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Work Quality: comparing 6 European regions

With its precise goals for member states, the European Employment Strategy has concentrated the attention of academics and politicians on the convergence in recent years between overall national employment figures, and on the more variable components (women, young people, older people) that influence the differences between states. In this connection, Italy is beginning to come into line with the EU27 average, while maintaining a poor performance due to the marginality of these subgroups. This approach has put a well-known characteristic of Italy in second place: the variance among regional performances. Suffice it to think of the difference between the employment rates of women and young people in Sicily and North Italy. But in an in-depth analysis the singularity of the Italian case, caused by historic labour market institutionalisation processes, comes to the fore once more. In this paper we will use the detailed data from the LFS in order to analyse 6 European regions: Lombardy, Tuscany, Sicily, Rhone-Alps (the Lyon region), South-East England (the Oxford region) and Stockholm. The result is an interesting scenario which compares regions located in different institutional contexts and discredits some clichés in the Italian debate:

1. Those employed in Italy are poorly qualified not only in the industrial sector due to the small size of businesses, but, comparatively, also in private services and public social services, which negative performance in comparison to European standards seems to be more qualitative than quantitative.
2. Working hours give little consideration to the needs of workers: in contrast with most European regions where trends reflect the theories of scholars from Gary Becker to Catherine Hakim, in Italy's regions women with medium-high levels of education, concentrated in the public sector, have shorter working hours, while those with fewer qualifications are faced with the alternative of working long hours in the private sector or leaving work when they have children.
3. In all European regions, short-term contracts are used in particular in agriculture and the social services. But concealed beneath these apparent similarities are higher percentages of Italians forced to accept such working conditions.