

COMMUNIQUÉ



EUROPEAN FOUNDATION

for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

More links with CEE countries

Agenda 2000 has highlighted the need to align social policy in acceding countries with EU policy. It identifies particular areas of concern: health and safety at work, the equal treatment of men and women and social dialogue and labour law.

To meet these demands the Foundation is expanding its programme of exchange activities with Central and Eastern European countries by developing dedicated information dossiers for distribution to institutions and groups in Estonia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia. Mattanja de Boer, Fiona Murray and Brid Nolan, programme managers in the information section of the Foundation, have responsibility for the project.

"As a starting point, we identified the most pressing information needs of these countries and the most effective channels of dissemination by conducting a field study which was carried out by ESIN of Spain," according to Brid Nolan.

In each country, a distribution network will be established through professional and trade union associations, ministries, women's organisations and others.

"The dossiers will be our means of introducing the work of the Foundation to

the CEE audience. They will include a guide to easy access to the Foundation information section including internet access at <http://www.eurofound.ie> as well as selected summaries of our work, translated into the various languages. "Much of our work has a practical approach. For instance, in many relevant areas we have produced "good practice" guides and documented national strategies in the EU; this type of information is very valuable to countries moving towards the European Union model."

This initiative complements the Foundation's information exchange programme which has been conducting seminars since 1991 on topics such as work organisation, industrial relations and social dialogue with representatives from CEE countries. 



Eric Verborgh, deputy director and Clive Purkiss, director (left to right) discuss the agenda prior to the meeting of the Administrative Board.


Board meeting

Director, Clive Purkiss gave a progress report on current Foundation projects to the 58th meeting of the Administrative Board, held at the end of March. The draft estimates of revenue and expenditure for 1999 were presented and approved. The estimated financial requirement for 2000, the final year of the Foundation's current four year programme, is €15.2 million. Research managers working on the health and well-being, social cohesion and sustainable development challenges presented overviews of challenge activities at parallel sessions attended by Administrative Board members. 

Local participation

Robert Anderson, research manager, presented a paper "Strategies to strengthen citizen participation" to the conference - Innovations in Urban Governance - organised by the European Urban Research Association (EURA) on 22-23 April in Oslo.

Based on results from two EU-wide studies carried out by the Foundation, Anderson's presentation emphasised the need for local community participation to support effective action.

"There has been inadequate attention to factors that will support meaningful and productive community involvement, particularly in local partnerships. Partnership is the key word, building between the public, private and local community sectors," according to Anderson. 

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Designing for the future

One are the days when electricity or batteries were needed to listen to the radio. On the wind-up radio, invented by Trevor Baylis, turning a handle for about 20 seconds generates 40 minutes listening time. The sound of a radio playing without using energy resources is sweet music not only to those committed to sustainable production but also to cost-conscious consumers.

The Baygen radio is one of a range of products and services which the Foundation has illustrated in its publication, *Design for Sustainable Development - Practical Examples of SMEs* which demonstrate how new and inherently sustainable industrial practice and consumer lifestyles can be developed.

Vision and mission

According to Foundation research manager, Henrik Litske, the general characteristic of these environmentally-aware enterprises is that they have a vision and a mission. In many companies, employees are directly involved in the decision-making process which leads to less wastage of natural resources in the production process.

"The idea of gathering these examples is to show others that the concept of making products which take account of ecological concerns can be quite successful; not only in making products that are more friendly to the environment, but also in making better and longer lasting products," says Henrik Litske.

Ideas for sustainable products range from complete kitchens to musical instruments. US company, C E Martin has been making guitars - for people like Eric Clapton and Johnny Cash - for over 165 years yet the company changed its production methods to incorporate sustainable materials in a traditional craft.

Trevor Baylis, the designer of the wind-up radio, is now working with companies like General Electric and Apple to develop and mass produce lap-top computers and mobile phones that run on the clockwork principle. His self-powered lantern is already widely carried on airlines for emergency lighting.

Renewable life cycles

In agriculture, Dutch company HempFlax has reintroduced fibre hemp as a crop to be grown and harvested using environmentally-friendly methods. The non-fibrous material is sold as horse bedding and building materials while the fibrous material is processed for the paper and textile industry. Furthermore, these products have a renewable life cycle - the hemp can start as a textile and end up as paper or building material.

The publication *Design for Sustainable Development - Practical Examples of SMEs*, compiled by Hans van Weenen of IDEA in the Netherlands, is the latest in a series of five publications which addresses the challenge of sustainable development through concepts and designs.

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Community involvement

Local Community Involvement - A Handbook for Good Practice, which provides practical advice on how to increase and improve community involvement in local development schemes in disadvantaged localities, has been published by the Foundation.

The handbook is aimed at practitioners and planners as well as policy makers. It illustrates the lessons and principles which apply to the core problems in stimulating local involvement in schemes which arise on an EU-wide basis. The Foundation will continue to monitor developments in the field and is keen to get feedback from practitioners, planners and community activists on local experiences: the difficulties encountered, the techniques employed and the lessons learnt as well as comments on the concepts and recommendations in the handbook. Contact: teresa.renehan@eurofound.ie

MBA studies

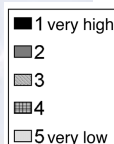
Three MBA students have spent a week at the Foundation examining Foundation projects for the purpose of identifying areas of further research to carry out as part of their MBA studies.

The students, from Nene College, Northampton, have a particular interest in studying the ageing workforce and work organisation - two areas in which the Foundation has a significant body of work.

research in figures

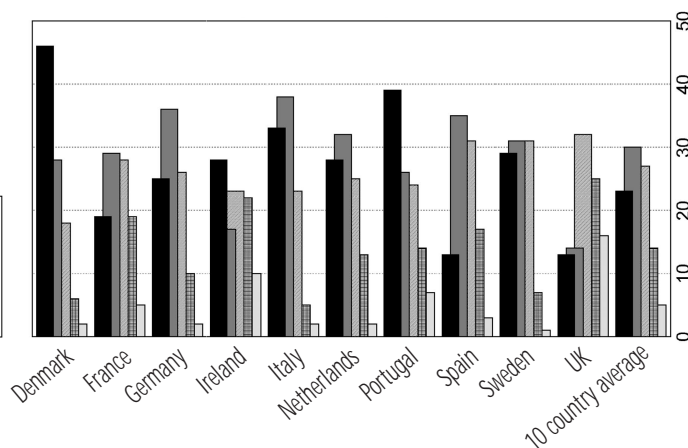
Qualifications and direct participation

Direct participation is more likely in workplaces with "white collar" occupations, task complexity, team activity, high qualification and internal training.



Source: EPOC survey

Qualification requirements - percentage of respondents with direct participation, by country



Working towards health

Labour market policies have significant implications for health yet they are not submitted to routine health impact assessments. A new report, to be published shortly by the Foundation, suggests it is time for European governments to consider subjecting their labour market policies to this type of scrutiny. Employers and trade unions should also be encouraged to pay more attention to the health and human resources aspects of business decisions. The report is part of the ongoing research by the Foundation monitoring the relationship between health and employment. It analyses the current literature on the subject and the related data included in the Second Survey on Working Conditions (1996) and other statistical information.

As a general proposition, the report finds that "job insecurity, redundancy and precarious employment status are likely to be associated with deficits in physical and/or psychological health" among a wide range of employees.

Employment status

Jaume Costa, research manager responsible for the report, says that while the evidence is clear that the main factor effecting workers' health is working conditions; what the Foundation's surveys on working conditions indicate, and what this report highlights, is that workers on fixed-term or temporary contracts, working in the same conditions as permanent workers, claim more severe health problems than their permanent counterparts.

One of the characteristics of workers with temporary contracts is that they consider that they are less consulted about organisational change, they receive less training and they discuss their work less with their colleagues and superiors.

This is significant because fixed term and temporary contracts are a growing phenomenon in all EU Member States. Although the terms and use of these contracts differs greatly between the Member States - in 1996 the EU average was 15% while in Spain 40% of workers were employed on temporary terms.

According to Costa, the relationship between health and employment policy

formally has been largely ignored to date. "For the first time, the problem of temporary contracts has been acknowledged in the recent agreement signed by the social partners which seeks to guarantee equal treatment for permanent and temporary workers, mentioning training and consultation. I am pleased this initiative is being taken because our research shows that this could have a positive impact on health even though that was not one of the motivating factors."



Jaume Costa, research manager

Job security

Perceptions about job security are also related to job status. People who have previously been unemployed and those in short term contracts are most likely to deem their employment as insecure. Those workers at the lower levels within organisations who have little knowledge about the likely effects of organisational change, are most at risk of ill-health.

However, there are contradictory indicators in certain areas. For instance, downsizing has been found to lead to increased levels of certified sick leave especially in workplaces that are losing a large proportion of their workforce and where there is a high proportion of older workers. On the other hand, the report refers to other studies which indicate that carefully managed downsizing can lead to clearer roles and responsibility for workers and result in increased worker participation.

Information and support

The report identifies two main buffers for counteracting the effects of job insecurity; high levels of perceived coworker, supervisor or trade union support can help offset some of the negative effects of job insecurity and having information about organisational change and feeling that one has some control of the situation can also be helpful. Ironically, these measures are not used as frequently or effectively as they should be.

Redundancy

Limited research has been undertaken on health changes during the period immediately following redundancy. The evidence suggests that poor quality re-employment can actually be more detrimental to psychological health than unemployment. According to the report, early retirement does not have negative health implications, however those who retire because of ill-health do report less satisfaction with their retirement.

Health sector challenge

Overall, it can be said that there are significant health impacts associated with current labour market conditions. The report recommends that the health sector should be challenged to ensure that in all aspects of its work, including promotion, prevention and treatment, close attention is paid to the link between employment, unemployment, health and well-being. 🌐

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12-13 May

Harassment - Equal Opportunities and Collective Bargaining
Presentation by Mia Heikkinen - Harris Park Conference and Exhibition Centre - Lancashire

17-20 May

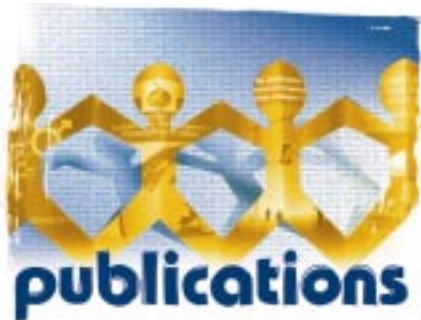
Ecology of Work conference - co-organised by the Foundation and US Ecology of Work - Bonn

20-21 May

"Twin Colloquium" on Labour Market Policies to Combat Social Exclusion
Hoger Instituut voor de Arbeid - Kastanjehof, Leuven, Belgium

20-22 May

Conference of IREC (Industrial Relations in the European Communities)
Presentation by Kevin O'Kelly - Aix-en-Provence



Publications mentioned

Employment through Flexibility - Squaring the Circle?

Findings from the EPOC Survey
Available in EN
€28

Direct Participation in the Social Public Services

Findings from the EPOC Survey
Available in EN
Cat. No. SX-15-98-908-EN-C
€28

Managing an Ageing Workforce: A Guide to Good Practice

Available in EN, available shortly in DE, ES, FI, FR
Cat. No. SX-19-98-617-EN-C

Economic Instruments for Sustainable Development: Improving the External and Working Environments. Part 1

Available in EN
Cat. No. SX-18-98-736-EN-C
€18

European Industrial Relations Observatory Web Site

<http://www.eiro.eurofound.ie>

New publications

Design for Sustainable Development: Practical Examples of SMEs

Available in EN
Cat. No. SX-18-98-906-EN-C
€18

Programme of Work for 1999

Available in all EU languages
Cat. No. SX-20-99-890-EN-C

Local Community Involvement: A Handbook of Good Practice

Available in EN, available shortly in FR
Cat. No. SX-21-99-270-EN-C

• Priced publications can be ordered from your usual bookshop or from one of the sales agents of the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. (Addresses available at <http://eur-op.int/en/general/s-ad.htm>)

Free publications can be obtained on request from the Foundation, or may be downloaded from the Foundation's Web site at <http://www.eurofound.ie/>

Young and old together

EURAG, an organisation representing the interests of the older generation, held its XVI International Congress in Graz, Austria, 21-23 April. The congress formed part of the UN Year of Older People 1999. Solidarity between the generations was the topic of the conference. Foundation staff attended and mounted an exhibition of the Foundation's work including studies on combating age barriers in employment and active citizenship.

Speaking on Irish radio on the subject, research manager Robert Anderson said: "We have to get away from the fairly widespread discrimination against people as they age - lowered expectations, is it worth investing, can they learn anything? - that has got to go because the scientific evidence is that there is every good reason to invest in the training of the ageing workforce." ☼

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Jobs in SMEs

Foundation research manager on secondment from the Portuguese Ministry of Labour, Filomena Oliveira, was invited to address the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs of the European Parliament on 30 March 1999. The committee discussed the present measures and policies in place to support SMEs - and other relevant developments - under the EU's growth and employment initiatives. New ideas for future funding and the role of SMEs in job creation were explored.

Other participants included Wolfgang Roth, vice-president of the European Investment Bank, and David McGlue, member of the financial committee of the European Investment Fund. ☼

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Women take charge

Speaking at a workshop, organised by DG V and the French Ministries for Labour and Foreign Affairs - Women and decision making - equal opportunities - held in Paris on 15-17 April, research manager, Mia Heikkinen, said that it was clear that women are under represented in decision making both within the trade unions and in the management of companies.

Examining the role women play in the process of reaching good agreements and within organisations as a whole she said: "Industrial relations is still widely a male domain: it is important to look at how both the bargaining process and union structures can be modernised so that the unions will be able to attract new and previously under represented decision makers and members - women."

She presented findings and examples from the Foundation's Equal Opportunities and Collective Bargaining project which analysed collective agreements with regard to women's equality issues: pay discrimination/ pay equity, sex segregation, job access/job security and organisational structures. Particular attention is paid to examining the whole bargaining process: what happens pre- and post-agreement, as well as during the negotiation process itself. ☼

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Review online

The online edition of the EIRO Annual Review 1998 has just been launched on the world wide web at <http://www.eiro.eurofound.ie/1998/review/>. The review presents a snapshot of developments in European industrial relations in 1998, beginning with a comparative overview across all EU Member States and Norway, and at EU-level, then following with a summary of the main events and issues in each of the individual countries. ☼

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communiqué

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