

Minister of State Burke - Eurofound Remarks
Italian Room, Government Buildings, Thursday 11 May

I am delighted to be here today in Europe Week. It's particularly apt that our final official EU50 event is being hosted in partnership with Eurofound – the only EU agency in Ireland.

I would like to thank Ivailo (Kalfin), the Eurofound Executive Director and his staff for organising today's annual lecture, including with such an eminent guest speaker as Professor Brigid Laffan.

We are very proud to host Eurofound in Ireland, which has had a rich connection to Ireland since Dr Patrick Hillery as Social Affairs Commissioner secured its establishment here shortly after we joined the EC. Dr Hillery, as President of Ireland, later officially opened Eurofound's offices in Loughlinstown in 1978.

This was a period of possibility for Ireland. Five years into our EC membership we were yet to fully experience the benefits of that Community but the slow rate of change was beginning to gain momentum.

Over the course of our EU50 programme we have had an opportunity to reflect on the profound change that this country has experienced.

This change didn't happen by accident. Committed public servants, engaged civil society and wise decision making at all levels of society and government over five decades brought us to where we are.

Good decisions of course can't be made without information.

The EU prides itself on making well-informed, evidence-based public policy. It would be naive to suggest politics doesn't come into our policy-making but I do sincerely believe our policy is the best in the world because nobody combines political judgement with technical expertise better than the European Union.

And, Eurofound is central to our ability to make this policy.

The European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council as well as Irish groups and EU bodies, all draw systematically from Eurofound's results and work to shape policies that improve our lives and work.

We need to understand our labour markets and our people – what they are thinking, how they are feeling - in order to make policy that improves their lives.

Over time, Eurofound has established a reputation as a unique centre of excellence for employment, social and work-related issues and has become Europe's leading knowledge source for better life and work.

In particular, its European-wide surveys - European Working Conditions Survey, European Quality of Life Survey and European Company Survey and, more recently its innovative e-surveys covering the impact on Living and working in Europe during COVID-19 and the subsequent war in Ukraine have provided a huge wealth of data that provides insights into how we're all doing today, but also importantly how that has changed over time.

During the pandemic, Eurofound became, perhaps, more important than ever. All of us, both at a personal level and a societal level, were turned upside down. It was a confusing time and for policy makers there was enormous pressure to get the response right – not just on the health side, but more widely on how to manage the consequences of such an unprecedented situation.

Eurofound rose to the occasion and demonstrated great agility, adapting its work programme to be one of the first organisations to deliver findings on the impact of the pandemic on EU citizens.

Its e-survey covered all aspects of living and working in Europe, including, among others, the move to remote working, the effect of the pandemic on women, parents with young children, working conditions and wellbeing of citizens and citizens' attitudes to governments and the EU.

And more recently, Eurofound again, found itself at the core of the response to the consequences of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. The organisation was in a position to document the economic and psychological impact on the wellbeing of Europeans.

In 2026, Ireland will next hold the EU Presidency. We will look forward to working closely with Eurofound as we will seek to drive the EU's Strategic Agenda during that period.

I want to thank you again for organising today's event and I am very much looking forward to today's discussion.

Thank you.

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