In July 2016, about 300,000 refugees in Germany were reported as seeking employment. At the same time, about 665,000 jobs were vacant – the highest number in many years. Behind these figures lies a complex network of institutional, political and societal challenges, which form the topic of this panel. Experts from the employment agency, social welfare organisations and scientific institutes will discuss difficulties in and solutions for the integration of refugees into the labour market: are the hurdles to be overcome of a legal, political, or economic nature? And, in view of the populist and xenophobic tendencies across Europe, to what extent are prejudices and the resulting discrimination complicating refugees’ access to the labour market?

Falling wages, weakened trade unions, reduced welfare benefits, cuts in the public sector: employment law and social security systems have undergone major changes in many EU countries. In this panel, sociologists, economists and civil society actors will discuss the reforms which have taken place primarily under the catchword of “austerity” since the start of the European economic crisis in 2008. The main focus will be on France, Germany and Greece: which path-dependencies influenced the reform of the various national systems? How did the affected populations themselves perceive the changes? And what is its impact on the future of the European social model and on democracy at the national and the European level?

The impact of European integration on the social cohesion of European societies has been the issue of increasing controversy in recent months. A number of academics, party politicians and representatives of organisations have underscored the weakening of national social security institutions and the idea of solidarity in general by European integration. Other actors from politics, civil society and science, however, point to new forms of solidarity and to initiatives for transnational social rights in the framework of EU citizenship: the ongoing integration process has led to the emergence of a genuinely European level of social policy, which complements and supersedes exclusive national social-security institutions. With a keynote lecture and a subsequent panel discussion, the evening event addresses these various positions and considers the current situation and the prospects for of a “Social Europe”.

The issue of old-age security is not only casting its shadow over the 2017 federal election campaign in Germany. All over Europe, models of old-age provision are being challenged by demographic change and the resulting recalibration of “fair” intergenerational, family and gender relations, as well as by a new balance between the state and the market. In this panel, historians, economists and EU administrators will examine long-term trends in the “three-pillar model of pension provision”, which has been promoted across Europe. Have collective state pension and social security schemes a future (again)? Or are social risks such as old age and disability increasingly commodified and left to individual responsibility? An additional focus will be placed on international transfers of socio-political ideas and programmes and on the different responses of private, national and supranational actors to the challenges of “Global Ageing”.
Economic crises, social change, political decision-making, and not least European integration have all changed the welfare state. A crucial element of social cohesion, it has traditionally been taken as a central power resource for national governments. But today, social policy is always embedded in European contexts and can only be understood from a cross-border perspective.

The conference, organised by the “Welfare State” group of the German-French interdisciplinary research programme Saisir l’Europe, will initiate a dialogue between representatives from research, politics and practice. It focuses on current socio-political challenges in the areas of migration, the labour market and old-age provision, which are all experiencing accelerated change through European integration.

Three thematic round-table discussions and an evening public lecture and discussion will bring the perspectives of political shapers and of scientific observers face-to-face. Together with representatives of trade unions, business and NGOs, experts from government and administration, and other day-to-day policymakers, we shall discuss the reasons, intentions and consequences of changes in these three fields. What historical breaks and what continuities can be seen? Which actors design and implement ongoing reform? And how are these actors themselves affected by current crises, new opportunities, and widening European horizons?

01/12/2016

Panel 1: Integration Through work? The Labour Market and the Refugees

Wolfgang Barth (AWO, Head of Department Migration and Intercultural Opening)
Dirk Buchwald (German Federal Employment Agency)
RA Dr. Frederik von Harbou (Universität Gießen / Lawyer for Asylum and Residence Law)
PD Dr. Nikola Tietze (Hamburg Foundation for the Promotion of Science and Culture)

17.30–19.45

Evening Event: Is There a Future for Social Europe?

Prof. Dr. Hartmut Kaelble, Keynote Lecture (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)
Prof Dr. Monika Eigmüller, Discussion (Europa-Universität Flensburg)
Dr. Arnaud Lechevalier, Discussion (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne)

02/12/2016

Panel 2: Work and Social Protection Systems in Europe

Didier Goubert (Territoires zéro chômeur de longue durée)
Sian Jones (European Anti-Poverty Network)
Prof. Dr. Matthias Knuth (Universität Duisburg-Essen)

13.30–16.30

Panel 3: Old-Age Provisions in Europe

Prof. Dr. Christoph Conrad (Université de Genève)
Prof. Dr. Elsa Fornero (Università di Torino)
Roel Gans (Dutch Ministry for Social Affairs and Employment)

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