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QUALITY OF JOBS AND EMPLOYMENT IN BULGARIA

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Abstract: *The article discusses the quality of jobs and employment in Bulgaria through the prism of labour remuneration, the polarisation of employment and the high values of material deprivation among employees. Results of sociological research and comparative data with other EU Member States are presented. These results outline the very unfavourable situation in Bulgaria as a consequence of specific policies of distribution and redistribution. As a matter of comparison, this paper discusses the design of these policies in Ireland, on the one hand, and in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, on the other. The choice of these countries is justified by the fact that, through active distribution and redistribution policies, they are able to create a much better socio-economic context. The low bargaining power of the employed is considered the main reason for the very unfavourable picture in Bulgaria. It is argued that a purposeful and massive reconstruction of public policies and regulatory frameworks is needed in order to achieve a development based on quality employment and directed towards internal cohesion of the highly disintegrated Bulgarian society. Such measures are also crucial for improving the demographic situation in the country.*

Keywords: quality of jobs and employment; labour remuneration; material and social deprivation among the employed according to the type of labour contract; employment polarisation; policies for distribution and redistribution; bargaining power.

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INTRODUCTION

Within the national project entitled “Measures to overcome the demographic crisis in the Republic of Bulgaria”, 2017-2018, assigned to BAS by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, a special emphasis was placed on the compliance of the quality of the workforce and the quality of jobs in Bulgaria.

The research (Borissova-Marinova, K. et al. 2018: 139–167; 301–329) [in Bulgarian] established that there is a highly pronounced discrepancy: more precisely, the quality of the labour force in Bulgaria is lower than the European average by about a third, while the quality of jobs is more than four times lower. In addition, it was concluded that the two tend to functional compliance (Jeliazkova 2018: 167), i.e. maintaining the low quality of jobs will continue to stimulate further reduction of the quality of the workforce in the country by pushing highly qualified personnel, including young people, out and continues to reduce the already unfavourable parameters of educational characteristics of human capital, demonstrated by numerous consecutive international studies of PISA¹. This highly pronounced discrepancy has been a fundamental factor driving people out of both the national labour market and of Bulgaria as a whole.

Therefore, the focus of this paper discusses the quality of jobs and employment in Bulgaria. The aim thereof is to find an answer to the questions where the low quality of jobs in Bulgaria ensue from, and what it is due to, and, moreover, what political measures should be outlined to contribute to improve that quality. For this purpose, the paper discusses some fundamental parameters of the quality of jobs and employment and provides a short comparative analysis of the situation in some other EU Member States. This taken as a basis, some conclusions are summarised concerning what changes to the public policies in Bulgaria need to be made.

It is common knowledge that both the quality of jobs and employment have long been attracting the attention of a number of different international organisations (OECD, ILO, EP, EC, the UN Economic Commission for Europe, G20, etc.), and particularly intensively so over the last few years. This has been reflected in a number of political documents, both at international level (Declaration of the G20 Ministers of Labour, September 2015, Ankara: “Quality jobs are important as a key driver for the better well-being of people and society”) and at EU level (Lisbon Strategy, Europe 2020 Strategy, European Pillar of Social Rights, etc.).

In this regard, the analytical and expert work on the development of indicators is progressing. Among the most frequently cited examples are: the Laeken indicators (2001), the business quality indicators of Business Europe (2001), the Job Quality Index (2008) of the Institute of European Trade Union, measuring the quality of jobs of the Employment Committee, established by a decision of the European Council (2010), the Eurofound Jobs Index (2012), the Handbook of the United Nations Eco-

¹ Series of reports of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which usually compares the academic performance of 15-year-old students from different countries: <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/>

conomic Commission for Europe for measuring the quality of employment (2014), the OECD Job Quality Framework (2015), etc.

Although no agreed definition has been adopted, it is widely acknowledged that job quality and employment quality are multidimensional concepts. The quality of jobs is the result of a number of influences at different levels. “These influences include regulations at national and other levels, economic conditions, the role of institutions such as trade unions, the practices of individual employers and the characteristics of individual workers” (Sissons et al 2017: 3). “The overall quality of jobs is the sum of many aspects, affecting both the employment relationship and the work itself. This multidimensional nature of job quality makes the development of a single indicator or system of indicators too difficult, as it is first necessary to identify the aspects to be taken into account and their overall impact” (De Bustillo et al 2009: 12).

Following the OECD tradition, the agenda of the summit of the G-20 leaders (November 2015, Antalia) was mainly dedicated to the improving the quality of jobs, with a focus on three dimensions: quality of incomes, reducing uncertainty on the labour market and encouraging good labour conditions and health care. Those three dimensions, which are within the framework of the OECD traditions, match the dimensions data most often available on. At the same time, the income quality indicator is complex: in some of these indicator systems it includes not only their level and adequacy (i.e. purchasing power in relation to the cost of living), but also inequalities in wages, as well as the relative share of low-wage workers compared to average wages. Green (2006) examines job quality and employment by analysing the evolution of various dimensions – including skills, work effort and intensification, autonomy, wages, risk and job insecurity, and workers’ well-being.

At the same time, both the job quality concept and the employment quality concept are considered at different levels: micro-level (at the level of an individual), meso-level (at the level of a number of different sectors of economy and/or different groups) and macro-level (at the level of labour management relations and employment in society).

In addition, there is growing attention and attempts to define ‘good’ jobs and quality employment and, on this basis, to assess the existing jobs and employment. Therefore, enhancing job quality and labour contracts is important because “Low quality jobs would bring people out of the labour market, while affecting adversely their health status and failing to utilise their skills and abilities sufficiently. It seems obvious that it reduces productivity and sustainability to get on to a longer working life. What is urgently needed are better legal frameworks and more focus on the application of the labour legislation, including the rights to employment and social security...” (EAPN 2018: 26). The vision developed in this regard (EAPN 2018) suggests 10 principles for quality work and employment, according to which people have the right to work, which:

1. would provide an adequate wage for a living.
2. would provide sustainable contractual relations and adequate labour and employment rights
3. would entitle workers to adequate social security protection.