



# Fourth European Working Conditions survey

## info sheet

*'Workplaces have to enhance the organisation of work so that both the quality of work and the creativity and innovation of employees increase, which in turn improves productivity.'*

*Statement from informal Council meeting of Employment, Social and Health Ministers, Helsinki, 6–8 July 2006*



## WHAT is the context?

At the Spring European Council of 2005, the EU leaders put growth and employment at the top of the European political agenda. The revised Lisbon strategy has better quality of work, greater productivity and increased employment among its key objectives. It is clear that increasing the numbers in employment – attracting people into employment and retaining them – should be carried out through close cooperation between governments and social partners at European and national levels. Being better informed about the working conditions of both employees and the self-employed – from knowledge gained through research results – can be an important tool in this process.

## WHY this research?

The Foundation's European working conditions surveys, conducted every five years, have been providing a unique insight into quality-of-work issues since 1990. In this fourth survey, interviews were conducted in late 2005 with nearly 30,000 workers in 31 countries (the EU25, the two acceding countries of Bulgaria and Romania, as well as Croatia, Turkey, Switzerland and Norway).<sup>1</sup> The survey covers a wide range of topics, including physical risks, working time, work organisation, employability, work satisfaction, health outcomes, absenteeism, work sustainability, work-life balance, violence and harassment and job performance. The aim of the survey is to draw a comprehensive picture of how European workers experience and assess their work lives and working conditions, to be used as a source of reference for policymakers and as the basis for further research. It is hoped that the survey will help focus attention on making workers and companies more adaptable and on raising levels of employment and the quality of jobs, with a view to increasing productivity and improving living and working conditions.

## WHAT are the findings?

### Work organisation

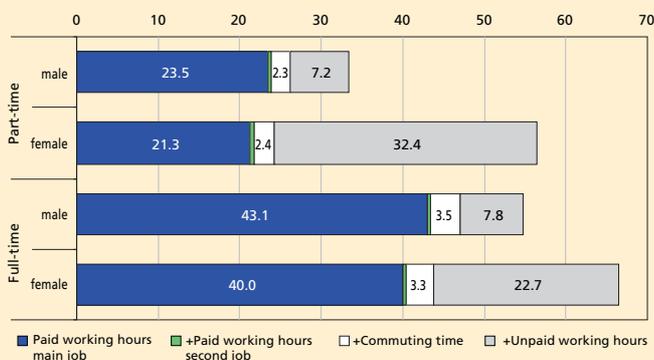
- **Work intensity:** 12% of the workforce report rarely or never having enough time to get their work done.
- **Autonomy and control:** More than two thirds of workers can choose, or change, the rate at which they work.
- **Female managers:** One out of every four employees has a woman as their immediate boss. However, more women than men have female bosses: 42% of women have a female boss, as against 10% of men.
- **Computer use:** Less than half (46%) of workers use a computer for at least a quarter of their working time.

### Working time

- **Working weeks:** Of the respondents surveyed, 65% work five-day weeks, while 23% work either six- or seven-day weeks.
- **Working hours:** 15% of all workers usually work more than 48 hours per week.
- **Work schedules:** Two thirds of employees have their work schedules set by their company, with no possibility for change. Only 24% of employees can adapt their working times to their needs, in some cases within certain limits.
- **Paid and unpaid work:** When both paid and unpaid working hours are both taken into consideration, it is clear that women working part time work longer hours than men who work full time (see figure overleaf). While women generally work part time in order to devote more time to family and household tasks, men who work part time devote even less time to unpaid work than men who work full time.



Cumulative weekly working hours, by employment type and gender (%)



Note: All figures represent weekly averages for all workers (employees and self-employed). Unpaid working hours include time spent caring for children, time spent caring for adults and time spent doing housework.

## Status, training and skills

- Employment status:** Approximately 23% of employees have some type of non-standard employment contract (primarily a fixed-term contract). However, for the most recent entrants to the labour market (those who have spent less than four years in paid employment after leaving full-time education), the proportion of non-standard contracts reaches almost 50%.
- Training:** In the last 12 months, more than 70% of employees have not received any training paid for or provided by their employers.
- Skills match:** Around half of the respondents indicate that their duties correspond well to their skills level, while one in three indicates that they could perform more demanding tasks.

## Health and well-being

- Health effects:** 35% of workers surveyed report that work affects their health.
- Health and safety:** Nearly one in three workers reports that their health and safety is at risk because of their job.



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- Violence and harassment:** Approximately 5% of workers report that they have suffered violence, bullying or harassment at work in the past year.
- Job satisfaction:** While 82% of workers consider themselves satisfied or very satisfied with their working conditions, only 31% consider that their job offers good prospects for career advancement.

## What now?

Improving the quality of work is essential both for the well-being of individual workers and for developing and enhancing Europe's productive capacity in an increasingly competitive world.

A main descriptive report of the survey's findings will be published in autumn 2006, as well as individual country fact sheets and a summary of time trend data from the working conditions surveys from 1990 to 2005. More in-depth analysis on specific policy-relevant areas will be carried out over 2006–2007.

## Survey methodology

- Face-to-face interviews with 29,680 workers in their homes**
- Respondents selected by multistage random sampling, to be representative of working population in all 31 countries covered**
- Interview questionnaire translated into 26 languages and 15 language variants**
- Survey quality framework to ensure a comprehensive check on data integrity**

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this leaflet reports the findings for 27 European countries only (the EU25 and Bulgaria and Romania, the two acceding countries at the time of the survey). Findings from the two candidate countries Croatia and Turkey, as well as from Norway and Switzerland, will be included in a full descriptive report, to be published later in 2006.

## Further information

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Details of European working conditions surveys:  
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/surveys/index.htm>

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