

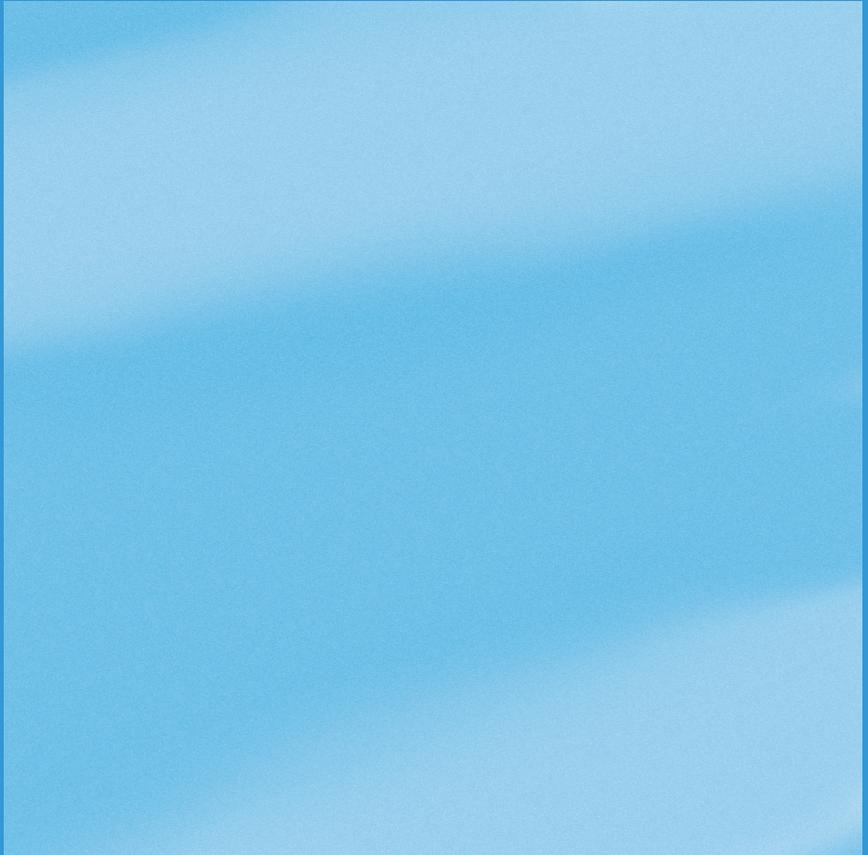


European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions



www.eu2001.be

For a better quality of work



European Union Presidency conference
Summary



European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

For a better quality of work

European Union Presidency conference

Brussels, 20-21 September 2001

Summary

Cataloguing data can be found at the end of this publication

Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2001

© European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2001

For rights of translation or reproduction, applications should be made to the Director, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Wyattville Road, Loughlinstown, Dublin 18, Ireland.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions is an autonomous body of the European Union, created to assist in the formulation of future policy on social and work-related matters. Further information can be found at the Foundation website at <http://www.eurofound.ie>.

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions
Wyattville Road
Loughlinstown
Dublin 18
Ireland
Phone: (353 1) 2043100
Fax: (353 1) 2826456
E-mail: postmaster@eurofound.ie
www.eurofound.ie

Printed in Ireland

The paper used in this publication is chlorine free and comes from managed forests in Northern Europe. For every tree felled, at least one new tree is planted.

Foreword

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, together with the Belgian Ministry of Labour, hosted a conference, 'For a better quality of work', in Brussels on 20-21 September 2001. Organised as part of the programme for the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the conference addressed four main topics relating to quality of work: time, work and personal life; work organisation and quality of work; labour market flexibility and quality of work; and indicators on quality of work. This brochure summarises the presentations and discussions of those topics which took place over the two days. It is prefaced by a short introduction from the Belgian Presidency of the European Union.

The Belgian Presidency and the Foundation are pleased at the success of this joint conference, which supported the preparation of future work of Belgian Presidency Councils on the quality of employment. It will pave the way for the achievement of the goals of Social Europe — significant progress for workers and for all citizens — whose future direction will be decided by the European Council in Laeken, Belgium, on 14-15 December 2001.

Laurette Onkelinx
Deputy Prime Minister,
Belgium

Raymond-Pierre Bodin
Director,
European Foundation for the Improvement
of Living and Working Conditions

Statement from the Belgian Presidency

More jobs and better jobs *More jobs through better jobs*

Following the Lisbon Summit, which adopted the double political objective of creating more jobs and improving the quality of jobs, the Belgian Presidency has resolutely focused on the quality of employment. The argument put forward by the Belgian Presidency shows that not only are better quality jobs compatible with jobs in larger quantity, but also that quality of employment is a requirement in the creation of sustainable jobs.

In this context, it is particularly important to show this link for the Belgian Presidency of the Employment and Social Affairs Council. The 8 October Council had to look into the Employment package 2001–2002 adopted by the Commission on 12 September. Through the impetus given by the Belgian Presidency at the informal Council in Liège on 7 July 2001, the set will now include a section concerning the quality of employment and a new specific guideline to allow quality of employment to be identified. This guideline should already be applicable to next year's European employment policy.

Promoting labour market inclusion

The revival of the economic growth noted in 1999-2000 has shown a relevant increase in fixed-term contracts, temporary work and part-time work in the labour market. As discussed during the conference 'For a better quality of work' on 20-21 September, temporary work and involuntary part-time work are unequally distributed, notably to the detriment of women, and they often lead to a professional experience composed of insecurity, short-term work and exclusion.

At the slightest turnaround of the economic situation, the insecure jobs categories are the first to pay the price in terms of restructuring plans. However, economic slowdown has different consequences for workers with different skills. In uncertain periods, many companies go on recruiting qualified workers in secure jobs while at the same time reducing the number of insecure jobs. This fact alone suggests that in the long-term perspective, quality of employment is already regarded as a significant priority.

High performance reinforcing factor for enterprises

For employers, promoting quality of employment is a way to gain the loyalty of workers. Investing in such loyalty is indeed linked to quality of employment (rhythm of work, work organisation, pay, access to training) and the commitment shown by the enterprise towards its staff. In jobs where professional mobility is important, quality of work is a way to 'keep the employees together' by guaranteeing a sustainable job together with motivating professional prospects.

In some cases, the full potential of job creation cannot be achieved because the jobs on offer are unattractive in terms of quality of work, wages or professional prospects and consequently prove difficult to fill. Bad quality jobs, that is to say, insecure ones with large flexibility and poor working conditions, lead to high turnover and absenteeism, as well as recurrent shortages of personnel. If there is the slightest improvement in the labour market, such personnel are the first to seek a job elsewhere.

Increasing long-term employment

One of the objectives of the European employment policy is improvement of the employment rates for women and workers older than 50-55 years. Two types of measures are envisaged: institutional measures to maintain older people at work or to encourage unemployed job-seekers (financial or fiscal incentives, law, collective bargaining) and organisational measures at company level, in order to maintain or attract these socio-professional categories at work. Among these organisational measures, promotion of quality jobs is certainly the best way to reach these goals. It has been shown that low employment rates reflect working conditions that are not attractive enough.

Investing in lifelong learning

Promotion of the knowledge society, as outlined during the Lisbon Summit, is incompatible with employment policies that would favour job quantity to the detriment of quality. The development of the knowledge society relies on the creation of quality jobs which enable individuals to continue education and lifelong learning, and work organisation and human resource management policies which enable the free expression, building up and transmission of knowledge.

Companies which are committed to a model of a 'learning organisation' can create jobs, because a learning company is also an innovating company. In an economic context that is characterised by uncertainty and instability, the best guarantee for competitiveness is permanent apprenticeship, knowledge and innovation. These three elements are mutually exclusive: the apprenticeship creates new skills, which are the basis of innovation. This induces a change and consequently a renewed need for apprenticeship. The innovative companies are the ones who create the most jobs and these are usually good quality jobs.

Aim of the conference

The Commission's current social policy agenda and employment strategy have placed special emphasis on the quality of work and the necessity to create not only more jobs, but better quality jobs in the European Union. The conference addressed four main topics related to quality of work; time, work and personal life; work organisation and quality of work; labour market flexibility and quality of work; and indicators on quality of work. One of the main aims of the conference was to identify potential indicators for evaluating quality of work.

The figures and tables in this summary are taken from publications of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. Further information about related publications is available on a dedicated webpage on the Foundation's website at www.eurofound.ie/working/qualityconf.htm.

For a better quality of work European Union Presidency conference

The main message to emerge from the conference was that quality of work is essential to the European Union and represents a cornerstone of a sustainable working life. A commitment to quality is the best means of achieving the twofold employment policy objective of the European Union: more jobs and better jobs.

Odile Quintin, Director-general of the European Commission's Employment and Social Affairs DG, declared: 'An emphasis on job quality in the labour market also creates job quantity'.

The message of *Raymond-Pierre Bodin*, Director of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, was that we should address quality of work from the employee's perspective. Good working conditions contribute to a positive mental and physical well-being. They are the basic right of every worker, a precondition for a rich and satisfying life. Good working conditions can also positively affect the performance of the company. Good jobs attract highly motivated and skilled people and result in the production of better products and services. Hence, living standards can be raised through economic growth. However, this also works the other way round. People in low-skilled, low-quality and precarious jobs, with few career opportunities, run a greater risk of becoming unemployed than people in good quality jobs.

Anna Ekström, Secretary of State for Sweden, pointed out that with the ageing of the population in the European Union and the growing need for new groups to enter the labour market, and for people to stay there longer, quality of work has become an important issue.

According to *Anna Diamantopoulou*, Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, quality is not an optional extra: it is the driving force of the European social model.

Of course, quality of work is not only a matter for the European Union. *Friedrich Buttlar* (International Labour Organisation) pointed out that poverty and social marginalisation are usually the result of the lack of decent jobs.

Quality of work is a concept with many dimensions: the possibility to combine working life and personal life; sustainable ways of organising work; or the combination of flexibility and security. All these aspects were discussed at the conference, as well as the use of potential indicators to further the process of creating and sustaining quality of work.

‘Employment and working conditions in one country or group of countries are determined both by domestic factors and by global development. We need an integrated approach, with quality of work placed in the centre of economic and social policy. There is a broad scope for international cooperation in this area.’

Friedrich Buttlar, ILO

Laurette Onkelinx, Deputy Prime Minister of Belgium, concluded the opening discussion by declaring: ‘We are just in the beginning of a very exciting and important debate.’

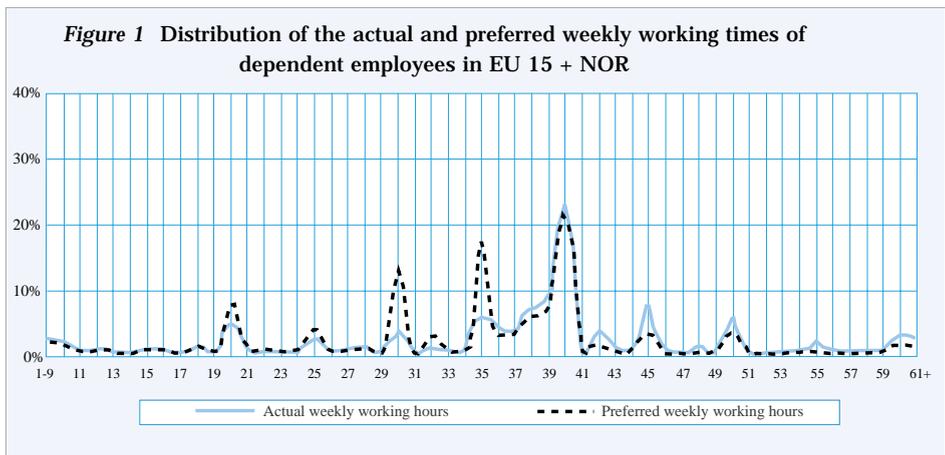
Time, work and personal life

The links between working hours and quality in work and life are clear but complex. One example of this is that although working hours may officially be reduced, a person may in reality work more or be more stressed. So far working time has determined the non-working time — the time for family and social activities, etc. — but perhaps it could work the other way round. That was one of the issues explored in the conference sessions on time, work and personal life.

At the opening of the conference, *Göke Frerichs*, President of the Economic and Social Committee, made the point that having a balance between

professional and private life is a key component in quality in work. *Gerhard Bosch* (Institut für Arbeit und Technik, Germany) highlighted the fact that nowadays we find a great variety of working time patterns throughout the EU. His presentation was based on an analysis of the results of two research projects, the *TSER New forms of employment* project, and the *Employment options of the future* survey carried out by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

The results show that in 1999 the average weekly working time of all employees ranged from 32.8 hours in the Netherlands to 44.0 in Greece. The average volume of paid work per person of working age varied from 21.0 hours in Italy to 28.1 hours in Denmark and there is a strong correlation between the volume of hours worked and the rate of female employment. In some countries, most people work standard hours, in others most do not. In the United Kingdom, for example, there is really no working time standard, but an overtime culture for men exists. In the Netherlands, there is a part-time work culture for women. In the first case, one explanation may be low income, and in the other it could be lack of childcare facilities. The point is that the difference in working time is not only a question of free choice, but of different constraints, according to Bosch.



According to Bosch, the national context matters a great deal, pointing out that there were substantial differences prevailing in the same sector in different countries. In 1999, for example, only 0.5% of the employees in

the Dutch IT sector worked more than 48 hours a week; in the United Kingdom 21.9% did.

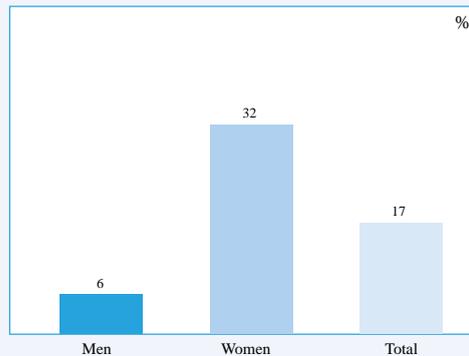
'The evidence clearly shows that the different distribution of working hours across the EU reflects different institutional and economic factors in each country rather than individual workers' preferences.'

Gerhard Bosch, Institut für Arbeit und Technik, Germany

However, there is a convergence to be found in all countries concerning the type of hours people would like to work: in general, men want less overtime, while part-time workers want more substantial working hours.

Preferences concerning the employment rate, at 74% against the current rate of 63%, are also in line with the EU goal to raise it – provided that this is combined with shorter hours. This means, according to Gerhard Bosch, that there is certainly a case for a working time policy at EU level, as long as it will include protection against excessively long hours, more individual choices of flexible work within the life cycle and a general reduction in working hours.

Figure 2 Percentage of workers reporting part-time work, by gender, 2000



Kea Tijdens (University of Amsterdam) also argued that variations in working time patterns from one country to another are based on complex factors. Her research showed that the mechanisms behind part-time work vary from country to country. For example, in the Netherlands, Belgium,

the western part of Germany and the United Kingdom, the most important driving force is that women with children, household responsibilities and a breadwinning partner need or want such jobs. In Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, on the other hand, the most important factor is the wish, on the employer's part, to have optimal staffing levels.

'Creating or enabling part-time jobs may be the best strategy to make it possible to combine work and family but this would mean treating part-time as seriously as full-time work.'

Kea Tijdens, University of Amsterdam

No matter how diverse are working time patterns and the driving forces behind them, many people in the European Union find it very difficult to combine work and private life. *François Barenton* (Unilever) told the participants that surveys regularly show that two-thirds of company employees find it hard to achieve a balance between work and family. He described the recent launch by Belgian companies of a website with information on facilities such as babysitting and laundry services, an initiative that is much appreciated by employees.

However, measures that are meant to facilitate the combination of work and family may be of no use if other forces are stronger. *Gerhard Bosch* told the participants of a company that introduced at the same time a family package and project work: work which is totally output-oriented, with no fixed hours in any contract. This resulted in people working 70–80 hours a week, which did not constitute a sustainable work organisation.

Jorma Rantanen (Finnish Institute of Occupational Health), emphasised the physiological and psychological consequences of having a time-deficit, for example, being so stressed you never feel that you are doing your work well, or through working very long hours and having too little spare time.

The positive side is that if work is well organised, physiologically and psychologically, it is an important factor for health. The life span of women with good working conditions is longer than for housewives.'

Jorma Rantanen, Finnish Institute of Occupational Health

According to *Jean-Philippe Cobbaut* (Ligue des Familles, Belgium), it is crucial for families to understand how to manage time in order to coordinate many different needs.

'I think the legal framework is extremely important. So are the negotiations between the social partners, and these should concern not only the reduction of working hours, but also how work is organised.'

Jean-Philippe Cobbaut, Ligue des Familles, Belgium

The difficulties we face in combining work and non-work may be explained by the rapid changes in the world of work. *Jean-Yves Boulin* (IRIS, Université Paris Dauphine) outlined some of the underlying factors of this development: changes in the nature of work, changes in attitudes and behaviour, and economic and technical changes.

'We know, for example, that the boundary between work and non-work is getting blurred for many people, and that an increasing number of people work what used to be called irregular hours. So far, working hours have determined the rest of what can be called 'social times', but why not take the other times as a point of departure?'

Jean-Yves Boulin, IRIS, Université Paris Dauphine

Boulin observed that this would have implications for the collective negotiations between social partners, although he pointed out that measures aiming at giving more scope to social times in relation to working times, like parental and study leave, have usually been realised through legislation, even in countries with a strong tradition of collective bargaining.

Changing working hours also affects the local communities. It is not fun to have your time off when everything is closed, as Boulin remarked. That is why working hours should not be seen purely in the context of work. *Ulrich Mückenberger* (Hochschule für Wirtschaft und Politik, Germany) is convinced that time policies are a matter of reconciling different needs at local or regional level, through pacts between the different actors such as enterprises, citizens, trade unions and municipalities.

'Stress is not only work-related: we are dealing with a complex process involving work, life, infrastructures and self-images.'

Ulrich Mückenberger, Hochschule für Wirtschaft und Politik, Germany

He gave participants an account of experiments in time policy being carried out in several countries. In Italy, for example, there are 'time' offices in different cities, whose task is to coordinate local times (factory hours, opening hours of leisure activities, etc.).

Modena, the friendly city

In *Modena*, within a forum known as the friendly city, women shopkeepers agreed among themselves a rota of late evening opening hours for grocery shops in the various districts. In 1994, a mobility pact was also agreed and signed by no less than 30 social representatives (from the taxi-drivers' association to housewives' federations, the chamber of commerce and three trade unions), aimed at tackling the issue of urban schedules in the light of all conceivable transport and traffic problems.

Robert Villeneuve (CEEP, European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and of General Economic Interest) fully agreed that time policies have an impact on local communities. The participants also concurred that the role of the social partners is very important, although *David Foden* (European Trade Union Institute) expressed some concern about the capacity of the trade union movement to enter into broad agreements with many other actors. He saw it as a positive development, nevertheless, that the trade union movement has moved from demanding shorter working hours full stop to an open attitude to things like part-time work, annualisation, longer holidays and flexible and part-time retirement.

What will happen in the future? *Gerhard Bosch* thought that the demand for shorter hours will increase even more when increasing numbers of women – and other groups underrepresented today – enter the labour market. That means, in his opinion, that the institutional framework must be developed along with a culture where flexibility is negotiated and accepted.

Work organisation and quality of work

The biggest concern expressed at the conference was about the 'hidden face' of new forms of work organisation. A series of complex and important issues such as working time, skills and training, equal opportunities and non-discrimination and the growing ageing population are closely interlinked and the way these issues are dealt with is largely determined by the manner in which companies now operate, both internally and externally.

Mark Keese (OECD) stressed that globalisation is the main motivation for change in the organisation of work, compounded by the information revolution. There are also changes in the traditional division of the labour market: more enterprises are now operating in the 'service' and 'knowledge' economy rather than in the traditional manufacturing sectors. At the same time, job satisfaction seems higher in services than in the manufacturing sector.

These changes bring new problems regarding working conditions, such as ergonomic problems in information-intensive work. Work in the services sector is about personal contact with people, clients, customers, patients, and so on, which can lead to increased stress and violence at work. Companies have failed to equip their workers to deal with these new demands, according to *Steven Dhondt* (TNO Arbeid, Netherlands).

'Classical tayloristic organisations have been characterised by poor working conditions, high job demands and low control possibilities. In the new organisation of work, workers should be able to adapt job demands to a satisfactory level, and bring about an improvement in working situations.'

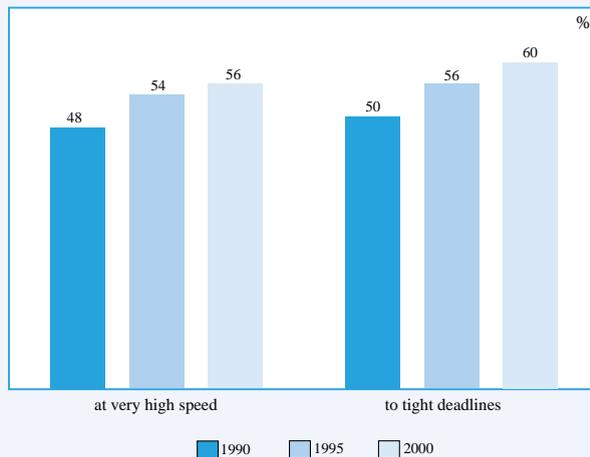
Steven Dhondt, TNO Arbeid, Netherlands

Whereas in the past centralised decision-making was an acceptable model, today it cannot match the changing market demands where task segregation rarely leads to efficient production. 'New' forms of work organisation contribute to a division of labour, based on the decentralisation of decision-making: through teamwork; quality improvement, 'just-in-time' production; job enlargement, job rotation and

interdepartmental job rotation; knowledge management; teleworking; and virtual companies. These new forms can make organisations more profitable, but often at the expense of quality of work.

According to Dhondt, organisational changes at the workplace have an inevitable impact on working conditions. Organisational improvement does not guarantee better working conditions and health. Lean production and socio-technical work organisation models have not brought the expected working environment improvements for workers. Workers in such systems report high levels of stress, job demand and burnout, said Dhondt referring to the Dutch situation. Companies which use new forms of work organisation are unable to limit demands on workers who, in turn, are suffering the negative consequences of these task demands. The situation often encountered today is a polarisation between a diminishing central core of workers who enjoy favourable conditions, and others on the margins who have increasingly precarious conditions. While work is becoming more autonomous and creative for some workers, in general it is becoming increasingly intensive, and such intensification is re-enforced by information and communication technology (ICT).

Figure 3 Percentage of workers who report working at very high speed or to tight deadlines.



Efficient use of time is a key factor: shifting working time arrangements, as well as irregularity and unpredictability can bring about a deterioration in

working and living conditions. According to *Patricia Vendramin* (Fondation Travail Université Belgium), 'it is irrational to build a society where workers are under even more pressure'. Vendramin also made the point that ICT has transformed many tertiary jobs into delivery points with little scope for added value or competence development.

Table 1 Women in the workforce, by occupation, 1995 and 2000

	1995	2000
Legislators and managers	30	34
Professionals	44	47
Technicians	46	47
Clerks	71	67
Service and sales workers	55	66
Agriculture and fishery workers	35	26
Craft related trades workers	18	12
Plant and machine operators	23	16
Elementary occupations	51	48
Armed forces	21	5
EU	42	42

There are increasing numbers of women entering the labour market, as well as workers from minority ethnic or national backgrounds. The view was expressed at the conference that organisations need to adapt to this change. Enterprises have legal responsibilities to promote equal treatment between women and men. National legislation and collective agreements to tackle other forms of discrimination already exist in the case of unfair treatment of people with disabilities, or because of age, ethnicity, 'race', nationality, religion, or sexual orientation.

'Women are under-represented in higher managerial positions and senior grades, and in skilled blue-collar craft and trade occupations; they are over-represented in health, education and the "caring" professions, in clerical work and in routine service and sales jobs.'

Colette Fagan, Manchester University

Colette Fagan (Manchester University) argued that gender segregation in the workplace is prevalent. She said that while the expansion of female-dominated professions such as nursing, clerical work and teaching have provided important entry routes and promotion paths for many women, men still tend to occupy the managerial positions and senior grades. Even in female-dominated occupations and sectors men are often disproportionately represented in higher grades and senior positions.

Gender segregation produces an unequal distribution of working conditions. Women are less exposed to the ‘traditional’ environmental and ergonomic hazards of blue-collar jobs in manufacturing and construction and to long hours of work, nightwork and shiftwork. They are more associated with ‘people-oriented’ service jobs, are more likely to work part-time and have only a limited degree of autonomy in their jobs. They are more exposed than male workers to discrimination and intimidation in the workplace from colleagues, customers and clients. Finally, even when they have similar education, experience, jobs and working hours, they are more likely to receive low pay. Women are generally in the position of juggling the demands of employment with the domestic task of running the home and looking after children and other relatives.

Figure 4 Distribution of employed men and women according to job stress model, %

		Autonomy	
		low	high
Time pressure	low	Passive ♂ 18% ♀ 22%	Relaxed ♂ 17% ♀ 16%
	high	Hectic ♂ 36% ♀ 40%	Active ♂ 29% ♀ 22%

The conference addressed the issue of older workers, and how companies must adapt their work organisation to the needs of an ageing workforce. The increasing number of older workers in the labour market highlights the

importance of adjusting work organisation to their needs. There is a tendency among companies to seek to employ young people, and assign working roles according to the needs of young people.

'Quality of work and life is relative, and differs from country to country due to political, cultural and historical reasons. However, in general, young people look for rewards in pay and promotion, while older workers are more concerned with working conditions.'

Fernando Dal Re Compaire, Grupo Antolin, Spain

Serge Volkoff (CREAPT-CEE, France) made the point that age-based selection has an influence on working hours, the pressure of work, and changes in the forms of work, affecting an increasing number of jobs. He argued that the process needed to be adjusted to take age into account. Fernando Dal Re Compaire (Grupo Antonin, Spain) talked about country differences and the differing expectations to be found among young and older workers.

Time constraints have increased and this has created problems for older workers. Time pressures reduce individual freedom, and decrease the opportunity of developing individual or collective strategies which would improve efficiency with least damage. It appears that choices in organisation, preparation, anticipation and cooperation are important for ageing workers.

It was generally agreed that decision-makers, both at national and European level, have not been in a position to catch up with the fast pace of change. There is an apparent lack of systematic information about the use of new forms of work organisation at European level. According to Laurent Vogel (TUTB), the European Commission needs to extend the scope of its operations, and should intervene both at national and European level. Steven Dhondt argued that there is a need to develop reliable tools which can pinpoint the social consequences of changes in the organisation of work, and help to integrate occupational health and safety in production planning.

Labour market flexibility

Achieving greater flexibility in a changing and globalised economy has become a key issue in organisational strategies. Labour market flexibility is

often synonymous with fixed-term contracts, temporary agency work, part-time work and outsourcing. But there are other types of flexibility, such as working time flexibility and work organisation flexibility (competence development, skills variation and team working), which, according to *Jacques Freyssinet* (Institut de recherches économiques et sociales, France), could replace contractual flexibility. The use of labour market flexibility is often a way to avoid addressing organisational issues.

'Flexibility must be combined with security, must benefit workers and companies, focus on training and lifelong learning, and invest in people, working hours and conditions of work that fit with personal needs'.

Anna Diamantopoulou,
Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs

One of the questions highlighted at the conference was to what extent increased labour market flexibility will affect the job security of employees. Freyssinet said that only a minority of individuals who work in a non-permanent contract do so by choice. The vast majority would prefer to have a permanent contract. He also argued that flexible forms of employment such as fixed-term contracts and temporary agency work create problems with regard to the quality of work.

This view was supported by *Michael Quinlan* (University of New South Wales, Australia), who presented the results of 150 cross-sectoral studies around the world from 1966 to 2001, which gave conclusive evidence that labour market flexibility has adverse consequences on the health and safety of workers. A wide range of methodologies were used: there were different indices, grouped into objective health measures, subjective health, sickness absence, knowledge of law, organisational policies and training. 126 studies found a negative association between precarious employment and OHS, irrespective of methodology or country. There were adverse consequences resulting from outsourcing, downsizing, temporary/leased work and telework/telecall jobs. The evidence revealed low knowledge of legislation among workers, limited access to compensation, reduced access to health surveillance, more injuries and diseases, intensification of work, lack of logistical resources and off-loading of high risk work. Only with part-time work did the research show better outcomes.

Figure 5 Self-perceived working conditions for workers, by contract

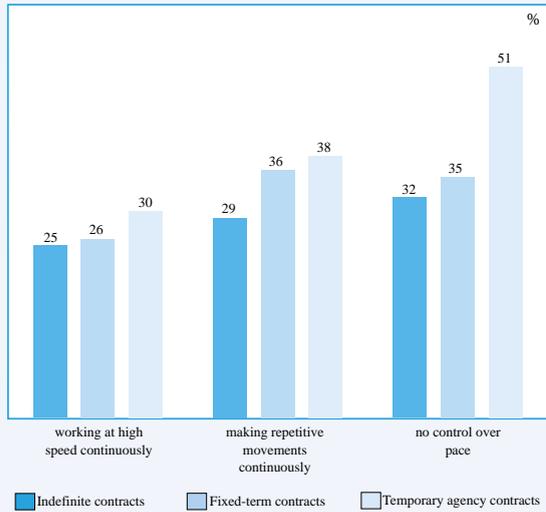
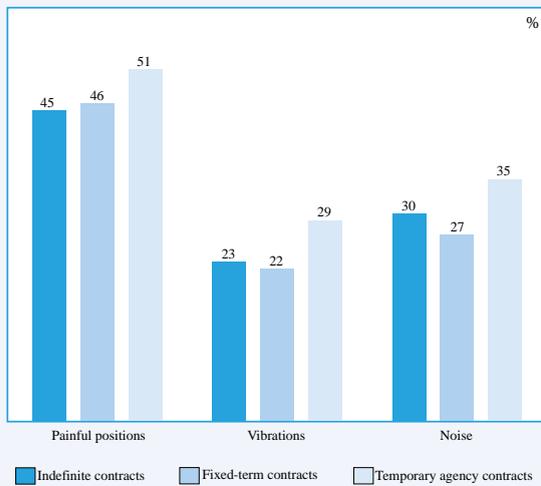


Figure 6 Workers exposed to physical hazards, by contract



This overall analysis was challenged by *Thérèse de Liedekerke* (Unice), who argued that quality of work is not primarily about status and said that it was too simplistic to correlate status with health and safety outcomes. She was also of the opinion that temporary work can act as a stepping-stone for reintegrating outsiders into the workforce. *Donald Storrie* (Centre for

European Labour Market Studies, Sweden) countered this by saying that although temporary agency work can promote labour market integration, there is little empirical evidence of it.

Temporary agency work has grown very rapidly in all Member States, by between two and five fold during the 1990s. Today it is estimated that the sector employs between 1.8 and 2.1 million agency workers, representing between 1.1% to 1.3% % of total employment in Europe. Temporary agency work is concentrated among young workers and, with the exception of Scandinavia, the majority of these workers are men. Storrie pointed to two main features of agency work that can lead to poor working conditions: frequent changes of workplace at user firms, and the duality of employer responsibility which could be problematic as regards health and safety at the workplace. He also highlighted the lack of training for temporary agency workers.

Changing technology and production systems make it difficult for workers to continue in their jobs without skills upgrading or further education. *Kenneth Abrahamsson* (Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research) argued that a flexible approach to employability was an essential pre-requisite in today's changing world.

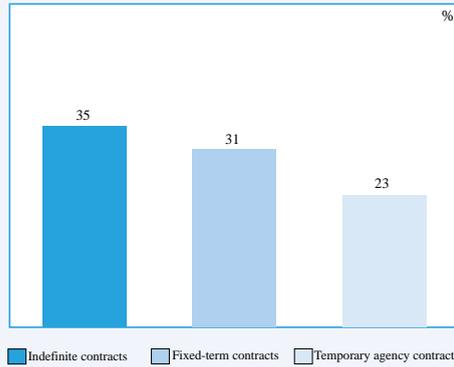
Abrahamsson said that the impact of lifelong learning policies and practices depends on individual incentives for learning, as well as access to learning options. The groups most at risk are immigrants, disabled adults, under-educated employees and older workers.

'We can no longer assume lifelong employment. The emphasis has switched to employability, the capacity to move on, or retain a job, in a changing labour market.'

Kenneth Abrahamsson,
Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research

Anne Van Lancker (MEP) stressed the importance of investing in training, arguing that it is a shared responsibility between governments and companies.

Figure 7 Workers having undergone training paid for or provided by their employer within the past 12 months



Equal treatment has been a central issue in the recent negotiations on temporary work at EU level. Corporate values highlight productivity, market expansion and profit margins, while workers wish to have acceptable wage levels, secure employment conditions and a good working environment. It appears that UNICE and ETUC disagree on the concept of equal treatment.

Penny Clarke (ETUC), said that agency work could undermine collective agreements in the user firms and that therefore equal treatment in pay and working conditions should be sought at that level. She added that the ETUC is not against flexibility as long as job security, training and lifelong learning are guaranteed. From the researchers' point of view, *Donal Storrie* added that if temporary agency work becomes widespread, it could undermine collective agreements at the user firm.

Anne Van Lancker declared that while the Parliament had not yet taken a position on temporary work, she saw the equal treatment principle as the answer to health and safety problems. *Michel Jadot* (Belgian Ministry of Labour) concluded the discussion by saying that although social partners are addressing these issues through social dialogue, governments should not feel themselves relieved of their responsibilities: they still need to consider effective alternative solutions, especially where regulations and legal aspects are concerned.

Indicators on the quality of work

The European Union has set itself the goal to create more jobs, and better jobs. Indicators on quality of work is a way of making the concept of quality in work more concrete, and will provide a toolkit for monitoring and assessing efforts to improve job quality. At the 'For a better quality of work' conference, the issue of quality of work indicators was discussed in detail: specifically, which indicators should be used, for what purpose and in what context.

Quality is an essential part of the way the European Union works. In the opening session of the conference, Commissioner *Anna Diamantopoulou* pointed out that quality is not an optional extra, a fair-weather policy for good times.

'Quality is a goal as well as an instrument: the key to competitiveness and increased economic and social performance.'

Anna Diamantopoulou, Employment and social affairs
Commissioner

Laurette Onkelinx, Vice-Premier Minister of Belgium stressed that it is impossible to talk about the European employment strategy without talking about the quality of work.

The use of indicators to promote the quality of work is highlighted in the European Commission's Communication on quality, 'Employment and social policies: a framework for investing in quality' (COM (2001) 313) which was adopted in June 2001. The Communication is built on a strong political base, as the Commissioner pointed out: the Social Policy Agenda and the Lisbon strategy, reinforced by the summits of Nice and Stockholm. The issue of quality of work indicators is also included in the draft guidelines for the Employment strategy for 2002.

Ten key elements of the quality of work are defined in the Communication: intrinsic job quality; skills, lifelong learning and career development; gender equality; health and safety at work; flexibility and security; inclusion and accession to the labour market; work organisation and work-life balance; social dialogue and worker involvement; diversity and non-discrimination; and overall work performance. The Employment

Committee of the Council is working on detailed proposals concerning indicators for each of these dimensions and the report will be finalised in the autumn of 2001. There is also a working group of experts set up by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, on a request from the Belgian Presidency, whose task is to come forward with proposals concerning the development of indicators.

The conference participants agreed that the starting point for developing indicators should be that quality is a relative and multidimensional concept, and that the core issue is to create a dynamic process, not a legislative framework. As *Antonis Kastrissianakis* (DG Employment and Social Affairs) said, 'Any system of indicators must be part of a learning strategy through the open method of coordination.'

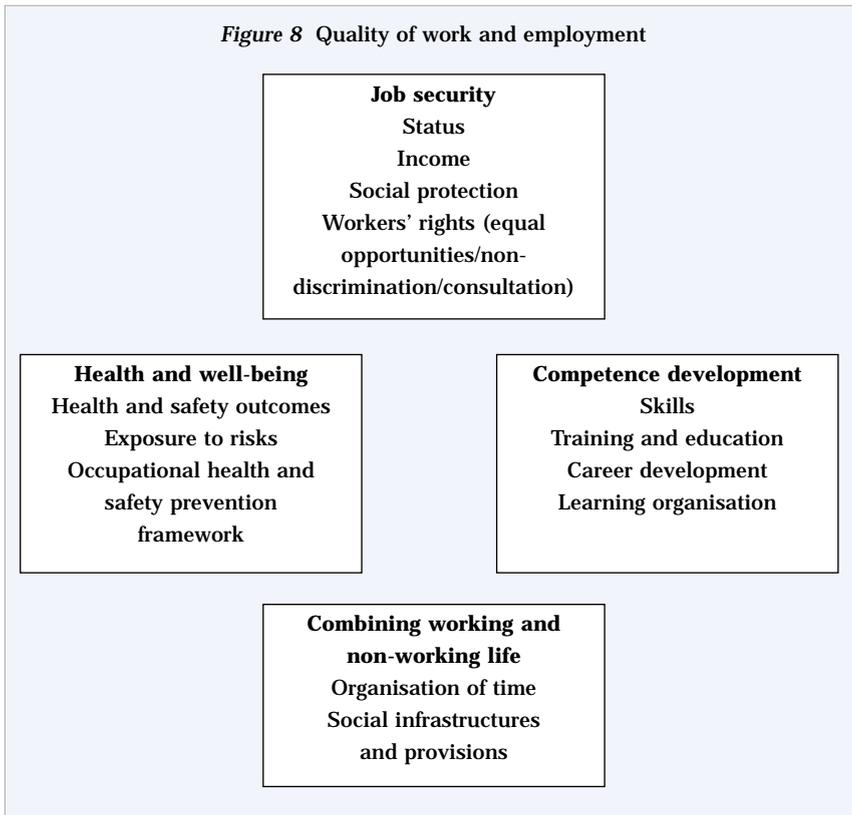
Philippe Pochet (Observatoire Social Européen) agreed that it is necessary to think about indicators in a dynamic way, not focusing on reaching a series of fixed ones.

'Perhaps the process itself is what is most interesting. I think that in defining a method that sets the ground for debate, and through the indicators themselves, the Member States will have to think about the quality dimension, also in the long-term perspective.'

Philippe Pochet, Observatoire Social Européen

Pochet also felt it was important not to shy away from issues which might be seen to be difficult or sensitive, for example, salaries, when developing indicators. Speaking about the quality of work without addressing aspects such as income and status of employment would be to remain out of touch with the daily life and preoccupations of citizens.

Pascal Paoli's presentation (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions) centered around a proposal from the working group of experts led by the Foundation, and illustrated three perspectives on quality of work: the individual (citizens need jobs that are secure, safe, interesting and which enable active social and family life), the corporate (companies need to find workers with the right skills), and the societal (society needs to promote healthy and skilled jobs to a maximum number of people).



Paoli pointed out that there are also three types of indicators: structural (describing the context /the framework, e.g. number of labour inspectors/1000 workers) situational (describing the reality of work, e.g. exposure to chemicals) and outcomes (the result, e.g. number of accidents or stress levels).

'We need to be cautious about benchmarking. We need to understand the context very well in order to draw the right conclusions.'

Pascal Paoli, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

According to Paoli, two aims for the use of indicators can be envisaged: benchmarking, and support for debate, based on the fact that the indicators reflect trends and provide time series.

How can we gain knowledge about the nature of indicators? The information can come from administrative reporting – which is not necessarily accurate – and/or self-reporting. According to Paoli, self-reporting should not be underestimated as it is a valuable and reliable source of information.

Paoli also stressed the need for an analytical framework (referring to the model above) and the importance of a dynamic reading of the indicators and a step-by-step approach. One possible example would go like this:

Status: There is an increase in non-permanent employment.

Health: There is a correlation between non-permanent employment and poor working conditions.

Training: Non-permanent workers receive less training and skills development.

On the basis of this, the *policy outcome* would be: Who takes responsibility for the training and competence development as well as for the occupational health of this growing group of non-permanent workers?

Jorma Rantanen (Finnish Institute of Occupational Health) described the Finnish experience which has moved from regulatory governance towards governance by information, a system in which indicators can play a vital role.

‘Indicators can be used to describe and to compare, to make priorities and to get early warning signals, and finally to follow-up and monitor.’

Jorma Rantanen, Finnish Institute of Occupational Health

One prerequisite is that the indicators themselves fulfil quality criteria, so that you can trust your findings. Jorma Rantanen proposed the following criteria: reliability, validity, sensitivity, feasibility and comparability. The indicators also need to be usable in practice: they should be easily available, easy to understand, demonstrative and instructive. He concluded that indicators can constitute an important tool for governance through proper information management and utilisation, and also contribute to increased workplace transparency, empowerment, collaboration and participation.

In the round table discussion on indicators which followed, *Annie Fouquet* (French Ministry of Labour) pointed out that the importance of different indicators varies from country to country: ‘It is important to have both indicators in common, and national indicators.’

She reiterated the point that indicators are for marking development, not for classifying or ranking countries. She also thought that indicators should make it possible to follow personal itineraries, for example the changes in one’s employment situation over time.

‘It is important that we do not reduce quality of work to a question of work organisation or health and safety. It would be inadmissible to exclude things like training and skills development, low salaries and precariousness.’

Jean Lapeyre, ETUC

The social partners were all in agreement concerning the important role of indicators in the quality of work. *Jean Lapeyre* (ETUC) emphasised that indicators must serve as a basis for action if they are to be meaningful: action on behalf of the Member States, and on behalf of the social partners, at European and national level. He invited the employers’ organisations to participate in the development of indicators by and for the social partners.

Wilfried Beirnaert (Unice) was also positive. He pointed out that the most important indicators from Unice’s point of view were health and safety at the workplace, gender equality, job satisfaction, economic performance, and training and skills development.

Charles Nordin (CEEP, the European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and of General Economic Interest) cautioned that some trial and error will be necessary when finding out which indicators to use.

‘We are definitely in support of indicators for quality of work. It makes business sense, and is quite simply the decent thing to do.’

Charles Nordin, CEEP

Juan Chozas (Spanish Secretary of State for Employment) stressed that quantity and quality indicators should not act in contradiction, but should complement each other. He highlighted the importance of quality of work and said that the process will continue under the European Union Spanish Presidency which begins on 1 January 2002.

List of speakers

Kenneth Abrahamsson, Swedish council for working life and social research

Christian Ardhe, Confederation of Swedish enterprise, Sweden

François Barenton, Unilever, Belgium

Ulrich Becker, Federal Ministry of labour and social affairs, Germany

Wilfried Beirnaert, UNICE

Raymond-Pierre Bodin, Director, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Marc Boissnel, Chairman of the Administrative Board, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Condition

Gerhard Bosch, Institut für arbeit und technik, Germany

Jean-Yves Boulin, IRIS, Université Paris Dauphine

Friedrich Buttler, ILO

Juan Chozas, Secretary of State for employment, Spain

Penny Clarke, European trade union confederation

Jean-Philippe Cobbaut, Ligue des familles, Belgium

Fernando Dal Re Compaire, Grupo Antolin, Spain

João Cravinho, President, European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest

Steven Dhondt, TNO arbeid, Netherlands

Anna Diamantopoulou, Commissioner for employment and social affairs, European Commission

Anna Ekström, Secretary of State, Ministry for industry, employment and communications, Sweden

Colette Fagan, Manchester University

Annie Fouquet, DARES, France and ELSA (Employment, Labor and Social Affairs) committee in OECD

Göke Frerichs, President, Economic and Social Committee

Jacques Freyssinet, Institut de recherches économiques et sociales, France

Michel de Gols, Federal Ministry of employment and labour, Belgium

Rosendo Dorrego González, Employment and social affairs DG, European Commission

Michel Hansenne, European Parliament

Reiner Hoffman, European trade union institute

Michel Jadot, Federal Ministry of Employment and Labour, Belgium

Antonis Kastrissianakis, Employment and social affairs DG, European Commission

Mark Keese, OECD

Jean Lapeyre, ETUC

Elisabeth Lagerlöf, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Mia Latta, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Thérèse de Liedekerke, Union of industrial and employers' confederations of Europe

John Morley, DG Employment and social affairs, European Commission

Ulrich Mückenberger, Hochschule für Wirtschaft und Politik, Germany

Inger Ohlsson, National institute for working life, Sweden

Laurette Onkelinx, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for employment and labour, Belgium

Pascal Paoli, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Ola Persson, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Philippe Pochet, Observatoire social européen

Ignacio Matía Prim, Ministry of labour and social affairs, Spain

Odile Quintin, Director-general Employment and social affairs DG, European Commission

Michael Quinlan, University of New South Wales, Australia

Jorma Rantanen, Finnish institute for occupational health

Donald Storrie, Centre for European labour market studies, Sweden

Kea Tijdens, University of Amsterdam

Clive Tucker, Employment Committee, Council of the EU

Anne Van Lancker, European Parliament

Patricia Vendramin, Fondation travail université, Belgium

Eric Verborgh, Deputy Director, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Robert Villeneuve, European centre of enterprises with public participation and of enterprises of general economic interest

Laurent Vogel, European trade union technical bureau for health and safety (TUTB)

Serge Volkoff, CREAPT-CEE, France

Cees Vos, Ministry of social affairs and labour, Netherlands

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

**For a better quality of work
A European Union Presidency conference**

Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities

2001 - 32 pp. - 16 x 23.5 cm

EF/01/68/EN



OFFICE FOR OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS OF
THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

L-2985 Luxembourg