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Work Orientations and Perceived Working Conditions across Countries: Results from the 2015 ISSP Survey

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This contribution offers an overview of the results derived from the 2015 ISSP survey on work orientations, which was fielded in 2015–16 in a total of 37 countries. The national surveys canvass random samples of the adult population and include questions for the general population and working respondents. Among the general population, we provide an overview of attitudes toward the centrality of work, desired working conditions, and the perception of harassment and discrimination. As for working respondents, we present results on their perceived work–life balance, job satisfaction, and characteristics of their current job, as well as their subjective employability and willingness to accept a different job.

Keywords Centrality of work; harassment; ISSP; job satisfaction; work orientations

The guest editors' introduction to this special issue on the ISSP Work Orientation module provided a detailed overview of the development of this survey. This article completes that introduction by providing a descriptive overview of the cross-country variation in attitudes towards work. We first present findings on the attitudes of the general population, followed by an overview of how workers perceive their working conditions. We conclude with a look at the topics of discrimination, harassment, and the role of unions.¹

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The main goal of this article is to provide a descriptive overview of the survey results. However, when describing and discussing the differences across countries, we build upon several underlying concepts and ideas. The study of work has a long tradition in the field of sociology due to its role as a core activity in society and a central aspect of individual identity (Kalleberg 2009). Further, work is also increasingly regarded as a way of obtaining self-fulfillment and improvement (e.g., Casey 1995). It leads to engagement and connections between individuals and determines their location in the socioeconomic stratification system. Working conditions and their differences across countries thus also inform us about the existing social order as well as the challenges and problems that need to be addressed by individuals, firms, and governments (Kalleberg 2009).

Differences in the role of work and work conditions are influenced by national laws and other institutions. When discussing work and different working conditions at a cross-national level, we thus refer to the idea of welfare and labor market regimes (see Esping-Anderson 2009; Gallie 2007; Wilson and Hadler 2017). Here we distinguish between Scandinavia, Central Europe, Eastern Europe, Latin American countries, Asian countries, liberal western countries, and a residual group. We are aware that these categories are a very simplified categorization and that some of these groups can be further differentiated such as dividing between southern Europe and continental Europe, or grouped differently when considering alternative characteristics of industrial relations (European Commission 2009).

THE CENTRALITY OF WORK AND DESIRED JOB CHARACTERISTICS FOR THE GENERAL POPULATION

The first two tables provide an overview of the general population's attitudes toward work. Table 1 presents our findings on the importance of work in people's lives and its variation across countries, based on agreement or disagreement with the following statements: (1) "A job is just a way of earning money—no more," and (2) "I would enjoy having a paid job even if I did not need the money." The countries are ranked according to the first question, with countries in which respondents consider work as "just a way of earning money" at the bottom of the table. We refer to this as the first dimension. The overall average of 2.99 on a 5-point scale indicates neither strong agreement nor disagreement as far as the instrumental side of work is concerned. Yet, there are clear differences between countries. Work is considered very important in northern welfare state countries such as Norway, Iceland, and Sweden and in the liberal regimes of Australia and New Zealand, whereas work is of least importance in India and the Philippines. Interestingly, most former socialist countries in Eastern Europe are also among the countries in which a job is considered just a way of earning money—a finding that is in stark contrast to the centrality of work during the socialist period. Considering the second dimension—enjoying a job even if someone does not need the money—country differences are smaller and no consistent pattern exists. Nonetheless, both dimensions correlate weakly with a Pearson coefficient of $-.29$ at the macro level, which suggests that these items are opposing aspects of the same dimension.

After considering the overall centrality of work, we now turn to more specific aspects of work and have a look at which job characteristics are desired by the general population. The

TABLE 1
Centrality of Work Among the General Population (Mean Values: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)

	<i>A job is just a way of earning money—no more</i>	<i>I would enjoy having a paid job even if I did not need the money</i>
Norway	1.90	3.92
Iceland	2.00	3.73
Australia	2.29	3.71
New Zealand	2.38	3.73
Sweden	2.39	3.79
Denmark	2.43	3.89
Switzerland	2.44	3.81
Belgium	2.55	3.55
United States	2.65	3.62
Israel	2.67	3.67
Great Britain	2.67	3.64
Germany	2.69	3.73
Finland	2.71	2.93
France	2.72	3.38
Austria	2.79	3.20
Spain	2.81	3.18
Slovenia	2.93	3.37
Japan	3.00	3.55
Chile	3.03	2.98
Georgia	3.09	4.02
Slovak Republic	3.13	3.36
Croatia	3.19	3.36
Latvia	3.20	3.15
Poland	3.21	3.44
Suriname	3.22	3.15
Taiwan	3.23	3.88
Mexico	3.28	3.58
Czech Republic	3.28	3.44
Estonia	3.33	3.10
Lithuania	3.37	3.39
Hungary	3.43	2.99
South Africa	3.44	3.12
China	3.47	3.66
Russia	3.52	2.80
Venezuela	3.80	4.22
Philippines	3.82	3.56
India	3.93	3.62
Total	2.99	3.49
N	50,017	49,092

Source: ISSP 2015 Work Orientation Survey.

consideration of the desired characteristics is important, as they play a crucial role in job satisfaction and occupational well-being. Work that enables the satisfaction of the needs of workers fosters the development of personal potential and is associated with better physical and mental health status (Kalleberg 1977; Nadinloyi, Sadeghi, and Najloo 2013). To examine

these aspects, ISSP asked the respondents how important they consider the following characteristics: (1) “job security,” (2) “a high income,” (3) “good opportunities for advancement,” (4) “an interesting job,” (5) “a job that allows someone to work independently,” (6) “a job that allows someone to help other people,” (7) “a job that is useful to society,” (8) “a job that allows someone to decide their times or days of work,” and (9) “a job that involves personal contact with other people.”

The results (see Table 2) show that, on average, job security is the most desired characteristic, followed by an interesting job and a high income. As far as job security is concerned, Spain and Croatia are the countries with the highest desire for job security in Europe, which could be driven by the fact that they are among the European Union countries with the highest unemployment rates in 2017 (Eurostat 2017). Outside Europe, job security is regarded as highly important in Latin American countries such as Venezuela, and in the United States. As for the second most important characteristic—having an interesting job—the results show that this dimension is slightly less important in Asian countries, such as Japan and China, than in the other countries. The data show that obtaining a high income is slightly less important in Western European countries (e.g., Norway) and slightly more important in East European countries. Having contact with other people and having influence on the work schedule are considered the least important items when considering the overall average. Both dimensions, however, rank comparatively high in the Latin American countries.

The characteristics of the ideal job depicted in Table 2 reflect the views of the general population on the ideal job. In the following section, we present findings on how working respondents assess the characteristics of their current position. If satisfaction with the current job ranks below the desired characteristics it would suggest possible negative effects on workers, given that work dissatisfaction is associated with health issues and other problems in the long run (Nadinloyi et al. 2013).

THE ACTUAL WORKING CONDITIONS AND JOB CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORKING POPULATION

The previous section offered an overview of the general population’s attitudes toward work and different desired job characteristics. This section focuses on respondents who work for pay and their perception of their current work situation. Similar to the desired characteristics, the survey includes questions about the characteristics of people’s main job and asks: “For each of these statements about your (main) job, please check one box to show how much you agree or disagree that it applies to your job.” The statements are: “My job is secure,” “My income is high,” “My opportunities for advancement are high,” “My job is interesting,” “I can work independently,” “In my job I can help other people,” “My job is useful to society,” “In my job, I have personal contact with other people.”

Table 3 provides the national averages of the assessments of the current job characteristics. On average, being in personal contact with other people ranks the highest, followed by having a job that is useful for society, and the ability to help other people. The lowest ratings were reported for advancement opportunities, high salary, and a secure job. Comparing these ratings of the actual work situation with the desired characteristics discussed in the previous section, we

TABLE 2
Desired Job Characteristics Among the General Population (Mean Values, 1 = Not Important at All and 5 = Very Important)

	<i>Secure job</i>	<i>High income</i>	<i>Advancement</i>	<i>Interesting job</i>	<i>Work independently</i>	<i>Help other people</i>	<i>Useful to society</i>	<i>Decide times</i>	<i>Contact with people</i>
Australia	4.52	3.67	3.92	4.45	3.85	3.92	3.97	3.46	3.78
Austria	4.58	3.87	3.79	4.43	4.20	3.87	3.98	3.51	4.03
Belgium	4.63	3.88	3.85	4.55	3.96	3.95	3.98	3.68	4.12
Chile	4.54	4.30	4.38	4.33	4.10	4.33	4.36	4.16	4.21
China	4.33	4.25	3.86	3.8	3.67	3.85	4.05	3.62	3.74
Croatia	4.69	4.16	4.06	4.31	3.75	3.8	3.89	3.34	3.66
Czech Republic	4.52	3.94	3.61	4.27	3.71	3.79	3.80	3.55	3.89
Denmark	4.15	3.55	3.35	4.51	4.19	3.90	3.84	3.53	4.05
Estonia	4.50	4.23	3.5	4.33	3.93	3.64	3.68	3.54	3.56
Finland	4.39	3.84	3.29	4.45	3.93	3.77	3.58	3.81	3.92
France	4.55	3.92	3.93	4.69	3.66	3.72	3.86	3.50	4.11
Georgia	4.49	4.49	4.13	4.42	4.18	4.32	4.34	3.92	3.78
Germany	4.52	3.82	3.76	4.47	4.24	3.82	3.86	3.46	4.13
Great Britain	4.51	3.68	4.02	4.38	3.8	3.88	3.88	3.42	3.79
Hungary	4.52	4.26	3.77	3.95	3.82	3.68	3.86	3.24	3.65
Iceland	4.65	3.93	4.12	4.62	4.05	3.96	3.99	3.32	4.03
India	4.39	4.26	4.21	4.13	3.93	3.95	3.95	3.85	3.75
Israel	4.46	4.14	4.23	4.39	3.96	4.19	4.19	3.73	4.05
Japan	4.17	3.92	2.97	3.88	2.92	3.6	3.76	3.46	3.60
Latvia	4.45	4.25	3.76	4.43	3.91	4.06	4.02	3.96	3.70
Lithuania	4.48	4.37	3.81	4.27	3.87	3.85	3.79	3.67	3.71
Mexico	4.67	4.45	4.55	4.37	4.19	4.29	4.32	4.09	4.14
New Zealand	4.41	3.69	3.85	4.33	4.05	4.15	4.05	3.62	4.03
Norway	4.41	3.57	3.44	4.40	3.97	3.76	3.76	3.58	3.89
Philippines	4.49	4.42	4.42	4.28	4.27	4.21	4.27	3.85	3.98
Poland	4.62	4.44	4.04	4.37	4.06	3.92	3.92	3.72	3.76
Russia	4.39	4.52	3.85	4.14	3.71	3.70	3.90	3.64	3.44
Slovak Republic	4.48	4.07	3.71	4.25	3.76	3.93	4.01	3.7	3.96
Slovenia	4.49	4.12	3.90	4.38	4.11	4.22	4.15	3.81	4.15
South Africa	4.51	4.35	4.37	4.29	3.99	4.16	4.21	3.62	3.94
Spain	4.74	4.12	4.23	4.38	4.19	4.27	4.34	3.84	3.92
Suriname	4.57	4.42	4.50	4.38	4.31	4.35	4.35	4.25	4.33
Sweden	4.46	3.72	3.54	4.48	4.01	3.83	3.77	3.75	3.93
Switzerland	4.52	3.51	3.72	4.60	4.25	4.04	4.06	3.53	4.20
Taiwan	4.48	3.93	3.85	4.11	3.45	4.04	4.11	3.63	3.89
United States	4.69	4.03	4.40	4.42	3.99	4.23	4.32	3.50	3.74
Venezuela	4.88	4.78	4.82	4.82	4.54	4.83	4.82	4.03	4.69
Total	4.51	4.08	3.94	4.34	3.94	3.99	4.03	3.67	3.91

N (min–max) = (50,199–50,819).

Source: ISSP 2015 Work Orientation Survey.

TABLE 3
 Workers: Actual Job Characteristics (Mean Values 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree)

	<i>Secure job</i>	<i>High income</i>	<i>Advancement</i>	<i>Interesting job</i>	<i>Work independently</i>	<i>Help other people</i>	<i>Useful to society</i>	<i>Contact with people</i>
Australia	3.57	2.84	2.63	3.89	4.07	4.05	3.93	4.40
Austria	4.13	3.21	3.13	4.31	4.31	3.9	4.16	4.30
Belgium	3.74	2.92	2.58	3.96	3.97	3.95	3.84	4.33
Chile	3.64	2.71	2.76	3.76	3.36	3.88	3.98	4.17
China	3.69	2.53	2.43	2.93	3.66	3.61	3.85	3.82
Croatia	3.76	2.52	2.72	3.64	3.32	3.70	3.73	4.30
Czech Republic	3.72	2.73	2.55	3.74	3.88	3.66	3.97	4.24
Denmark	3.87	3.01	2.70	4.23	4.38	4.15	4.07	4.57
Estonia	3.92	2.67	2.56	3.68	3.76	3.72	3.86	4.20
Finland	3.58	2.92	2.67	4.01	4.14	3.95	3.88	4.30
France	3.54	2.50	2.29	3.96	3.84	3.84	3.87	4.25
Georgia	3.99	2.46	2.54	3.77	4.06	4.05	4.16	3.44
Germany	4.09	2.90	2.94	4.19	4.29	3.68	3.91	4.47
Great Britain	3.66	2.78	2.95	3.96	4.09	4.07	3.89	4.37
Hungary	3.58	2.45	2.44	3.42	3.57	3.74	3.83	3.98
Iceland	3.95	2.77	2.97	4.03	3.94	4.07	4.06	4.50
India	3.93	3.25	3.40	3.51	3.60	3.55	3.74	3.64
Israel	3.93	3.14	3.02	3.9	3.83	4.13	3.96	4.19
Japan	3.36	2.29	1.94	3.24	2.44	3.42	3.63	4.20
Latvia	3.78	2.67	2.56	3.84	3.23	3.94	4.12	4.31
Lithuania	3.71	2.45	2.50	3.56	3.65	3.76	3.69	4.20
Mexico	3.80	2.79	3.05	3.83	3.70	3.96	4.02	4.12
New Zealand	3.71	2.88	2.79	4.00	4.11	4.16	4.00	4.34
Norway	3.88	2.87	2.60	4.09	4.18	4.03	4.06	4.36
Philippines	4.00	3.32	3.45	3.99	4.06	4.15	4.05	4.07
Poland	3.14	2.27	2.27	3.24	2.96	3.13	3.55	3.89
Russia	3.77	3.26	3.01	3.70	3.36	3.54	3.88	3.90
Slovak Republic	3.44	2.71	2.72	3.65	3.72	3.70	3.97	4.13
Slovenia	4.08	3.29	2.94	4.13	4.16	4.16	3.99	4.48
South Africa	3.70	2.86	3.21	3.70	3.68	3.88	3.95	4.00
Spain	3.65	2.68	2.50	3.84	3.57	3.81	3.97	4.34
Suriname	3.79	2.81	3.27	3.94	4.11	3.96	4.06	4.13
Sweden	3.99	2.96	2.98	3.98	4.11	3.93	4.00	4.37
Switzerland	4.08	3.14	3.05	4.36	4.33	4.14	4.12	4.51
Taiwan	3.63	2.86	2.74	3.62	3.83	3.96	3.93	4.16
United States	3.96	2.79	3.09	4.02	4.12	4.30	4.14	4.47
Venezuela	4.41	3.24	3.20	4.36	4.08	4.57	4.59	4.77
Total	3.78	2.82	2.78	3.83	3.82	3.88	3.94	4.23

N (min–max) = (27,346–27,971).

Source: ISSP 2015 Work Orientation Survey.

can see that the top three desired characteristics—a secure, interesting, and well-paid job—rank the lowest among the characteristics of the actual job. Conversely, while most respondents are in frequent contact with other people at their current job, this characteristic was the one of the

least desired characteristics among the general population. In sum, we can report a considerable gap between the ideal characteristics of a job among the general population and the actual job situation of the working population.

As pointed out before, a negative gap between the desired job characteristics and the actual working situation can lead to stress and other negative consequences in the long run. Further, considering the effort-reward-imbalance model by Siegrist (1996), high workloads with low occupational rewards can also result in job strain. Low rewards include, an inadequate salary, a lack of support from colleagues or management, low advancement opportunities, and high job insecurity. High efforts, on the other hand, refer to a high workload in general, constant time pressure or extra-long working hours.

In this context, ISSP asked respondents about physical work strains and stress on the job (see Table 4). On average, 30 percent of respondents perform only hard physical labor. There are, however, distinct country differences: Strain from physical work is significantly above average in India (57 percent), Poland (57 percent) the United States (48 percent), and South Africa (42 percent) and comparatively low in Austria (18 percent) and Norway (21 percent). Another important aspect of rewards in work life is opportunities to attend education and training. ISSP asked whether the respondents attended training to improve their skills at work over the past 12 months. A total of 44 percent of respondents did so. Yet there are distinct country differences in the availability of advancement opportunities for employees. These are especially high in Great Britain (62 percent), Belgium (60 percent), and Finland (58 percent) and rather low in India (23 percent) and Hungary (20 percent).

Social aspects of the workplace are another important reward and determinant of workers' well-being according to the effort-reward-imbalance model. Two questions cover this issue in the ISSP survey: (1) "relations between management and employees" and (2) "relations between workmates and colleagues." The results in Table 4 indicate that on average 85 percent of the working respondents report a "very good" or "quite good" relationship between workmates and another 73 percent between management and employees. Lower ratings can be found only in France (52 percent) and in Japan (57 percent).

WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND WORK SCHEDULE ORGANIZATION

Alongside the actual characteristics of the workplace, the balancing of work and private life is another important factor for the well-being and health of workers (see, e.g., Christiaens and Bracke 2013; Nordenmark, Vinberg, and Strandh 2012). Accordingly, the European Union has listed work-life balance among the five main risk factors of modern working life (EU-OSHA 2007). In this regard, the ISSP asked the working respondents whether they would prefer to (1) "work longer hours and earn more money," (2) "work the same number of hours and earn the same money," or (3) "work fewer hours and earn less money." Table 5 shows that in general the majority of respondents (58 percent) are satisfied with the hours they work and money they earn, whereas 36 percent would like to work more and earn more money, and only 7 percent to work less and earn less money. The results also indicate substantive country differences. Satisfaction with work hours and money earned is especially high in Finland, Norway, and Sweden, whereas the preference for more work and a higher income is rather high in East European countries and in some Latin American countries.

TABLE 4
Workers: Actual Working Conditions

	<i>Hard physical work (% always/often)^a</i>	<i>Work stressful (% always/often)^a</i>	<i>Skills training over past 12 months (% yes)</i>	<i>Management–employees relation (% very/quite good)^b</i>	<i>Relation to colleagues? (% very/quite good)^b</i>
Australia	23	37	56	70	85
Austria	18	31	33	87	92
Belgium	28	45	60	62	86
Chile	26	36	31	72	83
China	34	30	30	67	79
Croatia	27	42	27	67	83
Czech Republic	24	32	47	67	79
Denmark	27	35	55	69	88
Estonia	29	32	48	70	85
Finland	27	37	58	71	87
France	31	45	47	52	78
Georgia	26	27	34	88	94
Germany	25	39	48	87	93
Great Britain	26	37	62	75	91
Hungary	30	28	20	72	81
Iceland	27	40	55	79	92
India	57	47	23	78	79
Israel	21	34	36	82	88
Japan	21	48	42	57	70
Latvia	37	34	51	79	90
Lithuania	29	30	47	67	80
Mexico	27	23	35	81	85
New Zealand	27	34	57	76	89
Norway	21	42	57	70	93
Philippines	39	34	37	76	79
Poland	57	35	34	60	78
Russia	22	39	18	63	75
Slovak Republic	24	31	30	72	84
Slovenia	27	51	60	59	82
South Africa	42	38	39	82	90
Spain	29	42	49	78	90
Suriname	22	25	30	77	85
Sweden	30	49	52	68	90
Switzerland	26	32	53	81	93
Taiwan	35	39	40	83	90
United States	48	33	60	71	80
Venezuela	40	43	46	88	90
Total	30	37	44	73	85
N	28,105	28,036	27,881	26,367	26,388

^aAnswer categories: always, often, sometimes, hardly ever, never.

^bAnswer categories: very good, quite good, neither good nor bad, quite bad, very bad.

Source: ISSP 2015 Work Orientation Survey.

TABLE 5
Workers: Work–Life Balance Preferences (% Yes)

	<i>Working longer hours and earning more money</i>	<i>Working the same number of hours and earning the same money</i>	<i>Working fewer hours and earning less money</i>
Australia	24	66	10
Austria	25	70	6
Belgium	24	68	7
Chile	34	60	6
China	42	52	6
Croatia	54	44	3
Czech Republic	31	63	6
Denmark	18	73	9
Estonia	44	54	2
Finland	17	74	10
France	42	53	5
Georgia	63	36	1
Germany	22	68	9
Great Britain	26	64	9
Hungary	40	58	2
Iceland	29	65	7
India	46	50	4
Israel	36	56	8
Japan	33	57	11
Latvia	41	54	4
Lithuania	60	38	2
Mexico	61	31	8
New Zealand	25	68	8
Norway	16	76	8
Philippines	50	39	11
Poland	45	53	2
Russia	60	39	2
Slovak Republic	49	50	2
Slovenia	30	64	6
South Africa	59	38	3
Spain	29	61	9
Suriname	58	40	3
Sweden	15	70	16
Switzerland	17	72	11
Taiwan	30	56	14
United States	38	57	5
Venezuela	–	–	–
Total	36	58	7
N	26,361	26,361	26,361

Source: ISSP 2015 Work Orientation Survey.

Another important factor is the influence workers have on their specific work schedule, given that individualized working hours can facilitate the reconciliation of work obligations and personal life (European Commission 2010). “Flexibility,” however, can also have negative effects on workers, given that employers have increasingly introduced flexible working arrangements such as fixed-term contracts, temporary or part-time work, or work with varying schedules (Hofäcker and König 2013). Workers may thus experience both positive aspects of having more freedom to decide on their work schedule and negative aspects such as more irregular working conditions.

ISSP analyzes the topic of flexible working hours in multiple ways (see Table 6). First, working respondents were asked how difficult it is to take time off during working hours. Overall, 62 percent of the respondents answered that it is “not too difficult” or “not difficult at all.” As far as the country variation is concerned, we can see that such an opportunity is quite common in Western countries (e.g., New Zealand 80 percent; Finland 78 percent) and rather uncommon in countries such as Russia (36 percent) and Japan (49 percent). Second, respondents were also asked which statement best describes how their working hours are decided. On average, about half of the respondents (52 percent) answered that their starting and finishing times are decided by their employers and cannot be changed by themselves. Regarding cross-country variations, the least flexible working hours exist in Russia (76 percent), followed by Croatia (74 percent) and Hungary (73 percent), whereas workers in northern Europe (Sweden 30 percent; Finland 31 percent) have great flexibility in organizing their schedule.

In the context of nonstandard employment, ISSP also asked about the regularity of a person’s usual schedule or shift. Regular schedules or shifts are reported most often in Japan (88 percent), Taiwan (86 percent), and Australia (81 percent) and least often in the Philippines (50 percent), India (62 percent), and Venezuela (64 percent). Working at home during working hours is less common—on average 16 percent of respondents indicate that they do so “always” or “often.” Country differences are rather small, except for the high rates in the Philippines (55 percent) and India (42 percent). Working on the weekend is common in China (56 percent) and the Philippines (50 percent), whereas on average 35 percent of working respondents indicate that they work on the weekends “always” or “often.” Finally, ISSP asked about the organization of daily work. In this regard, 29 percent of the working respondents indicate that they are free to decide how their daily work is organized. Yet, there are substantial country differences with high agreement in the Philippines (63 percent) and Georgia (50 percent) and particularly low rates in Russia (12 percent) and Japan (18 percent).

JOB SATISFACTION, OCCUPATIONAL COMMITMENT, AND THE WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT NEW JOBS

We now turn to questions of job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and the willingness to accept new jobs in order to avoid unemployment. Overall 45 percent of the working respondents are “very satisfied” or “completely satisfied” with their current main job (see Table 7). Considering country differences, job satisfaction is particularly high in Austria and Switzerland (65 percent) and rather low in many East European countries (Poland 21 percent and Lithuania 24 percent). Beyond Europe, rather low levels of job satisfaction also exist in China (17 percent) and Japan (20 percent).

TABLE 6
Workers: Organization of Work Schedule

	<i>Taking time off during working hours (% not difficult at all and not too difficult)^a</i>	<i>Starting and finishing hours decided by employer and cannot be changed (%)^b</i>	<i>Working on regular schedule or shift (%)^c</i>	<i>Working at home during working hours (% always/often)^d</i>	<i>Involves working on weekends (% always/often)^d</i>	<i>Organization of daily work can be decided freely (%)^e</i>
Australia	73	45	81	14	31	31
Austria	55	56	73	10	26	28
Belgium	55	47	80	17	34	25
Chile	58	66	66	22	35	34
China	74	56	65	18	56	23
Croatia	54	74	75	11	41	23
Czech Republic	51	54	69	9	30	22
Denmark	74	30	78	—	—	27
Estonia	59	55	76	13	30	20
Finland	78	31	81	12	28	19
France	52	53	80	16	32	34
Georgia	63	68	71	23	42	50
Germany	61	43	74	12	30	26
Great Britain	67	53	80	12	36	32
Hungary	61	73	65	12	27	15
Iceland	74	51	80	12	36	21
India	60	50	62	42	41	41
Israel	61	43	65	23	27	30
Japan	49	64	88	11	47	18
Latvia	74	59	68	11	33	30
Lithuania	72	62	78	11	28	22
Mexico	51	58	77	12	47	36
New Zealand	80	40	83	11	31	32
Norway	71	42	76	16	30	23
Philippines	58	28	50	55	50	63
Poland	51	61	81	12	34	29
Russia	36	76	72	12	27	12
Slovak Republic	50	58	66	11	34	26
Slovenia	70	52	78	22	33	21

(Continued)

TABLE 6
Continued

	<i>Taking time off during working hours (% not difficult at all and not too difficult)^a</i>	<i>Starting and finishing hours decided by employer and cannot be changed (%)^b</i>	<i>Working on regular schedule or shift (%)^c</i>	<i>Working at home during working hours (% always/often)^d</i>	<i>Involves working on weekends (% always/often)^d</i>	<i>Organization of daily work can be decided freely (%)^e</i>
South Africa	57	73	70	21	34	30
Spain	64	60	76	12	40	32
Suriname	69	60	69	24	36	37
Sweden	73	30	76	10	24	26
Switzerland	76	35	73	14	29	34
Taiwan	63	50	86	15	41	40
United States	74	48	76	16	40	40
Venezuela	48	56	64	26	40	40
Total	62	52	75	16	35	29
<i>N</i>	27,605	27,856	26,154	27,223	27,321	27,506

^aAnswer categories: not difficult at all; not too difficult; somewhat difficult; very difficult.

^bAnswer categories: I cannot change, fixed time, I can decide within certain limits, I am entirely free to decide.

^cAnswer categories: I have a regular schedule or shift, I have a schedule or shift that regularly changes, I have a schedule where daily working times are decided at short notice.

^dAnswer categories: always, often, sometimes, hardly ever, never.

^eAnswer categories: I am free to decide, decide within certain limits, I am not free to decide.

Source: ISSP 2015 Work Orientation Survey.

TABLE 7
Workers: Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment

	Satisfaction in (main) job (% completely/very satisfied) ^a	Willing to work harder to help firm succeed (% strongly agree and agree) ^b	Proud to be working for my firm (strongly agree and agree) ^b	I would turn down another job to stay (strongly agree and agree) ^b	I would change type of work (strongly agree and agree) ^b	I am proud of the type of work I do (strongly agree and agree) ^b
Australia	43	66	70	23	40	80
Austria	65	63	72	36	25	77
Belgium	42	44	68	24	33	74
Chile	58	43	61	29	37	74
China	17	66	50	33	58	44
Croatia	42	52	63	20	45	60
Czech Republic	39	58	52	35	36	56
Denmark	55	65	70	27	37	78
Estonia	33	37	46	17	28	47
Finland	51	43	60	41	29	74
France	36	28	64	20	44	71
Georgia	32	70	75	28	52	59
Germany	48	56	66	34	27	73
Great Britain	46	72	72	26	34	74
Hungary	37	58	60	19	28	61
Iceland	51	76	78	20	37	80
India	55	78	66	47	63	63
Israel	53	63	74	39	38	73
Japan	20	50	47	35	28	53
Latvia	41	45	66	43	44	70
Lithuania	24	36	48	28	45	49
Mexico	61	72	76	34	42	73
New Zealand	45	76	77	28	34	82
Norway	48	68	78	29	25	82
Philippines	59	74	81	47	48	86
Poland	21	33	42	16	47	40
Russia	46	33	37	26	46	35
Slovak Republic	39	51	57	25	41	64
Slovenia	41	57	74	28	40	79

(Continued)

TABLE 7
Continued

	Satisfaction in (main) job (% completely/ very satisfied) ^a	Willing to work harder to help firm succeed (% strongly agree and agree) ^b	Proud to be working for my firm (strongly agree and agree) ^b	I would turn down another job to stay (strongly agree and agree) ^b	I would change type of work (strongly agree and agree) ^b	I am proud of the type of work I do (strongly agree and agree) ^b
South Africa	51	85	76	35	57	71
Spain	55	61	79	27	39	81
Suriname	50	68	84	43	38	81
Sweden	46	50	63	17	32	81
Switzerland	65	75	84	47	25	90
Taiwan	35	83	75	38	52	79
United States	54	81	82	27	40	86
Venezuela	70	78	86	45	57	81
Total	45	60	67	31	39	70
N	28,042	24,583	27,137	26,123	27,127	27,564

^aAnswer categories: completely satisfied, very satisfied, fairly satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, fairly satisfied, completely dissatisfied.

^bAnswer categories: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree.

Source: ISSP 2015 Work Orientation Survey.

To analyze the occupational commitment of workers, ISSP asked to what extent people agree with the following statements: (1) “I am willing to work harder than I have in order to help the firm or organization I work for succeed,” (2) “I am proud to be working for my firm or organization,” (3) “I would turn down another job that offered quite a bit more pay in order to stay with this organization.” Overall, the degree of willingness to work harder to help the firm succeed is 60 percent, with the highest occupational commitment rates (above 80 percent) in the United States, South Africa, and Taiwan. Low rates of commitment, on the other hand, can be found in East European countries and in France. The next question indicates that respondents are quite proud of working for their organization with an overall agreement rate of 67 percent. Yet only a minority (31 percent) would turn down an attractive offer from a different company. The least willing to accept such an offer are respondents in Switzerland, India, and the Philippines (all 47 percent) and the most willing are those in Poland (16 percent), Sweden (17 percent), and Hungary (19 percent).

Another set of questions tries to analyze the degree of commitment to the type of work someone is doing, regardless of the specific company or organization for which they are currently working. Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with the following statements: (1) “Given the chance, I would change my present type of work for something different,” and (2) “I am proud of the type of work I do.” As indicated in Table 7, 39 percent of the respondents would like to change their present type of work for something different. Moreover, 70 percent of the respondents “strongly agree” or “agree” that they are proud of the type of work they are doing. Yet, there are considerable differences between countries. The highest level of agreement is in Switzerland (90 percent) and the lowest in Russia (35 percent).

We now move from our examination of job satisfaction and commitment to perceived job security and personal employability. These factors have gained importance given that the financial crisis of 2008 resulted in increasing unemployment rates and thus reduced job security. ISSP posed several questions in the field of job security and employability (see Table 8). First, the survey places special attention on the extent to which workers worry about the possibility of losing their jobs. On average, 34 percent indicate that they worry a “great deal” or “to some extent” about job loss. However, there are distinct country differences that are in line with findings that subjective job satisfaction varies across different institutional, economic, and cultural contexts (Hank and Erlinghagen 2011). Our results show that self-perceived job insecurity is high in Spain (67 percent) and in East European countries (e.g., Czech Republic 47 percent) as well as in Latin American countries, whereas respondents in western and northern European countries report low job insecurity (e.g., Finland 11 percent). In addition, respondents were asked whether they think that it is easy to find a job that is at least as good as their current position. Overall, 23 percent of the working respondents think that it is “very easy” or “fairly easy” to do so. Finally, respondents were also asked how likely it is that they will try to find a job with another firm or organization within the next 12 months. Here, 27 percent of the respondents answered “very likely” or “likely.”

The remaining questions revolved around aspects of labor market flexibility (see Table 9). ISSP asked working respondents, how willing they would be, in order to avoid unemployment, to (1) “accept a job that requires new skills,” (2) “accept a lower position with lower pay,” (3) “accept temporary employment,” (4) “travel longer to get to work,” (5) “move within the country,” and (6) “move to a different country.” As shown in Table 9, respondents are most willing to accept a job with new skills (81 percent), followed by temporary employment

TABLE 8
Workers: Perceived Job Security and Personal Employability

	<i>Extent of worry about the possibility of losing job (% I worry a great deal and to some extent)^a</i>	<i>Easy or difficult to find a good job as the current (% very easy and fairly easy)^b</i>	<i>How likely: try to find a job within next 12 months (% very likely and likely)^c</i>
Australia	26	22	30
Austria	17	30	17
Belgium	23	18	23
Chile	60	26	34
China	22	23	23
Croatia	39	18	19
Czech Republic	47	16	19
Denmark	17	31	35
Estonia	37	18	20
Finland	11	18	22
France	29	18	43
Georgia	70	13	25
Germany	18	25	18
Great Britain	26	26	30
Hungary	20	20	13
Iceland	14	28	24
India	64	38	41
Israel	26	23	39
Japan	26	10	18
Latvia	53	26	35
Lithuania	52	22	27
Mexico	75	35	58
New Zealand	21	18	26
Norway	17	21	23
Philippines	76	21	52
Poland	30	10	26
Russia	54	15	25
Slovak Republic	33	17	19
Slovenia	36	15	17
South Africa	51	34	39
Spain	67	14	20
Suriname	30	19	24
Sweden	14	29	27
Switzerland	19	26	26
Taiwan	11	28	24
United States	16	43	30
Venezuela	89	26	36
Total	34	23	27
<i>N</i>	28,034	27,140	26,625

^aAnswer categories: I worry a great deal, I worry to some extent, I worry a little, I don't worry at all.

^bAnswer categories: very easy, fairly easy, neither easy nor difficult, fairly difficult, very difficult.

^cAnswer categories: very likely, likely, unlikely, very unlikely.

Source: ISSP 2015 Work Orientation Survey.

TABLE 9
 Workers: Willingness to Accept Worse Jobs to Avoid Unemployment (% Strongly Agree and Agree)

	<i>Accept job that requires new skills^a</i>	<i>Accept lower position with lower pay^a</i>	<i>Accept temporary employment^a</i>	<i>Travel longer to get to work^a</i>	<i>Move within country^a</i>	<i>Move to a different country^a</i>
Australia	88	52	75	55	24	17
Austria	82	44	59	54	18	14
Belgium	87	47	67	53	20	22
Chile	70	19	39	27	37	28
China	70	37	49	48	25	19
Croatia	90	54	77	66	29	27
Czech Republic	83	40	65	45	15	14
Denmark	92	56	74	63	22	18
Estonia	73	23	54	44	13	17
Finland	88	45	62	51	18	20
France	86	39	52	45	31	25
Georgia	67	43	62	43	23	23
Germany	88	48	66	62	23	21
Great Britain	89	50	67	55	26	20
Hungary	46	9	32	23	10	12
Iceland	90	38	79	34	29	38
India	90	56	65	38	47	37
Israel	80	46	57	44	31	22
Japan	53	16	21	25	15	11
Latvia	84	44	66	55	24	19
Lithuania	81	42	62	59	21	26
Mexico	87	19	45	37	32	27
New Zealand	85	49	68	49	27	21
Norway	86	54	68	47	16	12
Philippines	77	39	64	34	34	31
Poland	80	43	55	57	17	16
Russia	68	25	41	48	15	9
Slovak Republic	79	38	63	46	20	14
Slovenia	88	57	78	53	23	21
South Africa	78	33	51	45	51	34
Spain	90	57	73	73	41	27
Suriname	74	35	61	48	39	36
Sweden	85	49	65	47	14	13
Switzerland	89	65	76	67	28	21
Taiwan	75	48	57	31	32	29
United States	87	55	75	60	40	18
Venezuela	81	11	28	23	28	32
Total	81	42	60	48	26	22

N (min–max) = 26,905–27,359.

^aAnswer categories: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree.

Source: ISSP 2015 Work Orientation Survey.

(60 percent). Traveling longer to work (48 percent) and earning less money in a lower position (42 percent) receive medium agreement, and the willingness to travel within (26 percent) and outside the country (22 percent) the lowest agreement.

TABLE 10
General Population: Discrimination, Conflict, and Unions

	<i>Past five years: discriminated against with regard to work (% yes)</i>	<i>Past five years: harassed at your job (% yes)</i>	<i>Workers need trade unions (% strongly agree and agree)</i>	<i>Strong trade unions bad for economy (% strongly agree and agree)</i>
Australia	23	32	47	29
Austria	15	9	77	15
Belgium	24	19	57	30
Chile	19	10	80	23
China	33	14	76	19
Croatia	19	11	77	13
Czech Republic	18	11	55	15
Denmark	17	17	74	18
Estonia	14	14	73	7
Finland	15	18	61	35
France	21	24	60	31
Georgia	6	4	67	9
Germany	22	11	73	14
Great Britain	11	16	53	21
Hungary	8	4	69	12
Iceland	25	18	88	5
India	41	32	79	49
Israel	17	12	78	29
Japan	12	25	56	13
Latvia	20	10	77	16
Lithuania	15	7	82	8
Mexico	17	6	68	27
New Zealand	20	30	49	22
Norway	12	14	69	12
Philippines	20	7	67	29
Poland	28	10	68	16
Russia	13	7	76	10
Slovak Republic	14	7	61	13
Slovenia	19	11	61	28
South Africa	15	9	84	28
Spain	20	9	73	14
Suriname	17	9	80	26
Sweden	16	12	65	13
Switzerland	16	14	71	22
Taiwan	14	7	86	26
United States	20	17	50	19
Venezuela	17	9	86	45
Total	18	13	70	21
<i>N</i>	51,668	51,668	48,091	44,905

Source: ISSP 2015 Work Orientation Survey.

CONFLICT AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

After considering the situation of workers, we now turn again to all respondents and their experience with discrimination and their acceptance of unions, which is one possible mediator in case of discrimination. ISSP asked if respondents have been discriminated against with regard to work, for example, when applying for a job, or in the context of a pay increase or promotion. The results presented in Table 10 show that 18 percent of the respondents experienced workplace discrimination within the past five years. As for country differences, perceived workplace discrimination is particularly high in India (41 percent), China (33 percent), and Poland (28 percent), and rather low in northern and western European countries.

ISSP also asked specifically about harassment on the job by superiors or coworkers. A total of 13 percent of the respondents reported that they experienced harassment during the past five years. The highest rate reported is for India with 32 percent of the respondents having experienced harassment. ISSP also takes a closer look at various reasons for discrimination on the job. In this regard, the following aspects are considered (1) age, (2) race, ethnicity, (3) nationality, (4) sex and gender, (5) religion, (6) disability/mental or physical illness, (7) family responsibilities, (8) political beliefs, (9) other reasons (education, etc.). The results indicate that age (23 percent) is the most common reason for discrimination, followed by race and ethnicity (9 percent), sex (9 percent), and family responsibilities (8 percent). Political beliefs (6 percent), disability and mental or physical illness (5 percent), and nationality (4 percent) are mentioned less often. Religion is mentioned the least often—only 2 percent of the respondents report having been harassed because of their religion.

The two final columns in Table 10 report the respondents' views on trade unions with regard to the questions: (1) "Workers need trade unions to protect their interests," and (2) "Strong trade unions are bad for the country's economy." Overall, the vast majority of respondents (70 percent) consider trade unions as necessary. Iceland shows the strongest agreement with this statement (88 percent). That syncs with the high trade union density in that country (OECD 2017). Yet, agreement with this statement is not necessarily correlated with national union density, given that agreement is also very strong in Taiwan (86 percent), Venezuela (86 percent), and Suriname (80 percent)—countries in which trade union density is much lower than in Western countries (Kuruvillea et al. 2002). The second item on unions shows that these organizations are not perceived to harm the economy. Only 21 percent of the people think that strong trade unions are bad for the economy, with the highest rates of agreement in India (49 percent) and Venezuela (45 percent).

CONCLUSION

The findings presented in this article reveal complex patterns of cross-country differences in work orientations and perceived working conditions. Considering the different labor market regimes, we see that the general importance of work is particularly high in the northern and liberal welfare state regimes and very low in India and the Philippines. Our results also indicate a comparably low significance of work in post-communist countries, which is surprising given the centrality of work in communist and socialist countries.

Our results also point to a significant gap between the ideal job characteristics desired by the general population and the actual situation of the working population. As for desired job characteristics, job security is the most important factor—especially in countries with high unemployment rates such as Spain and Croatia—followed by an interesting job and a high income. When it comes to the characteristics of a person’s current job, however, these three aspects are not mentioned very often, whereas social aspects such as being in contact with other people or having a job that is useful to society are mentioned frequently.

In contrast to the gap between the desired and actual job, the majority of employees are satisfied with their work–life balance in terms of hours worked and money earned. An especially high satisfaction level can be found in the Scandinavian welfare state regime, which goes along with high flexibility in terms of having an influence on working hours, and low perceived insecurity. Inflexible working hours, on the other hand, are reported in Eastern Europe and Russia—where overall job satisfaction is also comparably low.

In sum, our article offers first insights into the variation in attitudes toward work at the country level. However, it ignores differences within countries as well as changes over time. Changes over time are of particular interest, given that a major financial crisis occurred between the 2015 and 2005 ISSP surveys on work orientations and most likely affected working conditions and individual attitudes. Future research should thus consider both individual-level influences within countries and changes over time. The following articles in this special issue consider such aspects in more detail and will allow further insights into this matter.

NOTE

1. The authors contributed equally to this article.

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