

Abstracts

Flexicurity – In pursuit of a moving target

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As a concept, flexicurity is a moving target. It was invented in the Netherlands in the mid-1990s, and later used as a description to capture fundamental characteristics of the Danish labour market model. Recently, flexicurity has become the top priority of the EU-Commission in its attempt to revitalise the Lisbon Strategy. Thereby all member states are asked to pursue flexicurity policies. Clearly, flexicurity is a rhetorical success. In this article we seek to document the triumphal progress of the flexicurity concept.

The political embrace of flexicurity runs the risk that the concept becomes diluted, and gradually becomes meaningless. We, therefore, discuss different definitions of flexicurity in order to understand what flexicurity could and should mean, and, finally, arrive at a new analytical understanding of flexicurity.

Flexible Working Hours in Denmark, Germany, France and the UK – A matter of flexicurity in macro politics or workplace practices?

Mads Peter Klindt

Flexible working hours (or internal numerical flexibility), is on the agenda in the EU and OECD where the sirens of flexibility sound louder than ever. Enhanced

flexibility for the business life seems to be the key approach to tackle the challenges brought on by Globalisation and technological progress. However, in many cases modern wage earners also request for more flexibility, hence the traditional perception of the conflict line between employers and labour concerning wages and working conditions might be out of date. So is the case of flexible working time that constitutes a new ground for labour-management negotiations regarding smarter work planning, productivity enhancement and job satisfaction. This situation opens for new compromises and new deals between the social partners that most thoroughly have been discussed in the literature on Flexicurity that has received widespread attention in many of the EU member states in recent years.

In this article four countries, Denmark, Germany, France, and the UK, are examined. First the article reviews how working time and flexible working hours have played a role on the political agenda the last couple of decades: How has flexible working hours been incorporated into the socio-economic discourse, and does the linguification of working time reflect the Flexicurity-paradigm? As is obvious through the review of the countries, working time has been related to quite different economic problems and solutions; from solving unemployment through working time reductions in France to enhancing competitiveness in Germany. Thus, the first impression is that the four countries represent very distinct models regarding work time regulations. As a second task, the article therefore moves to an empir-

ical investigation based on a huge company survey conducted by the European Foundation on how companies apply flexible working hours and why? In that way, the article provides a clearer picture of what actually is going on in the four countries, an instigates to more moderate descriptions of how working time flexibility is being applied in the different labour market models.

Decentralisation in a Flexicurity Perspective – Towards a segmentation of the Danish labour market?

Anna Ilsøe

This article addresses the contribution of decentralised collective bargaining to the development of different forms of flexicurity for different groups of employees on the Danish labour market. Based on five case studies of company-level bargaining on flexible working hours in the Danish industry, it is argued that decentralised bargaining has enabled new balances between flexibility and security to develop for many but not all employees. On the one hand, the company-level agreements on flexible working hours facilitate greater efficiency and employee satisfaction that often goes beyond the text of the agreements. On the other hand, less flexible employees such as single parents and older workers often face difficulties in meeting the demands negotiated at company level and may ultimately be forced to leave the company and rely on unemployment benefits and active labour market policies. In a flexicurity perspective, this development implies a segmentation of the Danish workforce regarding harder and softer versions of flexicurity. Finally, the article discusses the consequences of such segmentation and calls for a broader definition of the flexicurity concept that is able to capture the development of impor-

tant differences between various groups of employees on the labour market.

Temporary Agency Workers between Flexibility and Security

Søren Kaj Andersen

The concept flexicurity first appeared in the Netherlands and from the very beginning it contained a focus on atypical employment; i.e. agency workers, fixed term employment and part-time employment. This is a significant difference compared to the Danish flexicurity debate which has been focusing solely on the standard employment contract which is characterised by both the flexible regulation of dismissals and a high level of security via relatively generous unemployment benefits and the active labour market policy. In the Dutch context the key question became how to increase security with regard to pay and working conditions for the flexible atypical workers. Thus inspired by the Dutch approach to flexicurity it is in this article discussed whether Danish temporary agency workers in the same way are covered by flexicurity. Furthermore, it is discussed why the number of agency workers have increased significantly on the Danish labour market which is especially surprising due to the flexible regulation of hiring and firing.

It is concluded that since the early 1990s wages and working conditions for temporary agency workers in Denmark have become normalised, meaning that security have been increased in the broadest sense for agency workers. Consequently, with regard to the substantial regulation we can by and large identify an identical development compared to the regulation of the employment relationship for Dutch agency workers. In this sense Danish agency workers is covered by 'Dutch flexicurity'. However,

focussing on the processes leading to these changes in regulation in respectively the Netherlands and Denmark there are significant differences. In the Netherlands these changes of regulation were part of a larger political compromise involving among other things the flexibilisation of standard contracts. Further, both labour market organisations and the political system were involved in the process. In Denmark the changes in regulation for agency workers were introduced in an incremental way solely via sector level collective bargaining. Accordingly, the process of changes was less dramatic in the Danish case. Likely explanations for these divergences between the Dutch and the Danish cases are first, the relatively larger number of temporary agency workers, and other atypical workers in the Netherlands and second, the differences in the industrial relation systems in respectively the Netherlands and Denmark.

Does It Pay ? Flexicurity and pay in the Danish flexicurity-model

Flemming Ibsen

In studies of the Danish flexicurity-model the wage formation process is normally excluded. The model is described as a balanced model, where a trade-off between, on the one side, numerical flexibility and, on the other side, income security and employability balance the model. A different and

supplementary interpretation of the model could be that internal and external flexibility, where wage earners move from one job to another inside the firm or to another firm, rewards the persons in question with a higher hourly wage. Here, income security is not related to unemployment insurance, but rather to an increase in the hourly wage.

The relevant research question in this article is there for: When Danish wage earners are flexible, will they then receive a wage, which is higher or lower than the previous wage? Does it in fact pay to be flexible, and which kind of flexibility pays most, internal or external flexibility? Or does it pay to stay 'unchanged' in the same job in the same firm?

The theoretical approach is based upon the theory of firm specific Human Capital and the theory of compensating wage differentials and the analysis show, that people "staying unchanged" or being internal flexible have a greater probability to receive a wage increase than people being external flexible, especially when they move to another sector. The probability to suffer a wage loss is conversely also greater, when people move outside to either another workplace in another trade or quite another sector. But – all in all – the analysis also show, that most Danish wages earners are rewarded with positive wage gains, when they are showing flexibility. So the article support the concept of income security in the Danish flexicurity-model, but from a different angle.