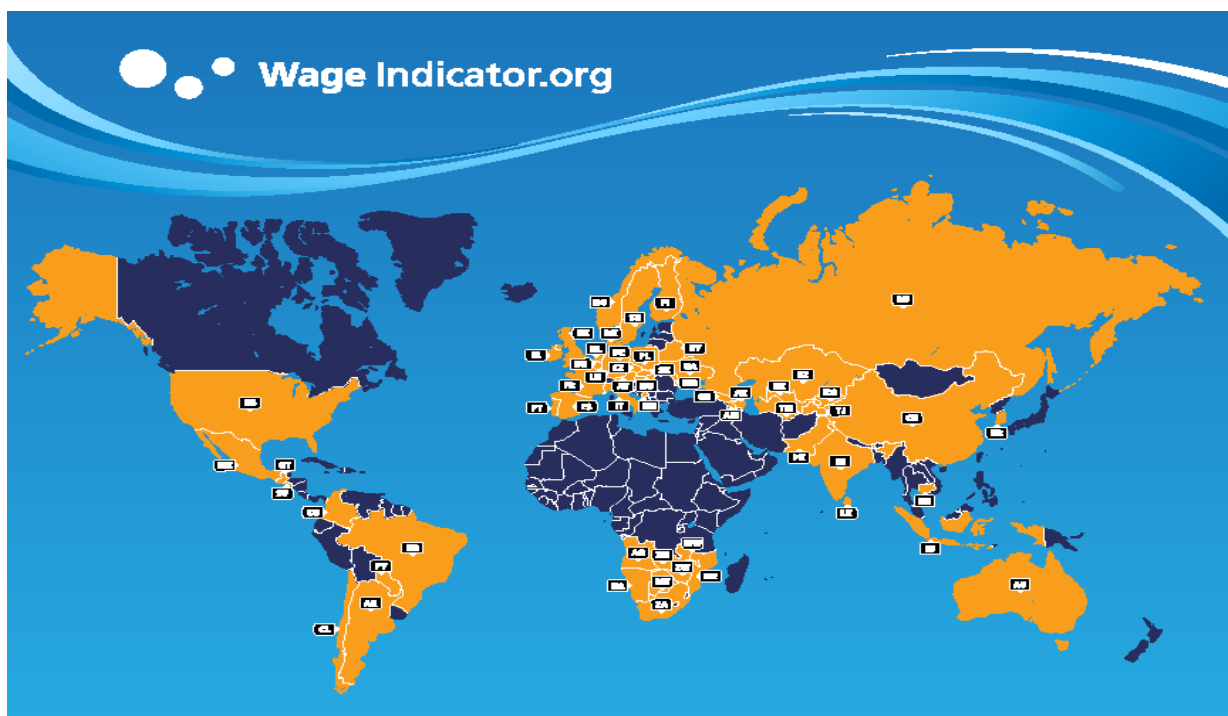# WageIndicator: ten years of websites

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Ten years ago

Ten years ago we published an article in the magazine *Zeggenschap* about the first Women's WageIndicator, launched in the Netherlands in May 2001. The website provided information about wages in 40 major women's occupations and included a web survey on employment and wages. Since then, we have written a further 37 articles for *Zeggenschap* on a range of topics, from young people employed in supermarkets to the working conditions of older employees; from workers in the food industry and construction to those in universities and call centres; from the reorganization to telework to the introduction of salary sacrifice schemes. Initially, these articles were only about the Netherlands, but as time went on and the survey was expanded to new territories, they increasingly began to draw upon comparisons with other countries. All these articles were based on data from the web survey. Now, we offer a different sort of article, reviewing the history of these past ten years.

History of the WageIndicator

The WageIndicator project began in 1999. Paulien Osse, then web manager for Dutch trade union confederation FNV, thought it would be informative if women could compare their own pay with the average for their profession. This meant data from many women was needed, about their wages and working hours. In 2000, a written survey was published in major Dutch women's magazines and in trade union journals. The same survey was posted on several websites that were frequently visited by women. There was an overwhelming response, as much to the web survey as to the paper survey. The wage data from the survey formed the basis for a salary-check: Choose your occupation, and WageIndicator would provide information about the average wage in that job, generating a figure based on your indicated levels of education and experience.

The success of the web-survey showed that the internet would be a good medium to collect data on wages. In May 2001, the Women's WageIndicator website was launched for the Netherlands, including a pay-check for 40 occupations and lots of information about working conditions. This site also attracted many male visitors, and so in late 2001 a website specifically for men and a general WageIndicator website were introduced. But the family was not yet complete. Diversity in the labour market was to be reflected with the launch of a WageIndicator for workers in the health and care sectors in 2002, and one for workers over 40 in 2003. The websites attracted thousands of visitors each month, with a minimum wage check and a gross-net salary calculator also having been introduced in the meantime. Some of the visitors came not only to check their salary or other information on the website, but also to fill in the survey. The number of occupations in the salary check was gradually expanded to about 350.

The organisation

The WageIndicator concept is owned by the WageIndicator Foundation, a non-profit organisation dedicated to improving labour market transparency by providing accurate wage and wage-related information. Its mission statement reads: 'Share and compare wage information. Contribute to a transparent labour market. Provide free, accurate wage data through salary checks on national websites. Collect wage data through web-surveys.' On 17 September 2003, the Foundation was established under Dutch law. Its founders were the Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Labour Studies (AIAS) of the University of Amsterdam, the Dutch Confederation of Trade Unions (FNV), and the international career website Monster. These parties make up the Board of Supervisors.

Director Paulien Osse supervises the work subcontracted to other companies for web programming, web design, data and questionnaire management and web journalism, all of which are based in the Netherlands. Regional teams are located in Argentina, South Africa, Belarus and India. The University of Amsterdam/AIAS oversees the scientific aspects of the research and the dataset. Worldwide, administrative and financial issues are managed by the Foundation, which also works to stimulate the development of new tools and applications, ensure that the technological under-pinnings are state-of-the-art, and to seek funding and negotiate commercial deals.

International expansion

In 2003 the idea emerged that what worked in the Netherlands could also work in other countries. An application for funding via Woliweb, a research project in the Sixth Framework Programme of the European Commission, was successful and consequently new WageIndicator websites were launched in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the UK, Finland, Poland and Spain at the end of 2004. And what was possible in Europe was also possible worldwide. In 2005, the Global project started, funded by FNV Mondiaal, the international arm of the FNV trade union confederation. WageIndicator sites in South Africa, India, South Korea and Brazil were made possible, and were followed one year later by Argentina and Mexico. In all these countries the concept was a hit and the sites received many visitors.

In 2006 a second project was funded through the European Commission's Sixth Framework Programme. This project, EurOccupations, enabled the creation of an occupations database with a search tree for more than 1,500 professions in eight countries. This search tree was then extended to other WageIndicator countries. In subsequent years more countries joined in, sometimes with project financing, sometimes on their own: almost all other European countries (including most former Soviet countries), Russia, most countries in Latin America, the U.S. and China. In 2008, the Decisions for Life project was funded by the Dutch Ministry of Development, meaning WageIndicator websites in 14 developing countries could be started or continued. In 2010, a first website was launched on the fifth continent, Australia.

Ten years after the start of the first WageIndicator website in the Netherlands, about 60 countries around the world now have a WageIndicator website. A few years ago, the Foundation unveiled a plan to expand to a total of 75 countries, which is well underway.

The websites

In the past ten years there have been amazing developments in website technology. The Plone open source Content Management System (CMS) used for the Wage Indicator sites makes the management of web pages easy and offers many more technical features. There is also better understanding of how websites can be made more user-friendly. The massive use of Google and other search engines means that sites attract visitors not only through reputation, but also by keywords. The increased ability for website managers to easily view statistics for search terms and visits to their sites has led to significant improvements.

The technical infrastructure has also improved greatly. Fiber cabling has meant fast Internet in many countries, and wireless Internet has also become available. Recently it has become possible to view websites on mobile phones. Last year the WageIndicator Foundation therefore put a lot of effort into developing a mobile version of its websites, as well as a 'light' version for countries with poor Internet connections. At the Foundation, understanding of what the core of the web pages should be worldwide has grown. All the national sites now have the same structure. There are pages for employment law and the Decent Work Check, pages with information on minimum wages, and pages for the salary-check, the web survey and the VIP pay check showing wages for 'Very Important Persons'. The website www.wageindicator.org contains information about the Foundation, its projects, publications, the research lab, and the like.

Cooperation with media partners

The Foundation coordinates the web marketing in various ways to attract as many visits to the websites as possible. Firstly, the information in the salary-check on the websites must be of high quality. The website visitors should have confidence that the information provided is reliable, and be encouraged to contribute their own salary details to the survey. To maintain that trust, cooperation with universities, major job sites, trade unions and their umbrella organizations is important. Cooperation with partners that have a prominent Internet presence is also crucial. Currently, the Foundation has agreements in many countries with major web portals, job vacancy sites, temporary staffing agency sites and media groups and publishers with a strong presence on the Internet. These partners place the salary-check or other WageIndicator tools on their own websites, thereby attracting more visitors. Very recently a cooperation agreement was signed with China's largest job site, whose owners believe the WageIndicator websites will be of interest to their visitors.

The Foundation also tries to generate free publicity, for example through the publication of research based on data from the survey, and uses search engine optimization to improve the position of WageIndicator sites in the rankings of search engines. To further increase the probability of visitors finding these pages, for a number of countries an additional 433 web pages have been created, with each page providing information about a particular job from the occupations database.

The salary-check and the web survey

Earlier we noted that the salary-check calculates the average wage that someone can expect to earn in a selected occupation, based on a number of indicated characteristics such as education and work experience. The database that supports the salary check is built from the web survey that collects data on wages, of course anonymously. The web survey is aimed at all groups in the workforce, including employees, the self-employed, freelancers, trainees, job seekers, subsidized job-holders, those working in family enterprises, and those with perhaps a more tenuous connection to the job market, such as the disabled, pensioners, students or students with a job. The survey includes questions to collect factual information about wages, allowances, working hours, overtime, occupation, sector, collective bargaining coverage, education, on-the-job training, characteristics of the workplace and the company, working conditions, work history, future career prospects and household composition, and also asks the opinion of respondents on a number of these topics.

The survey has been translated into the languages of all WageIndicator countries, but as far as possible each survey contains the same questions. Halfway through the survey, visitors are asked whether they want to fill in the second section. This section contains no questions that are important for the salary-check, but does contain questions of importance for other research being carried out. In total, filling in the two parts takes about 10 minutes, and there is a cash prize available to win.

Meanwhile, a large database has been created with wage data by occupation and sector for many countries and over time. This wages database is the basis of the calculations for the salary-check.

Celebrating ten years of operations

On Thursday May 12, WageIndicator celebrates its 10th anniversary at De Burcht in Amsterdam, following the final conference for the 14-country Decisions for Life project. Guests are coming from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and of course Europe. For more information about the celebration, see
http://www.wageindicator.org/main/WageIndicatorgazette/wageindicator-news/2018the-next-decade2019-10-years-wage-indicator-celebrated-at-may-conference

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