

Flexicurity in europe

Sociology, Empowerment



Continental Europe seeks to combine flexibility with security in its relations with the workforce via a range of measures one of which is flexicurity.

Introduction

Flexicurity promises to address the problems relating to the labour market by enhancing the need for security and flexibility. In this study the establishment of the Flexicurity concept will be identified followed by a determination as to whether Flexicurity has been successful for business and the workforce in relation to young workers.

Main Body

Flexicurity is an integrated strategy, which attempts to enhance the need for security and flexibility within the labour market. Flexicurity thus consists of four policy components which ought to be implemented by all countries within the EU. These are; “ flexible and reliable contractual arrangements; comprehensive lifelong learning strategies; effective labour market policies; and modern social security systems” (European Commission, 2012a, p. 1). Flexicurity is thereby an important element of the European Employment Strategy, which must be incorporated into all of the Employment Guidelines within the EU.

This helps to modernise labour markets (Flaschel and Luchtenberg, 2012, p. 14) and achieve the 75% employment rate target that has been set by the Europe 2020 Strategy. This Strategy seeks to change Europe into a “ smart, sustainable and inclusive economy” (European Commission, 2012b, p. 13). In effect, flexicurity is vital for the labour market and must be promoted by all

so that unemployment and long term exclusion from the labour market can be sufficiently tackled. It was made clear in the 2011 Annual Growth Survey that in order for an integrated labour market to be created “ rigorous fiscal consolidation for enhancing macroeconomic stability” (European Commission, 2011, p. 1) is needed.

Growth enhancing measures as well as reforms for higher levels of employment would also create a more integrated labour market, which would help to achieve the employment rate target. However, it was stressed by Linda Richardson that in order for the employment rate target to be successful attained, work needs to be “ an economically attractive option” (European Employment Observatory, 2012, p. 1). Therefore, individuals need to be provided with the incentive to work in order for this to prosper otherwise the Flexicurity strategy will become futile.

In order for Flexicurity to be fully achieved, nonetheless, it is important for all Member States to “ design solutions that offer flexibility and security beyond company borders in order to facilitate good and timely labour market transitions and to reduce labour market segmentation” (European Expert Group, 2007, p. 41). It remains to be seen whether this approach will also address national borders in future years but it is evident that Flexicurity provides an opportunity to achieve “ economic efficiency and social equity to a higher level in Europe” (European Expert Group, 2007, p. 41). In addition, the pathways to establishing Flexicurity need to ensure that national contexts and histories are taken into account since each Member State has a

different legal and contractual model, which often stems from historical viewpoints that have become embedded into national cultures.

This ultimately shapes the ways in which Member States adapt and change, which illustrates the importance of this when it comes to implementing policy measures relating to Flexicurity. Arguably, it is manifest in accordance with this that whilst there are a number of different pathways to achieve Flexicurity, each Member State will adopt their own according to their own cultures of industrial relations.

This was clearly recognised by Wilthagen (2008, p. 14) when it was pointed out that: “ There is not one common or standard pathway to flexicurity and every Member States will have to construct its own pathway, based on its typical history and its political, cultural, institutional and organisational tradition and particularities.” Despite this, each Member State can in fact learn from the approaches undertaken by other Member States, yet this will require intervention by the EU so that the different pathways to Flexicurity can be promoted. It is important that Flexicurity successfully addresses the problems surrounding young workers. This is because, young workers are mostly affected by reduced employment opportunities and as a result it is vital that Flexicurity is able to address this.

Flexicurity should thereby “ reduce the divide between insiders and outsiders in the labour market” (Eurofound, 2012, p. 1). In doing so, it is vital that insiders are being supported during job-to-job transitions, whilst outsiders are provided with easy access to work and stepping stones, which will “ enable progress into stable contractual arrangements” (Eurofound, 2012, p.

1). Flexicurity for young workers has proven successful in helping young people find work (OECD, 2008, p. 109). This clearly highlights the significance of Flexicurity and demonstrates how Flexicurity can be used as a means to support specific groups of people who are usually disadvantaged within the labour market (Broughton, 2012, p. 1).

Arguably, Flexicurity appears to be a solution to the problems faced within the labour market, which is why it is important for the promotion of Flexicurity to be fully realised by the EU. Not all agree that Flexicurity is the solution for all Member States, however, and instead believe that “ the concept reveals itself to be less convincing when it comes to its application within the framework of different socio-economic realities and differently shaped labour markets” (Heeger, 2012, p. 1). Therefore, whilst Flexibility does appear workable in theory, the same cannot be said in practice since there is no one size that fits all and different approaches will need to be employed.

Conclusion

Overall, whilst Flexicurity is an important concept, which aims to combine flexibility with security in order to achieve the 75% employment rate target that has been set by the Europe 2020 Strategy, it is evident that there are a number of different pathways to achieving Flexicurity. Because of this, there is much difficulty in deciding what the best approach to take is, however this will differ according to the historical cultures of industrial relations of each Member State. Flexicurity does appear workable when it comes to solving the problems relating to young workers, and evidently helps young workers

enter the labour market. This is vital given that young workers are mostly affected by unemployment levels and as such it is imperative that Flexicurity is better promoted by the EU and its Member States.

References

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