

COMMUNIQUÉ



EUROPEAN FOUNDATION

for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

East - West exchange on employment

The challenges and opportunities posed by employment trends was the theme of the 12th Information Exchange with Central and Eastern European Countries (CEE), held recently in Vienna.

The seminars were organized jointly by the Foundation, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Austrian Training Academy for the Civil Service as an official event of the Austrian Presidency.

The seminars considered the European strategy on employment as incorporated into the Amsterdam Treaty through the Chapter on Employment and Social Policy.

The Foundation presented a number of its employment projects: the EPOC results, developments in the SME sector and some case studies of decentralization of work.

Representatives of trade unions, employers, national governments and the research community from 10 CEE countries attended the conference.


Commenting on the process, Clive Purkiss, director of the Foundation, said that these exchanges have been a commitment of the Foundation since 1991 when the CEE countries embarked on radical changes in their economic, social and political systems. "We were conscious of the fact that these countries might join or form an association with the European Union at some time in the



The EIRO team at the Institute of Information Scientists' award ceremony from left to right John Myers, Andreas Antonopoulos, Fiona Murray, Jurgen Klöckner, Helen Baird, Mike Forsyth and Michael Gold

future and that the Foundation could share the knowledge it has accumulated over the years to the advantage of all.

"The seminars operate on a number of levels of exchange of information. The quadripartite structure of the Foundation is also reflected in the representation from CEE countries.

The Foundation's work and results are made available to the CEE countries which, in turn, provide valuable information about the dynamics of the ongoing transition process." 

Major award for EIRO

The Institute of Information Scientists has awarded the 1998 Jason Farradane Award to the European Industrial Relations Observatory (EIRO) team at the Foundation.

Making the presentation, chairman of the council of the Institute, Peter Enser said the award was being made for "their outstanding and original work on the European Industrial Relations Observatory".

Fiona Murray, programme manager, accepted the award on behalf of Norman Wood, head of the information section at the Foundation and the EIRO team.

This is the second time the Foundation has been recognised in this way: in 1992 it received the same award for its development of the EMIRE database containing the European employment and industrial relations glossaries. EIROOnline can be accessed at www.eiro.eurofound.ie 

EIROOnline hits

The average number of hits per month on EIROOnline - the database on European industrial relations information - is nearly 20,000, with an average length of visit of 11 minutes, according to figures issued recently by EIRO. The EU countries using the database most actively are: UK, Germany, Ireland, Belgium and Denmark.

Over the six-month period from March 1998 there were 120,000 hits on EIROOnline and more than 1,500 records of news, features and comparative records on European industrial relations had been posted on the site by the end of this period. 

In this issue

European Telework Week • Virtual companies • Working and caring for adults
• Changes in working conditions

European Telework Week

Companies in cyberspace

Early November marks the start of European Telework Week - a framework in which to debate the significant impact of teleworking on work practices. Although there is no completely satisfactory definition of teleworking, best estimates indicate that four million Europeans (2.5% of the workforce) are currently involved in some form of telework activity.

Changing modes of work

Eberhard Köhler, coordinator of information technology research at the Foundation, views the development of teleworking as part of the evolution toward greater flexibility in many aspects of working life.

"These developments reflect the move away from the standard assumption that work must be performed in a central workplace where people come to work and then go home again. The emphasis is growing on greater spatial flexibility, in working time and in work contracts."

Virtual companies

Köhler is currently researching a new form of work organization - the virtual company - an electronic networking company where a number of people with specialist skills come together, usually via the internet, to do a specific task for which these skills are needed. The multi-media industry is a typical example. In the virtual company scenario, a sound engineer teams up electronically on the internet, with computer, graphic and text specialists to compete for a large contract. If successful, they carry out the job, operating

as a virtual company for a limited period.

Operating as a virtual company, Köhler together with a team of experts have produced a guide for virtual companies in CD-ROM format in German and English. It includes background information on: how decentralized working has developed; the opportunities and the pitfalls of the virtual company; and the route companies and individuals can take towards electronic decentralization. The CD-ROM has links to the web site of the University of Berne, which carries case studies of operating virtual companies.

Evaluation features

The CD-ROM features a questionnaire which assists companies evaluate their own position vis-à-vis decentralization. It also makes suggestions as to the steps which need to be taken to move a company closer to virtualization.

The CD-ROM was presented by Köhler to the 5th Future of Work Forum at Henley Management College, UK in September.

The European Guide for Virtual Companies - A framework for action - CD-ROM costs ECU 20. For ordering details, see page 4. On request from the Foundation 100 copies are available for free. In return the Foundation is anxious to have feedback from users which can be submitted via an electronic evaluation form incorporated on the CD-ROM 🌐

Contact: camilla.gallidabino@eurofound.ie

Disability and telework

A conference on teleworking and disability will be held by the Foundation during European Telework Week this month. The conference is co-organized by the Foundation, the Communications Workers' Union, the European Telework Development Project, the Information Society Commission and the Central Remedial Clinic. Its principle aim is to increase awareness of the teleworking option for people with disabilities. The conference will be opened by Minister Mary Wallace - Irish minister with responsibility for disability issues at the Ministry for Justice and Law Reform. Eberhard Köhler of the Foundation will make opening remarks to the conference. 🌐

Conferences and events

The Foundation mounted enquiry desks at the 5th European Assembly on Telework and New Ways of Working in Lisbon and the Building for a New Millennium - Telework and Tomorrow's Organization Conference in Turkey during September.

Eberhard Köhler addressed a conference on information and new forms of work and their contribution to sustainable economic development in Bozen/ Bolzano, Italy at the end of September. 🌐

Regulation of telework

EIRObserver will publish a comparative study on teleworking and industrial relations in all EU Member States and Norway for the November/December period both on the EIROnline website and, in a briefer version, in EIRObserver. 🌐

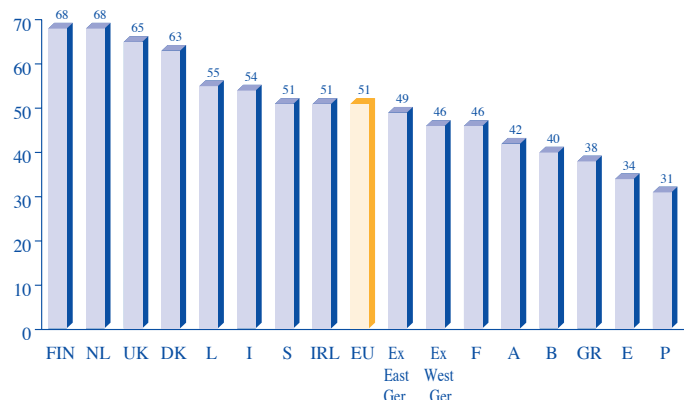
research in figures

Worker involvement

50% of employees are consulted about changes in the organisation of work or in working conditions. Wide disparities noted between countries emphasize, beyond cultural differences, the weight of the institutional context

Source: *Second European Survey on Working Conditions*

% of employees consulted on organisational changes (by country)



Charting the changes in working conditions

There is a general assumption that working conditions are improving - indeed for a majority of workers overall conditions could be deemed good. However, for a significant minority, this is not the case.

Pascal Paoli, coordinator of the European Survey on Working Conditions, says that the assumption that things are improving for workers is not borne out by research findings. "There is a general perception that working conditions are naturally improving because people are moving from jobs in agriculture and industry into the service sector. There is also an assumption that the introduction of technology automatically improves working conditions. But working conditions can also be bad in the service sector. And technology has positive consequences on working conditions only as far as the organization of work enables it to do so."

The problem, according to Paoli, is that assumptions are not based on research. The traditional indicators of working conditions - the rate of accidents and diseases at work - are unsatisfactory.

"We need to develop, at a European level, indicators of working conditions so as to assist policy makers. The work of the Foundation is contributing to this."

The Second European Survey on Working Conditions collated the views of nearly 16,000 workers in 15 Member States. It seeks to fill gaps in knowledge and chart trends in working conditions so that policy makers can take account of the changes. The survey presents a broad picture and also indicates where more detailed research needs to be carried out.

The areas of significant change

Paoli highlights three areas of significant changes in the nature of work: firstly, the transfer of workers from agriculture and industry to services; secondly, the ageing of the workforce, creating new problems; finally, work is being restructured: companies are downsizing, they are increasingly sub-contracting work and hiring temporary workers. As a result, a number of new issues are coming to the fore in respect of working conditions. These do not affect all workers - but

some groups are exposed to some or all of these features in their working lives.

The stresses and strains

"We have seen from our own data and from other international sources that the pace of work is increasing - workers may work shorter hours but they work faster. This appears to be associated with a perception that stress is increasing.

"Stress is basically the result of putting high demands on people while limiting their ability to control their work. While autonomy in work has improved, the pace of work has become more intense, so that stress is still a major issue.

"Work for many workers is still organized in a very traditional way. The rhythm of work and the fact that work can be very monotonous



Pascal Paoli, research manager at the Foundation with responsibility for the European Survey of Working Conditions

for some workers is associated with a high rate of repetitive strain complaints in the findings."

While the figures for violence at work look quite low, the rates are significantly higher for some groups of workers, particularly young workers and female workers.

"In the context of the size of the EU workforce the figures suggest that millions of people are being subjected to some form of bullying or sexual harassment; findings which are in line with those the ILO."

Working hours are becoming more flexible - more and more workers are working around the clock, 7 days a week. This is a particular concern for workers with social or family commitments, especially female workers and

where flexibility is involuntary it cause can problems.

Casual contracts

The research has revealed a significant correlation between temporary work and working conditions. Increasingly, more people are working on fixed term contracts and temporary agency contracts - currently 15% of the work force is covered by these type of contracts - in some countries the figure is as high as 40%. The overall trend is towards non-permanent contracts.

"There is a direct statistical link between the standard of working conditions and the status of employees. Those in fixed term contracts and temporary contracts record that they work harder, face more problems, are less likely to be consulted or informed, less likely to be trained and more likely to be subjected to bullying. While these contracts do not in themselves create bad working conditions, there appears to be a tendency to give more difficult jobs to people on fixed term contracts and agency contracts."

Contact: john.hurley@eurofound.ie



3-5 November

Employment Week 98, Brussels - participation by the Foundation and exhibition of its work.

9-10 November 1998

The European Social Model - Social Dialogue, Vienna. Presentation by Director Clive Purkiss on *The Role of the Social Partners in the Member States and their influence on Social Security Systems as a Productivity Factor*.

16-17 November

Information Workshop for representatives of the European Commission's offices in Member States and DGV at the Foundation.

26-27 November

European Urban Forum, Vienna. Participation by Foundation staff and exhibition stand.

25 November

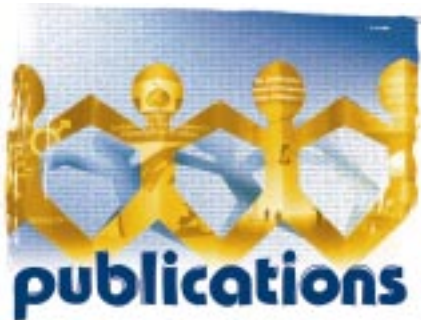
Productive Ageing: The future of Pensions and of Retirement - The Geneva Association in Geneva. Presentation of paper by Robert Anderson.

3-4 December

European Workshop on Environmental Management and Health and Safety at the Foundation conference centre in Dublin.

4 December

Local Partnerships: key challenges, future directions - conference in Dublin Castle. Wendy O'Conghaile chairs session and presentation of paper by Robert Anderson.



Publications mentioned

Second European Survey on Working Conditions (1996)

Available in disk format only
Cat. No. SX-05-97-414-EN-Y
ECU 16

Equal Opportunities and Collective Bargaining. Volume 3. Innovative Agreements: An Analysis

Available shortly in EN, FR, DE
Cat. No. SX-176-98-936-EN-C
ECU 25

Volume 4. Illuminating the Process

Available shortly in EN, FR and DE
Cat. No. SX-176-98-936-EN-C
ECU 16

Volume 1. Defining the Issues

Available in EN, FR and DE
Cat. No. SX-95-96-059-EN-C
ECU 7

Volume 2. Exploring the Situation

Available in EN, FR and DE
Cat. No. AF-09-97-187-EN-C
ECU 12

European Industrial Relations Observatory - 1997 Annual Review

Available in EN
www.eiro.eurofound.ie

European Guide for Virtual Companies - A framework for action - CD-ROM

Cat. No. SX-18-98-162-EN-Z
ECU 20

New Publications

The Social Situation in Member States of the European Union: The Relevance of Quantitative Indicators in Social Policy Analysis

Available in EN, FR
Cat. No. SX-14-98-372-EN-C
ECU 20

Negotiating European Works Councils: An Analysis of Agreements under Article 13

Available in EN
Cat. No. SX-16-98-320-EN-C
ECU 20

Design for Sustainable Development: Environmental Management and Safety and Health

Available in EN
Cat. No. SX-17-98-370-EN-C
ECU 28

• Foundation Reports are on sale from the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, L-2985, Luxembourg. Where prices are not quoted, the document is free of charge

Danish Visitors

Representatives of the Danish Cooperation Board visited the Foundation to discuss the Danish contribution to the Ecology of Work conference to be held in Bonn in May 1999 which the Foundation is co-hosting with the US Ecology of Work Inc.

The study group also showed considerable interest in the Foundation's work relating to direct participation in organizational change - the EPOC project. ☀

Contact: camilla.gallidabino@eurofound.ie

Families of the Future

Progress in the medium-term Community Action Programme on equal opportunities for women and men was the focus of Equality is the Future, a congress and exhibition organized by the European Commission.

Robert Anderson, research manager at the Foundation made a presentation to the workshop entitled "Working and Caring in the Families of the Future", examining the role of the social partners in promoting reconciliation of the double demands of family care of older people and employment.

Anderson pointed out that while child care had been the subject of extensive debate, care responsibilities for dependent adult relatives are not yet high on the social partners' agenda.

"This issue is rarely negotiated in collective bargaining; the care needs of adults were peripheral to the EU-level debate on parental leave; and dependent adults received hardly any attention in the reports on reconciling work and family life in the National Action Plans for employment."

According to Anderson, there has been relatively little systematic investigation of the relationship between working and caring for dependent adults. ☀

Contact: teresa.renehan@eurofound.ie

Equal opportunities

A new report on innovative agreements in collective bargaining will be published this month by the Foundation. The report - the third in a series - is part of a major project which seeks to examine the link between collective bargaining and the advancement of equal opportunities: it is being carried out by the Foundation in close cooperation with DGV of the European Commission's services.

The report provides an overview and analysis of 250 of the most innovative provisions in collective agreements in 15 Member States on different aspects of equal opportunities. It aims to identify the crucial factors which may lead to good agreements.

The areas covered are: organizational culture, job access and sex segregation, pay equity, sexual harassment, reconciliation of work and family, and working time.

The limits and potential of collective bargaining on equal opportunities is a relatively new area of interest for the European social partners and the European Commission.

Equal opportunities is normally regulated by national or European legal provisions.

Mia Heikkinen, research manager of the Equal Opportunities and Collective Bargaining project at the Foundation, gave a presentation on the project to the ETUC Women's Committee Meeting in Brussels in October.

Participants at the conference were particularly interested in the way the project focuses on the whole bargaining process and not just the element concerning collective agreements. ☀

Contact: hilary.odonoghue@eurofound.ie

Personnel moves

Wendy O'Conghaile, formerly research coordinator, is now advisor to the Directorate. She will be primarily dealing with the development of a Foundation evaluation system. Robert Anderson is now coordinating the social cohesion programme. ☀

communiqué

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Telephone: (353-1) 204 3100
Fax: (353-1)282 6456

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Director: Clive Purkiss
Deputy Director: Eric Verborgh.

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