

NEW mapping report on Labour inspectors in 15 European countries at times of austerity

Labour inspectors are essential to the enforcement of employees' rights, the prevention of abuses by unscrupulous employers and the promotion of economic and social development. They help make decent work a reality and provide pointers of socio-economic trends in society.

Written by a former labour inspector in Spain , this report provides a detailed account of how labour inspectorates operate in 15 European countries, how they are organised, the main issues they deal with, whether their remit encompasses or not the public sector, the main problems they are faced with, and identifies areas for improvement. As we campaign against unprecedented, imposed cuts or freezes of public sector jobs and wages, the report also looks at the effects of austerity measures on labour administrations.

The ILO Convention 81 in force since 1950 provides a common framework and standards for labour inspectorates across the world. In the surveyed countries, ensuring compliance with health and safety at work and other employment conditions is a common task of labour inspectors. There are however country differences with regard to whether restructuring, social security contributions or undeclared work are part of the remit of labour inspectors.

With this word of caution that makes cross country comparisons difficult, the number of labour inspectors is most often than not deemed insufficient. This puts at risk the very efficiency of their work which, in the face of globalisation and deregulation of the labour market, has become more complex and demanding. By extension this is the very safety of society at large that is put at risk. It also begs the question of whether ILO Convention 81 that calls, amongst others, for a sufficient number of labour inspectors is fully applied with.

Staff shortages are further compounded by the impact of the crisis adding more work to an already overburdened public administration. In 5 of the surveyed countries, the resources and numbers of labour inspectorates have been further reduced. Yet as a result of the crisis, the workload has increased with more

restructuring cases to deal with.

But not all countries have opted for staff cuts, some have even increased the number of labour inspectors which shows that another route is possible.

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