

## **WORKING CONDITIONS : SURVEY ON WORKING TIME IN EUROPE**

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), a European Union agency based in Dublin, has released the findings of its latest survey on working conditions throughout Europe.

Carried out every five years since 1990, Eurofound conducted interviews for this survey with 21,031 human resource managers in companies in 21 EU member states (15 old' and six new') and 5,233 employee representatives. The survey is particularly comprehensive in that it covers all aspects of working time: flexibility, part-time, leave, phased and early retirement, etc. According to Eurofound Director Jorma Karppinen, "this survey provides unique knowledge on working time arrangements in Europe. It gives a representative picture of workplace practices and takes into account the views of both managers and worker representatives".

### **FLEXIBILITY**

Flexible working time arrangements are in operation in almost half (48%) of companies with ten or more employees in Europe. The proportion is higher in the services sector (50%) than in industry (43%). "Enabling employees to better combine work and family (or personal) life" (68%) and "better adaptation of working hours to the business's workload" (47%) are the two main reasons cited by managers for introducing flexible working arrangements.

### **PART-TIME WORK**

There are huge differences between countries in the incidence of companies offering part-time employment: almost nine out of ten businesses in the Netherlands employ part-time workers, compared to only around two in ten businesses in Greece and Portugal.

The proportion of companies where part-time is the main or even only form of work is high in Germany, Latvia, Sweden, Denmark and it is especially true for the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

A significant proportion of both employee representatives (41%) and managers (34%) stated that working part-time had a negative impact on career prospects.

### **FAMILY-RELATED LEAVE**

In half of all companies (51%) in the survey, at least one employee has availed of parental leave in the three years preceding the interview. On average, 30% of the businesses with recent experience of parental leave reported that one or more male employees had taken parental leave.

Training programmes to facilitate the re-integration of employees returning to work after an extended period of leave are offered by about one in five companies.

Phased retirement schemes are made available in about 37% of companies in the survey.

Phased retirement is more likely to be found in countries that have broad experience of part-time employment than in countries with little experience of such work.

Early retirement schemes are more widespread than phased retirement schemes, with 48% of all the businesses surveyed offering this type of scheme. The incidence of early retirement is particularly high in the education sector (72% of establishments), in financial intermediation (63%) and health care (61%).

The survey shows that the availability of flexible working time arrangements has a positive impact on the work-life balance of employees and also has benefits for companies, helping them to match working hours with the workflow and leading to greater job satisfaction.

Eurofound will follow up its publication of the main report on the survey with a series of in-depth analytical reports in late 2006, to cover topics including: part-time work, childcare leave, early/phased retirement, extended operating hours, flexibility in companies and social dialogue on working time and work-life balance.

*A copy of the full report is available at: [www.europolitics.info](http://www.europolitics.info) > members > advanced search > reference =57672*

*By Nicolas Gros-Verheyde*