

communiqué



European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

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DIRECTOR'S DIARY

Making work more attractive

Against the background of the Lisbon strategy goals of increasing employment rates, the Foundation carried out a company survey on working time arrangements and work–life balance in late 2004 and early 2005. This comprehensive, pan-European survey of 21,000 workplaces set out to explore what types of working time arrangements companies put in place for their employees. At EU policy level, the priority is the need to make work more attractive, in particular for women and elderly workers, and to implement policies which make it possible to combine work with other aspects of life.

At a briefing to members of the European Parliament on 18 March, the Foundation presented the first findings of the survey. According to the findings, flexible working time arrangements are viewed as beneficial by both the employer and the employee, with more than half the workplaces in the survey reporting a higher degree of job satisfaction among workers, and a better arrangement of working hours to match the workload. About one third of the companies also reported reduction of paid overtime and lower absenteeism.

This joint positive approach to flexi-time arrangements is good news for job creation in Europe.

In the coming month, the Foundation's Annual Report 2005 will be published. The Foundation will also share its expertise at an Austrian EU Presidency conference on social services of general interest and visit government and social partner representatives in the United Kingdom as part of its roadshow initiative.

Jorma Karppinen
Director

Temporary agency work in an enlarged European Union

Temporary agency work is an increasingly significant form of employment in the EU, representing the full-time equivalent of 1.3% of total employment in the former EU15 countries, according to new research from the Foundation's European Industrial Relations Observatory (EIRO).

Temporary work agencies in the former EU15 countries employ the full-time equivalent of some 2.5 to 3 million people in approximately 20,000 firms – a segment with a likely annual turnover in excess of €75 billion, the report estimates. In EU15 countries, the employment levels range from 0.3% in Denmark to 2.6% in the United Kingdom; high levels also exist in the Netherlands, Belgium and France. In the new EU Member States for which data is available, employment levels range from 0.5% in Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, to 1.4% in Hungary.

Read more on www.eurofound.eu.int/press/communiqué/2006/april/newsletter2.htm

Minimum wages: a global perspective

The EU Member States and acceding countries, as well as Brazil, China, Japan and the USA, have in place a system for regulating pay at the lower end of their labour markets, providing a floor for wage levels across the economy. These are some of the results from the report, *Key themes in global industrial relations: Minimum wages and relocation of production*, from the European Industrial Relations Observatory (EIRO). The report examines in detail the operation of the minimum wage system across the different countries.

Within the EU, the minimum wage in 2005 ranged from about EUR115 per month in Latvia to slightly over EUR1,500 in Luxembourg – 13 times the Latvian figure. The two acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania have even lower minimum wage rates: EUR77 and EUR86 respectively. Looking beyond Europe, the federal minimum wage level in the United States is the equivalent of EUR700 per month. That is the same as the average regional minimum wage in Japan. This places the US and Japanese economies between the higher minimum-wage Northern Europe, and the lower minimum-wage Mediterranean countries and Slovenia. The report determines the equivalent figure for Brazil as being EUR110 per month, while it concludes that it is not possible to establish a minimum wage level for China.

Read more on www.eurofound.eu.int/press/communiqué/2006/april/newsletter3.htm

NEWS IN PICTURES

Jorma Karppinen, the Foundation's Director, and Willy Buschak, Deputy Director, with MEP Jean Lambert (The Greens/European Free Alliance group/UK) at the presentation in the European Parliament of the first findings of the new survey 'Working time and work–life balance in companies'. Also present were MEPs Stephen Hughes (Socialist group/UK) and Richard Falbr (Socialist group/Czech Republic)



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Working conditions in Estonia and Finland

Summaries of national working conditions survey findings have been published by the European Working Conditions Observatory since 2003: to date over twenty have been published. Results from these surveys provide an interesting complement to the results of the Foundation's own working conditions survey and are an important source of comparative data. The most recent reports deal with survey data from Finland and Estonia and cover trends over the period 1998–2005. They look at aspects such as working time, pay, employment contracts, intensification of work, violence and harassment and work–life balance. Workers in Estonia report an increase in work intensity while in Finland, where levels of work demands in general appear to be stabilising, increased mental demands at work are reported by twice as many workers as increased physical demands. However, employees in the local government sector in Finland report deteriorating working conditions.

The report can be found on www.eurofound.eu.int/ewco/surveys/surveyreports.htm

Accessing Foundation research

The Foundation is making available the datasets of its recent research via the Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS) International, a UK-based data centre. The aim is to ensure that the Foundation's European survey datasets are professionally preserved, and to promote third-party use of the surveys. It is the Foundation's policy to make its datasets and accompanying documentation available for third-party use, after publishing its own work. (Survey data is available two years after the Foundation begins its analysis phase). Currently, the datasets of the first European Quality of Life Survey and the third European Working Conditions Survey are available free of charge to all registered users for non-commercial purposes.

Access the ESDS Archive on www.esds.ac.uk/International/access/eurofound.asp

Flexible, part-time working in the UK

More than half (56%) of all private companies and public organisations in the UK with more than 10 employees have flexible working time arrangements in place, the Foundation's new report *Working time and work–life balance in European companies* has found. The findings, based on the Foundation's Company Survey 2005, also indicate that the UK labour market is part-time friendly: UK companies and public organisations rank first in Europe when it comes to easily switching from full-time to part-time work. A Foundation seminar in London on 5 April will discuss these findings, and others from the report, with representatives from the UK government, the social partners and civil society. The report will be published in May.

Read more on www.eurofound.eu.int/areas/worklifebalance/eswtfindings.htm

Working time over the life course

In recent years, the Foundation has examined the issue of time and income distribution in the context of a life course policy perspective. This approach takes a holistic view of the entire life path, rather than viewing specific events or phases separately. A new report looks into the current state and development of time options, time arrangements and income over the life course, relating current working time options and arrangements over the life course to the prevailing societal and institutional framework. In doing so, the report aims to highlight the need for implementing time policies that take a life course perspective and that eliminate the potential for gender, social or age discrimination.

The report can be found at www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/htmlfiles/ef05160.htm

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Social dialogue capacity building at sectoral and local level in the new Member States plus Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey
6 April 2006, Zagreb, Croatia
Foundation own event

Conference on social services of general interest
20–21 April 2006, Vienna, Austria
Austrian EU Presidency event

Industrial relations in agriculture
25 April 2006, Brussels, Belgium
European Parliament Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

Fourth international conference on occupational risk prevention
10–12 May 2006, Seville, Spain
Junta de Andalucía

PUBLICATIONS

Employee financial participation in the European Union (infosheet) EN
<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/htmlfiles/ef0587.htm>

Reconciliation of work and family life and collective bargaining in the European Union EN
http://www.eurofound.eu.int/other_reports/work_family_life.pdf

Key themes in global industrial relations: minimum wages and relocation of production EN
<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/comparativestudies.html>

Working conditions in Estonia EN
<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/htmlfiles/ef0628.htm>

Working conditions in Finland EN
<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/htmlfiles/ef0629.htm>

Free publications can be downloaded directly from the website and priced publications can be ordered online at www.eurofound.eu.int. They can also be ordered from bookshops or from one of the sales agents of the Office of Official Publication of the European Communities. More information is available at www.eur-op.eu.int.

Event of the Month

Employment Week 2006
16–18 May 2006, Brussels, Belgium

Jorma Karpinnen, Foundation Director, will chair Session 1 on 17 May on the subject of 'Employability through diversity – how well is it working?'. In parallel, David Foden, Foundation Research Manager, will contribute to Session 2 on 'Work-Life Balance: is it really getting any better?'.
As part of the Foundation's 'Your Work, Your Life' campaign, the Foundation will present the findings of its Company Survey on 17 May from 10h45 to 11h15. You are welcome to visit the Foundation's stand (no. 60) at the exhibition.

For further information, please visit www.employmentweek.com