

Interfaces with Other Disciplines

# Analysis of the third European survey on working conditions with composite indicators <sup>☆</sup>

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## Abstract

A composite indicator *Working conditions* for comparing European countries is constructed from data of the Third European Survey on Working Conditions. The main findings are as follows: (a) European countries differ with respect to working conditions statistically more significantly than with respect to earnings; it implies a quite accurate discrimination threshold in ranking countries with respect to working conditions, (b) working conditions and earnings positively correlate over the whole of Europe but correlate little within single countries; it indicates at the prevailing role of national determinants over professional or social specificities as contributing to the average working conditions, and (c) earnings play no essential role in subjective estimations, including job satisfaction, which mainly depends on working conditions; consequently, more attention should be paid to improving the latter.

The same approach is applied to constructing a three-dimensional indicator of *Working time*, reflecting its aspects duration, location (abnormality), and flexibility. It is found that abnormality and flexibility compensate each other, whereas the duration is not affected by two other factors.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Political background

*In the new list an indicator **quality of work** has been added in response to the emphasis put on this issue by the Stockholm European Council. The particular indicator on accidents at work has been chosen ... But other indicators of quality of work, such as “life-long learning”, were already included in the list of structural indicators.*

European Communities  
Structural indicators, p. 6  
Brussels, 30.10.2001  
COM(2001) 619 final

The concept of the European welfare state includes both economic and social aspects; see Esping-Andersen (1990). Since employees spend at least 1/3 of the time at work, more than devoted to family, friends, and leisure together (Hesse and Schrader, 1995, 2nd cover page; Halama, 1997, p. 2), working conditions play as important a role as income, consumption, or living standards in the total welfare of workers.

Working conditions permanently remain in the focus of attention of the European Commission, national governments, and trade unions. In particular, it is one of the issues of the European Employment Strategy (EES) launched in 1997 in Luxembourg; see European Commission (2002a, 2003). The EU Lisbon Summit 2000 called for “more and better jobs and greater social cohesion by 2010” (European Commission, 2001a). Four years later, on March 2004, the European Council again emphasized “the urgency to take effective action in creating more and better jobs” (European Commission, 2004).

At the European level, the supervision of working conditions is institutionalized in the *European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions*, Dublin, and the *European Agency for Safety and Health at Work*, Bilbao. The former is a European organization, one of the first to be established to work in specialized areas of EU policy. It was set up by the European Council (Council Regulation EEC No. 1365/75 of 26 May 1975) to organize research and development projects, providing data and analysis for the relevant EU policies. The Foundation has a network of experts throughout Europe who conduct research on its behalf

including assessing the current national situations, the preparation of case studies and national reports and the conducting of surveys; see European Foundation (2004).

The European Agency closely collaborates with the European Foundation. It acts as a catalyst for developing, collecting, analyzing and disseminating information that improves the state of occupational safety and health. The Agency is a tripartite European Union organization also set up by the European Council (Council Regulation EEC No. 2062/94) to bring together representatives from three key decision-making groups in each of the EU Member States—governments, employers and workers associations; see European Agency (2004).

Germany has contributed to these European initiatives as early as in the 1970s by a research program *Humanisierung des Arbeitslebens (HdA)* (= Humanization of Working Life) followed by programs *Arbeit und Technik* (= Work and Techniques), and *Innovative Arbeitsgestaltung* (= Innovative Work Structuring); see the Editorial (2004) to *Arbeit*, 2004/3. The actual program of this type, *Initiative Neue Qualität der Arbeit (INQA)* (= Initiative New Quality of Work) (Bundesministerium, 2004), is complemented with the political initiative *Gute Arbeit* (= Good Work) of the leading German trade union IG Metall; see Pickshaus and Urban (2004); for the current German debate on the quality of work see Peters and Schmitthenner (2003).

### 1.2. European surveys on working conditions

Both European Foundation and European Agency use statistical data on working conditions from the Eurostat (2004). Macro-data are available from the *New Cronos* Internet page (section *Population and Social Conditions*). Selected data are annually summarized in the *Labour Force Surveys* and other Eurostat reports, also available on-line. These data are however not comprehensive enough for specialized studies on working conditions, and in 1990 the European Foundation initiated purpose-oriented *European Surveys on Working Conditions* which take place every five years, the third dating 2000 and the fourth being planned for 2005.

The most recent published survey by the European Foundation (2001) is based on a questionnaire with over 200 questions related to

- occupation (position, industry branch, type of contract, size of enterprise, etc.),

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