

Changing working conditions in Europe: Moving towards better work

First findings from Eurofound's 6th European Working Conditions Survey

*Joint conference organised by Eurofound in cooperation with the
Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the European Union*

Juan Menéndez-Valdés - Opening remarks

Minister, thank you for your kind words.

Eurofound is very happy to organise this event in cooperation - and with the support of - the Luxembourgish Presidency.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Whether you work to live or live to work (a question that only you can answer) you and I – like the vast

majority of people of working age - spend a significant amount of time at work.

Apart from being necessary, as the main source of income for most of us, work is also the main way we integrate in the society. It can be a source of satisfaction and personal development. It provides opportunities for social interaction. It provides 'identity'.

However, work can also be a painful obligation, a source of frustration and anxiety. It can harm our physical and mental health.

The improvement of working conditions – the **reduction** of risks and the **enhancement** of the positive sides of work – has been an objective of European integration from the start. At the core of this is the concern for the health and safety.

However, we know that the benefits of improving job quality and working conditions go **beyond the individual well-being at work.**

Job quality also matters for **labour market participation.** Some working conditions attract more people to the labour market and facilitate them remaining at work and having a longer working life.

More people are able and willing to engage in work if workplaces have conditions that fit their capabilities, needs and requirements. Working time arrangements that make it possible to combine work with care responsibilities are just one example.

And it can be shown that **high job quality** and good working conditions can support **innovation and growth** in companies. Eurofound research on company practices supports this point: good outcomes for workers in terms of **well-being** and strong company **performance go hand in hand** in companies with high employee participation.

Good quality jobs are therefore an important factor in supporting (smart, sustainable and inclusive) growth in Europe. And policymakers and practitioners – whether in governments, in social partner organisations or at company level – are searching for ways to help improve working conditions.

To enhance the positive aspects of work and minimise risks, they need reliable information.

They need to know what conditions are like today; they need to know how they are changing over time and they need to anticipate how they will develop in the future.

This is where the European Working Conditions Survey comes in. The EWCS provides facts and figures and allows for robust and comparative analysis – in short: it **provides evidence** on which policies geared towards the improvement of working conditions can be based.

I am therefore happy to see so many policymakers and practitioners in the room today eager to learn about the first findings from the latest wave of the European Working Conditions Survey. It is the sixth time that we have conducted the survey.

When we started back in 1991, the survey covered 12 countries and focused to a large extent on exploring conditions in male-dominated industrial work places.

As the context and nature of work is changing, not least due to the digital revolution and globalised competition, our survey has also evolved.

In 2015, we covered 35 European countries. The latest questionnaire covers a much wider range of issues which allows us to contribute to different debates: on the different dimensions of the quality of work, on the ageing workforce, on the link between job quality and the sustainability of work, on gender segregated roles,

on skills development and the learning organisation, on staff engagement, on the blurring borders between work and life, paid and unpaid work, between being employee or self-employed– to name just a few.

And we have teamed up with the International Labour Organisation and other international partners to add to our analysis of the situation in Europe to comparative information from countries outside Europe - from the United States for example and also from some major cities in China. I believe that providing a more global picture on working conditions can serve as key evidence to better understand and identify the lights and shadows of economic globalised competition.

This, however, is for next year. Today we will present first findings from the 28 EU Member States. In some of these Member States, fieldwork was only completed in September. So I am very proud that only two months later we can already provide you with first insights and some key messages on what has changed – for better or for worse – and also, where we see no new developments.

My colleague, Agnes Parent-Thirion, will lead you through the first findings in a moment. We will then have a chance to discuss with other experts changes over time and whether, in fact, work is improving.

In a second panel we will turn to the key challenges for working conditions. The future of work will be influenced by a range of factors – digitalisation, new forms of employment, labour mobility, gender and work. The EWCS covers these issues and they will play an important role in our programme of analysis.

In a final panel, we will give policymakers a chance to discuss the policy challenges linked to the improvement of working conditions for 2020 and beyond.

Throughout, you will have the opportunity to raise questions and comment on what you hear from the

experts and panellists and I would like to encourage you to make use of this opportunity.

For now, I thank you and pass the floor to Agnes to kick us off with a presentation of the first findings.

(800 words)