de Oficio'), the Employment Workshops ('Talleres de Empleo') and the Experimental Programs on Employment Issues ('Programas Experimentales en Materia de Empleo'). The first consists of employment centres where unemployed youngsters (from 16 to 24 years old) receive formal occupational training at the same time as they perform practical work as trainees and is promoted as an active employment measure by the Public Employment Service. The second keeps the same purpose, but is promoted by private and public non-profit organizations, and the work performed by users of the program is rather oriented towards the third sector and the social economy. Finally, the Experimental Programs on Employment Issues is a subsidization scheme launched by the central government aiming to finance innovative labour integration programs designed by non-profit organizations, in which financial support depends on the level of success of the program in terms of the insertion rate, with a minimum target of 35% of participants obtaining a job after the measure. The programs is not only targeted to youngsters but also to other disadvantaged group, as defined in the in the National Action Plan for Employment.

² Public Institute embedded in the Social Security system entitled to manage social services complementary to social benefits for the elderly and people with disabilities. See <http://www.seg-social.es/imserso/>

³ See <http://aptra.discapnet.es/aptra/index.aspx>

⁴ See <http://www.emancipacionjoven.es/>

For the programme Service work and health, there are some similarities with the obligation that all enterprises (from one size on) have their mutualities to carry on yearly medical revisions to their workers. Nevertheless this legal obligation does not contain such a detailed advising mechanisms (early diagnosis, health coaching, psychological assistance, etc.) as the ones described in the Austrian experience and, once more, social partners are not involved in the process, except for the general function of trade unions as warrantors of worker's rights.

Summing up, the Spanish labour market already enjoys most of the services provided by the Austrian experience (information platform, health assistance at work, and occupational advising for youngsters) although some of them are not provided in such depth. The main difference is that, so far, social dialogue has not been involved in the design and implementation of none of these programs, rather performed by public institutions and NGOs.

3. Brief assessment of the potential transferability of the policy (as a whole or as a part) to Spain and likely conditions for its application

The current renewal process of the social dialogue in Spain may constitute a suitable framework for the adoption of new unexplored possibilities in the aspect. So far, the Government has announced its will to extend the ambit of social dialogue to other areas in which the intervention of social partners had been almost nonexistent, and to provide further formal arrangements for its implementation.

Regarding the possibility of setting new information platforms, the role of social partners in this concern seems to be quite limited. As seen above, there are several initiatives with very similar purposes and contents carried out by public institutions and NGOs, which may lead to the conclusion that social partners may not play a relevant role in those matters, at least for the years.

However, some other aspects of the suggested measures can be highly suitable for further development in the Spanish system of social dialogue. For instance the provision of health guarantees at work could be one of the areas in which social partners could participate to extent the current level of protection, adopting a more individualized approach as in the Austrian case. Quality at work is already one of the areas covered by social dialogue, and the recent inclusion of health policies could definitely help to set this kind of actions. Also a closer approach to youth of the active employment policies could be desirable. Active employment policies are already under the scope of social dialogue in Spain and, in the light of the results shown by the main indicators of the labour market, greater efforts are needed to enhance the access and job quality of youngsters through more individualized assistance and the design of personal itineraries for training and job seeking.

4. Important questions proposed for the debate

- With regard to the service work and health program, do you think that the low and decreasing employment rate of elderly in Austria is a result of more chronic illness than in the rest of the EU and the consequent early retirement due to illness? Who are the clients who are to be sent to the advisory board? Has the gender dimension (different illnesses at work by women) been taken into account? Results?
- A chance for youth: what are exactly the measures offered to the youngsters? Who are the partners and what do they do? What is the key of the project's success: the coaching? The partners? The money given to the partners? How are enterprises sensitized apart from the information they are given?

5. How success of policies in this field is measured in Spain

The success of the kind of policies analysed in this document is basically assessed through the main indicators of the labour market, with a social focus on the disadvantaged groups taken into account. With regard to information platforms aiming to certain disadvantaged groups, their actual effectiveness seems to be quite difficult to assess, as it is almost impossible to monitor the number of potential beneficiaries and the real impact of information access. Apart from monitoring the number of visitors in every website, by the assessment over time of the basic indicators of the labour market we can examine whether these measure can cause any impact in the labour market. A 'before and after' analysis of employment, unemployment or insertion rates of youngsters, older, women and people with disabilities is a complementary methodology to assess the impact of such measures.

Regarding the evaluation of effectiveness of active employment measures, thanks to the above mentioned programs of Workshop-Schools and Occupational Centres and Employment Workshops, among others, the Spanish Employment Public Service has acquired a good experience in the design of appropriate indicators and statistical information. The evaluation dossiers (performed from 2001 to 2004) and periodical statistics contain participation levels, participation rates over available places, and insertion rates with a detailed disaggregation by gender, age group, previous educational level, previous working experience, kind of training received during the course. The evaluation also includes a detail comparison of participants with a control group. More generally, the Information System of the Employment Public System (SISPE), which is a recently established mechanism that allows for better coordination among different administrative levels (regional and central) regarding labour market and insertion statistics, and the Occupational Training Database of the Employment Public Service, contains improved measures of registered unemployment and participation in active employment measures that are crucial for monitoring the effectiveness of this kind actions.

Finally, regarding health and work issues, the level of occupational injuries and diseases, together with the National Health Survey (which contains health condition perceptions by occupational status), are the most commonly used instruments to assess the effectiveness of such measures.