

ABSTRACT

The job preferences of young people in South Tyrol: needs and expectations

In this study, the IER – Institute for Economic Research of the Chamber of Commerce of Bolzano/Bozen analysed the expectations of young people in South Tyrol with regard to their ideal workplace and illustrated them by means of some selected professions. The study focused on the following questions: What do young people in South Tyrol expect from their workplace? Are they all the same or can patterns and groups with different attitudes be identified? How well do selected professions in South Tyrol meet young people's expectations? To answer these questions, more than 2,000 young South Tyroleans between the ages of 14 and 30 were surveyed in the spring of 2023, in collaboration with the "Südtiroler Jugendring" and other youth organisations. An innovative statistical method, the adaptive choice based conjoint analysis, was used.

A key aim of the study was to understand what young people in South Tyrol expect from their workplace. The survey of young people shows that the most important factors when choosing a job are the working atmosphere among colleagues and the salary, both of which account for around 20 % of the importance. The importance of these characteristics is also reflected in the fact that a poor working atmosphere is a sufficient reason for 3 out of 10 young people to reject a job offer or to terminate an existing employment contract. Similarly, one in five categorically rules out a job with an income of 1,400 euros. Thus, a poor working atmosphere or a low salary cannot always be compensated for by other positive characteristics.

However, other aspects such as the relationship with one's superior also play an important role, followed by the type of employment contract (seasonal, fixed term or permanent) and career opportunities. In comparison, training opportunities, working hours (regular or irregular) and decision-making power seem to be less important criteria when choosing a workplace.

Although many of these aspects, especially working atmosphere and salary, are important to most young people, they are not all equally important. For 40 %, the working atmosphere is so important that they can be classified as 'harmony-oriented'. On the other hand, a third attach particular importance to a high salary and are therefore classed as 'salary-oriented', while one in five is 'security-oriented', with a corresponding preference for regular working hours and a permanent contract, as well as an aversion to seasonal jobs. The remaining 10 %, described as 'career-oriented', are mainly looking for jobs with good career and training prospects, as well as the opportunity to take on responsibility.

Irrespective of their specific job requirements, young people in South Tyrol demand a good work-life balance, their own house or apartment and good health care. This is followed by mobility issues such as good public transport links to their hometown and workplace. Almost two-thirds of young people can also imagine leaving South Tyrol for professional reasons, especially if this would be associated with interesting job and career opportunities as well as a higher salary.

Another aim of the study was to find out to what extent certain occupations in South Tyrol already meet the expectations and needs of young locals, and whether the image of these occupations corresponds to experts' assessments. There are indeed some differences: for example, the professions of teacher and construction worker have a poor image among young people, while they are considered attractive by the experts. On the contrary, mechatronics engineers and software developers are considered very attractive by both young people and experts. Finally, the following occupations are clearly in need of improvement from both points of view, although the approaches to improvement are different. While for waiters and waitresses a higher salary is the greatest potential for improvement, for cooks it is a regular working schedule and for hospital and elderly care workers it is a guarantee of a good working atmosphere.

Several challenges can be derived from these findings.

Create a motivating work environment: Employers need to recognise that the working atmosphere is an important lever for increasing the attractiveness of the workplace. Creating a good working atmosphere has no real economic cost and should therefore be possible in every company.

Salary is a key decision criterion: 1,400 euros net per month is the minimum income for young people. However, around a quarter of private-sector employees in South Tyrol earn less than this (ASTAT, 2023). It is therefore not surprising that the prospect of a higher income is one of the main reasons for leaving South Tyrol.

The image of some occupations does not correspond to reality:

Some professions have a very poor image among young people, even though they are considered attractive by the professionals themselves. Information and awareness-raising activities by associations and youth organisations are therefore needed to improve the image of these professions.

Framework conditions need to be improved for some professions:

The survey showed that some occupations are not only poorly rated by young people but also by the experts, in particular waiters and cooks. In addition to salary and working atmosphere, other aspects such as working hours and employment contracts need to be improved as well.

Take individual needs and wishes into account:

Not all young people have the same preferences for their ideal job. Accordingly, employers need to consider different aspirations in terms of salary, career, training opportunities or working atmosphere, as well as individual life plans and work-life balance. All this should be done as free of stereotypes and prejudices as possible, as the differences within young people cannot be attributed to gender, language group or other socio-economic factors.

Young people also need an attractive environment:

Many young people are tempted to leave South Tyrol for professional reasons, but also because the desire to own a house or an apartment in South Tyrol is difficult to realise. The creation of affordable housing is therefore a particular challenge for politics and administration.