



Attractive workplaces: Innovative company strategies for growth and jobs

info sheet

'The objectives of full employment, job quality, labour productivity and social cohesion must be reflected in clear and measurable priorities: making work a real option for everyone, attracting more people into the labour market, improving adaptability, investing in human capital, modernising social protection, promoting equal opportunities inter alia between men and women, and fostering social inclusion'

Presidency conclusions of the Brussels European Council, 22 and 23 March 2005



WHAT is the context?

The Lisbon strategy aims to make the EU by 2010 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth, with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'. However, the reform process has lagged behind the ambitious targets set in 2000 and was subsequently reviewed.

In spring 2005, the Council discussed the European Commission's mid-term review of the Lisbon strategy. Despite controversial views the EU leaders overcame differences and agreed on the need to increase productivity and strengthen social cohesion, putting emphasis on development in the knowledge society and investment in human capital.

Often criticised as a 'top-down' approach, the European strategy has nevertheless been built on concrete practices. Recent research from the Foundation demonstrates that there are companies across Europe implementing innovative employment policies, practices and agreements, and, therefore, contributing to the Lisbon strategy objectives.

WHY this research?

As a step towards the ambitious challenges set by the Council in spring 2005, the Foundation initiated research to identify innovative company practices and demonstrate how companies are implementing the Lisbon strategy.

The research consisted of identifying and analysing company case studies from seven countries (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and UK). The 104 case examples were organised under six thematic orientations, which reflect key dimensions of the Lisbon strategy.

It is important to note that the selected case studies are examples of 'win-win situations', showing that it is possible to combine quality of work and employment with economic performance. The involvement of the social partners at company and sectoral level is a significant aspect of the development of these policies and their outcomes.

WHAT are the findings?

Fostering employability

- Human resources are valued as a key strategic factor for competitiveness and development of the company, therefore personnel and competence development are often embedded in the company strategy management.
- The identification of individual, team, and organisational needs for qualifications and skills is a feature in most case studies.
- Several companies encourage internal mobility policies as a valuable means to develop broader knowledge among employees and to restructure the organisation without redundancies.

Increasing labour market participation of underemployed groups

- Company policies geared towards improving female and youth employment rates are primarily a response to accommodate persistent skills shortage.
- In most cases, the promotion of women's employment involves a variety of measures encompassing internal and external support for childcare and elderly care, re-integration programmes after parental leave, and availability of part-time work models.
- The successful development of youth employment policies depends on a supportive network (employees, employers, public authorities, training institutions and schools).
- The introduction of job guarantees after completion of the training increase the success of such policies.

Integration of people at risk of exclusion into the labour market

- The main reason given for company policies for early school leavers, long-term unemployed and disabled people is corporate social responsibility.
- Key approaches are educational and training programmes aimed at particular groups of disadvantaged young people, entry qualification programmes and opportunities to obtain work experience.
- Intensive coaching, mentoring and counselling during the entire programme are preconditions for successful company policies.
- Most company examples include programmes with a long-term human resource perspective and corporate culture supports sustainability of such policies.

Make work pay and attractive

- Most of employee financial participation schemes provided by the selected companies are not strictly related to profit sharing, share ownership, and company savings schemes.
- In most cases the employee financial participation schemes were developed jointly by the management and work councils or trade unions.
- The intention for introducing financial participation schemes is long-term commitment and involvement, creation of a positive working atmosphere, increased productivity and effectiveness of work.
- In some cases, the financial participation schemes are accompanied by comprehensive training and personnel development programmes.

Towards a balanced flexibility

- Successful initiatives of balanced flexibility concern both flexible working time models and policies aimed at improving employment conditions of non-permanent employees.
- Work organisation plays a crucial role both for guaranteeing functional services and production processes for the companies and working time

sovereignty for the employees when introducing flexible working time systems.

- Although flexible working time arrangements can sometimes be regarded negatively by employees, the case examples show that balanced flexibility result in improved working conditions and better work–life balance.
- A typical feature is a win-win situation in the implemented practices on flexible working time arrangements, often as outcome of well developed social dialogue.

Business creation and entrepreneurship

- The case studies exemplify a broad variety of creative examples of how companies can foster business creation in many different ways, ranging from classical spin-offs to new forms of private-public partnerships.
- A considerable number of examples relate to new forms of networks built to improve the chances of new entrepreneurs.
- The role of social partners is crucial for the success of initiatives supporting the creation of local and regional business networks and clusters.

WHAT now?

The selected case studies demonstrate that companies across the EU are implementing employment practices that could feed into national policies and inspire other companies to do more and better. The dissemination of good examples is essential to encourage the take-up of existing practices and raise awareness of the need to endorse the Lisbon targets at company level.

The next step should be to identify company examples in selected countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, and Slovenia). Large and foreign-owned companies could be potential sources as policies are often better structured, given the large-scale resources available.

Further information

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Findings of this research will be published shortly at the EWCO (European Working Conditions Observatory) site at <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco>

