Empirica (2022) 49:277–279
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10663-022-09538-9

EDITORIAL

Special Issue: Sustainability, Work and Growth in the Context of SDG 8

Sandra Bilek-Steindl[1] · Claudia Kettner[1] · Christine Mayrhuber[1]

Published online: 26 March 2022

Following the workshop "Sustainability, Work and Growth" organised by WIFO's thematic platform "Sustainability and Inclusivity" in March 2021, this special issue collects a selection of papers presented. The workshop covered a broad thematic spectrum of SDG 8 which is one of the 17 goals (Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs) adopted by the member states of the United Nations in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015.

SDG 8 calls for "Promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all". The papers presented in the workshop illustrated that, on the one hand, a transformation to a sustainable economy requires adjustments in a large number of areas and, on the other hand, that the synergies and trade-offs between different SDG-targets must be carefully examined. Moreover, the implementation of the SDGs requires in-depth scientific analysis, ongoing monitoring and political action.

To ensure decent work and sustainable economic growth, SDG 8 touches employment and economic growth within its twelve sub-goals (as listed in UN 2015) in a very heterogeneous and contradictory way (Coscieme et al. 2020): The spectrum of employment related topics ranges from the abolition of forced labor, promotion of safe and secure working environments for all workers, full employment up to sustainable work. With respect to economic growth, the targets do not only cover the GDP per capita growth rate but also e.g. increasing economic productivity and global resource efficiency, strengthening the capacity of domestic financial institutions and promoting sustainable tourism. A sustainable development approach

✉ Claudia Kettner
claudia.kettner@wifo.ac.at

Sandra Bilek-Steindl
sandra.bilek-steindl@wifo.ac.at

Christine Mayrhuber
christine.mayrhuber@wifo.ac.at

[1] Austrian Institute of Economic Research (WIFO), Arsenal Object 20, 1030 Vienna, Austria

requires the integration of environmental and climate issues into the sphere of employment as well as production and consumption.

The four papers published in this special issue focus on different aspects of SDG 8. Two papers address monitoring and measurement of SDG 8, i.e. the development of a proposal for new sub-goals, targets and indicators from a degrowth perspective and the development of a nowcasting approach for indicators assigned to SDG 8. Other aspects addressed in this special issue include an assessment of the potential of different labor market policies for greening employment and an econometric analysis at the intersection of SDG 8 with energy efficiency (SDG 7), technological change (SDG 9) and climate change (SDG 13) that focuses on the determinants and effects of the adoption of "green energy saving and related technologies" (GETs).

In the first paper of this special issue, Kreinin and Aigner (2021) propose conceptional changes on the idea of SDG 8. The authors analyze the goal from the perspective of "strong sustainability" (e.g. Ayres et al. 2001) and provide a reformulated framework including new sub-goals, targets and indicators, which they argue being better in line with the overall goals of the SDGs and the Agenda 2030. In their work, they peel out and discuss aspects of SDG 8 which are currently interfering the idea of long-term social-ecological sustainability. Their approach differentiates itself more clearly from economic growth and productivity per se and rather focuses on aspects of social and environmental well-being, decency of work and dependence of economic growth and unsustainable work.

Evaluating the progress of the SDGs provides important information for policy makers in order react if necessary. As a basis there can be considered the EU SDG indicators structured around the SDGs (Eurostat 2021). As some of the indicators are lagging in time, the paper by Bilek-Steindl and Url (2022) is focussing on nowcasting SDG indicators. The authors propose a nowcasting approach which allows an early estimation of the SDG 8 indicators. Incorporating the nowcast results, the development of the indicators in Austria is monitored at an early stage using the Eurostat (2021) approach. It is shown in the results that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are clearly visible in the indicators. In particular the assessment of indicators covering the economic dimension has deteriorated quickly with the economic downturn.

The third paper by Bohnenberger (2022) is an innovative approach that provides a systematically link of gainful employment to environmental dimensions. Different aspects and definitions of "green jobs" (ILO 2018), "greenness-of-tasks" (Janser 2018) and "sustainable work" (Barth et al. 2016) are integrated in a new taxanomy of sustainable employment on the level of analysis as well as on the level of environmental impacts. Based on a systematic survey of policy proposals from scientific publications as well as from relevant organizations (NGOs), in the first step the paper derives eight major strategies of greening work through labor market policies. In the second step, these strategies are explored in terms of their contribution to sustainable employment. Bohnenberger structures these effects along four different dimensions, which are output, occupation, work-lifestyles, outcome and efficiency. The author concludes that conversion of plants/businesses and environmental decommodification are the main modification to

greening the output; environmental labor law, vocational guidance and alternative income sources promote environmentally sustainable occupations; and that sustainable work-lifestyles can be ameliorated by equalizing income and employment time.

In the fourth paper of this special issue, Peneder et al. (2021) study the adoption of "green energy saving and related technologies" (GETs) based on a survey among companies in the DACH region (Germany, Austria and Switzerland). On the one hand, the authors investigate the main determinants of the adoption of GETs in different areas (e.g. production, transport, buildings, ICT or renewables). On the other hand, they test the perceived impacts of the adoption of these technologies in terms of energy efficiency, CO_2 emissions, and the firms' competitiveness reported by the managers of the firms. The econometric results show that policies affect the adoption of GETs via differentiated transmission channels, and not in a uniform manner. The authors conclude that policy can induce firms to improve energy efficiency and their carbon footprint and that policymakers should opt for a comprehensive policy mix, so that the individual instruments each capitalize on different transmission mechanisms.

References

Ayres R, van den Berrgh J, Gowdy J (2001) Strong versus weak sustainability: economics, natural sciences, and consilience. Environ Ethics 23:155–168. https://doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics200123225

Barth T, Jochum G, Littig B (eds) (2016) Nachhaltige Arbeit: Soziologische Beiträge zur Neubestimmung der gesellschaftlichen Naturverhältnisse. Campus Verlag, Frankfurt

Bilek-Steindl S, Url T (2022) Nowcasting and monitoring SDG 8. Empirica. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10663-022-09533-0

Bohnenberger K (2022) Greening work: labor market policies for the environment. Empirica. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10663-021-09530-9

Coscieme L, Mortensen LF, Anderson S et al (2020) Going beyond gross domestic product as an indicator to bring coherence to the sustainable development goals. J Clean Prod 248:119232. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2019.119232

Eurostat (2021) Sustainable development in the European Union – monitoring report progress towards the SDGs in an EU context: 2021 edition.

Janser M (2018) The Greening of Jobs: Empirical Studies on the Relationship between Environmental Sustainability and the Labor Market. Dissertation, University of Bamberg. https://doi.org/10.20378/irbo-54822

Kreinin H, Aigner E (2021) From, "Decent work and economic growth" to "Sustainable work and economic degrowth": a new framework for SDG 8. Empirica. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10663-021-09526-5

ILO (2018) World Employment and Social Outlook 2018 – Greening with jobs. International Labour Organisation. 9789221316473[ISBN]

Peneder M, Arvanitis S, Rammer C et al (2021) Policy instruments and self-reported impacts of the adoption of energy saving technologies in the DACH region. Empirica. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10663-021-09517-6

UN (2015) Sustainable Development Goals. Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A/RES/70/1. UN General Assembly, New York.