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on the quality of work
(18-20 April 2006, Geneva, Switzerland)

Topic 1: International conceptual framework for measuring the dimensions of quality of work:
an integrated approach to embracing the EU Quality of Work, the Dublin Foundation and the
ILO Decent Work frameworks.

**COMMENTS ON THE CONCEPTUAL PAPER OF THE TASK FORCE: "TOWARDS
AN INTERNATIONAL QUALITY OF EMPLOYMENT FRAMEWORK"**

Invited paper by European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions¹

1. The objective of this paper is to develop some reflections around the different frameworks which were used in the building up of the international framework on quality of employment. The paper furthermore elaborates on some indicators, which are already included in the frameworks and makes a suggestion for a new indicator which could be included.
2. The aim of the task force was to come up with an international conceptual framework for measuring the dimensions of quality of work. The proposal put forward bases itself on an integrated approach taking into account different 'quality of work frameworks' such as the ones put forward by the ILO (decent work), European Union (quality of work) and European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (quality of work and employment). As a preliminary and very trivial remark, it should be born in mind that the different frameworks referred to in the framework proposal serve very different purposes.
3. At the European Union level, the first framework referred to is the quality of work framework, as part of the European Union Social Agenda². This framework is being used in the context of the European Employment Strategy and serves to measure progress towards the Lisbon targets as established by the European Council, which is comprised of the heads of all member states. The indicators used are being established by representatives from all member

¹ This paper was prepared by Greet Vermeulen.

² *Towards an International quality of employment framework: conceptual paper of the task force on the measurement of quality of work*, p. 5 as well as *Employment and Social Policies: a framework for investing in quality*, Communication from the Commission, COM (2003) 728 final.

states in the enceintes of the Employment Committee (and its Indicators Subgroup), which reports to the Council. The Council has to endorse the list of the indicators. This list serves to guide the measurement of progress towards the established goals of the Lisbon agenda, with the ultimate aim to create more and better jobs in the European Union. Most indicators are taken from labour force survey, SILC or statistical information at national level.

4. The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions is an EU agency, which provides for policy-relevant research findings to policy makers. It is governed by a tripartite board, which consists of a tripartite delegation (a representative from government, employers and trade unions) along with the European Commission. The framework of quality of work and employment uses to serve to conceptualise the content of what is perceived as most important dimensions of working conditions of workers (employees and self-employed) in the European Union.

5. The Foundation has been involved in the development of monitoring instruments on working conditions, in particular through the development of EU-wide questionnaire surveys on quality of work and employment³. The Foundation launched a survey at the beginning of the nineties with the aim of filling this gap of information. The aim of the European Working Conditions Survey is to describe and monitor trends in the working conditions of people in employment⁴ in the European Union. The European Working Conditions Survey is survey undertaken in the Autumn 2005 in 31 countries (EU27, candidate countries (Croatia and Turkey), as well as Norway and Switzerland).

6. The European Working Conditions Survey is a single EU-wide data source on working conditions, which is based on four dimensions of quality of work and employment (career and employment security, health and well-being, reconciliation of working and non-working life and skills development). The indicators found to measure progress in the four dimensions can be found in the European Working Conditions Survey.⁵

7. The survey is a workers' survey, whereby both employees and self-employed are questioned about their conditions of work and employment. The measurement level is the worker's perspective, even though most questions would be relatively 'objective ones'. However, this has implications for the 'picture' one is taking. The aim of the survey is more focused on working conditions in the European Union, in identifying priorities and measuring results, monitoring trends and changes over the years, and contributing, wherever possible with findings, to support policy-makers in their discussion. All in all, the survey tries to provide a complex and multi-faceted portrait of work and working conditions in an enlarged Europe. It furthermore has led to new research in order to be able to triangulate, understand, interpret and contextualise the data.

³ Dhondt S. and I. Houtman (1997), *Indicators of working conditions in the European Union*, European Foundation, Office for Official Publications, Luxembourg.

⁴ Definition used is the one from the Labour Force Survey.

⁵ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Quality in work and employment in the European Working Conditions Survey*, UNECE/ILO/Eurostat seminar on Quality of Work, Geneva, May 11 to 13 2005. Some results of the 4th EWCS can be found in Parent-Thirion, Fernandez Macias, Hurley and Vermeylen (2006), *Fourth European Working Conditions Survey*, European Foundation, Office for Official Publications, Luxembourg. More information on the methodology and development of indicators: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2002), *Quality of work and employment in Europe: issues and challenges*, Foundation paper, Office for Official Publications, Luxembourg. More information on the survey methodology can be found on <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/surveys/EWCS2005/methodology.htm>

8. The questionnaire for the survey has been adapted at every single episode of the survey, in order to give a good picture of working conditions at that time.⁶ While the questionnaire has expanded at each wave, however, a lot of attention is paid to capture trends. Some dimensions have been refined and some questions were revised or added in the survey. For instance, the questions around blurring frontiers between working and non-working life have been expanded in this episode, in order to measure better the influence of contactability outside working hours (and its impact on work-life balance). Also, the questions around work organization (team work and team autonomy) and training (including several forms of training, also on-the-job training) have been refined in order to measure better the dimension of competence development. This is, on its turn, an important element in the current political reflections in the European Union on flexicurity, whereby updating of skills in very different ways could enhance the employability of workers. This would give workers more employment security.

9. The ILO framework on decent work⁷ tries to give form to ‘decent work’ agenda, put forward by the ILO. This list of indicators tries to encompass different dimensions of quality of work in a worldwide scale and brings together the goals of employment, social protection, social dialogue and rights at work into a consolidated framework, whereby the central focus is to create opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity⁸. The indicators are wider encompassing and stress much more the influence also of infrastructure and economical context on quality of work. This dimension seems to arguably even more important in an international context. Indicators are filled in with findings from labour force surveys and national statistical sources (especially with regard to the infrastructure elements, social protection information etc).

10. Despite the fact that the purpose of the three frameworks is very different, they have served as an interesting background to come to a list for global quality of work indicators.

11. The international conceptual framework⁹ as proposed here is based on four pillars. These are giving a nice overview of the different dimensions of quality of work. Hereby we use the term ‘work’ in the widest sense including both the dimensions of work (content of job) and employment (contractual arrangements), as well as infrastructural elements, which have an impact on quality of work, such as social protection attached to work (unemployment benefits, pension provisions, possibly (supplementary) health care provisions attached to work.).

12. The four dimensions proposed are

- a) Rights at work
- b) Employment
- c) Social protection
- d) Social dialogue

⁶ The questionnaire was revised through a number of meetings of an expert questionnaire development groups, consisting of representatives from each member state (from national statistical offices, ministries, research institutes), international organisations (Eurostat, ILO, OECD), academic experts on working conditions and members of the tripartite Governing Board of the European Foundation. The questionnaire can be found in all its language versions on <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/surveys/EWCS2005/questionnaire.htm>

⁷ *Towards an International quality of employment framework: conceptual paper of the task force on the measurement of quality of work*, p.8

⁸ ILO, *Decent Work*: report of the director general, International Labour Conference, 87th session, ILO, Geneva, 1999

⁹ *Towards an International quality of employment framework: conceptual paper of the task force on the measurement of quality of work*, p.17

13. With regard to statistical indicators to measure quality of employment, both a longer and shorter list are established. These lists should be able to give an assessment of quality of work in all countries (high income, medium income and low income countries) and should be relevant and applicable everywhere: they should be comparable in space, therefore using conventional and cultural norms, which are commonly accepted. The longer list is used for more in-depth analysis and the shorter list should be able to give a general assessment of a country's quality of employment.

14. The list of indicators should be quite clear and transparent, in the sense that it should be very clear what this indicator is intended to measure and that there is a link between the measure and the information expected. These indicators should preferably also be comparable in time, in order to see progress within each country over time.

15. Most of the indicators proposed refer to structural indicators in the sense that they describe the context / framework: e.g. labour inspectors per number of workers.

16. Some of the indicators refer to work and employment situations, describing the reality of work and employment situations and the likelihood to have negative or positive outcomes (e.g. low wage, temporary employment). The remainder of the indicators refer to outcomes of the situations described above (e.g. occupational accidents (fatal/non fatal).

17. The indicators chosen try and capture a bigger picture and necessarily reflect a certain compromise in order to be useful at international level and for all countries. They can be complemented by indicators at other levels, such as national or regional level, whereby other accents might be put. The final result should try and give a richer picture. Furthermore, it should be borne in mind that the most interesting use of the picture taken is to try and compare this picture over time – and see whether progress can be made in quality of employment in the countries.

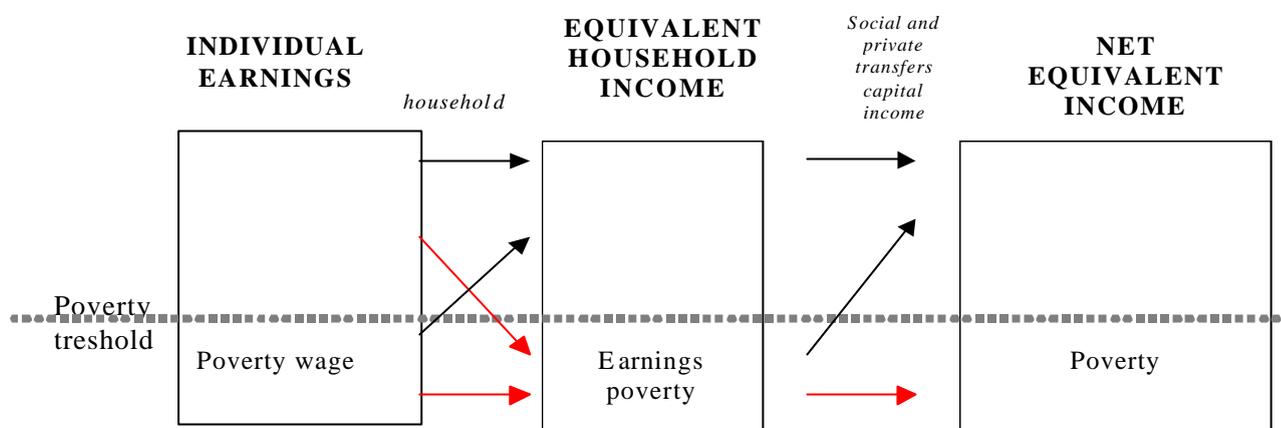
18. Working poor is one of the indicators, which has been referred to both in the long and short list. It is a very important indicator, which is slightly complicated as it refers to hybrid concept which refers to individual and household components, as it combines income and employment dimensions¹⁰. Income (poverty) is measured at the household level, while employment is measured at the individual level. In the European Union, the discussion on working poor has been intensified in the last couple of years, mainly due to the European discussions around social inclusion and employment.¹¹

19. In-work poverty is a difficult concept as it seems to refer to a glaring contradiction whereby links are generally established in terms of deficit: the lack of work being the reason for poverty and work being the way out of poverty. The underlying assumption is that for those capable to work, unemployment (and poverty) is the result of a lack of commitment to work (notion of « voluntary unemployment »). This idea has then been abandoned to pass on to the idea that working poor are the low wage earners. However, this again might be a slight misconception. In-work poverty and low wage might be related, but are different issue: someone with a low wage could escape poverty through additional earnings from other members of the household or social transfers.

¹⁰ Pena Casas R. and M. Latta (2004), *Working poor in the European Union*, European Foundation, Office for Official Publications

¹¹ Indeed, at-risk-of-poverty indicators have been added to the list of indicators for the Lisbon strategy. Both the Employment Committee and the Social Protection Committee have reflected upon a good indicator to measure this phenomenon.

20. Working poor are individuals that are in employment, and simultaneously members of a household which global income is below the poverty line.



Source: Strengmann- Kuhn, 2002, *Working poor in Europe*, paper for BIEN network, referred to in Pena Casas and Latta, *Working poor in the European Union*, p.5

21. According to Strengmann-Kuhn, there are two ways for workers to become 'working poor'.¹² The first way is that the worker has a poverty wage (living alone and no additional other income in the household) and poverty cannot be avoided through other earnings in the household or other income such as from social transfers. The other way is that the worker him- or her-self might have sufficient income, but falls below the poverty line because of the household context. The two dimensions – income (low wage / earnings) and household are therefore important.

22. Many countries have come up with their own definitions of working poor, both in order to define work and the poverty threshold. Some examples: the low income threshold can be defined according to different standards and could refer to either absolute or relative poverty lines : eg 60 % of the median equivalent household income (Eurostat) (at risk of poverty threshold ?), 50% of median equivalised household (France, INSEE definition), administrative rates of social security (Switzerland, Swiss Federal Statistical Office), a federal poverty line (US Census and US Bureau of Statistics). In an international context, it is advised to use a relative poverty line.

23. On the work definition, there are equally different possibilities : most frequent activity status in the last year + employed 15 hours (Eurostat, referred to in Marlier, 2000), individuals who have spent at least six months on the labour market (working or searching for a job, having had a job at least for one month during the year (France), the total hours worked by family members greater than or equal to 1750 hours (44 weeks) (US Census), individuals who have spent at least six month in the labour market (working or searching for a job) (US Bureau of Statistics), all active individuals, regardless of the number of hours worked (Australia).

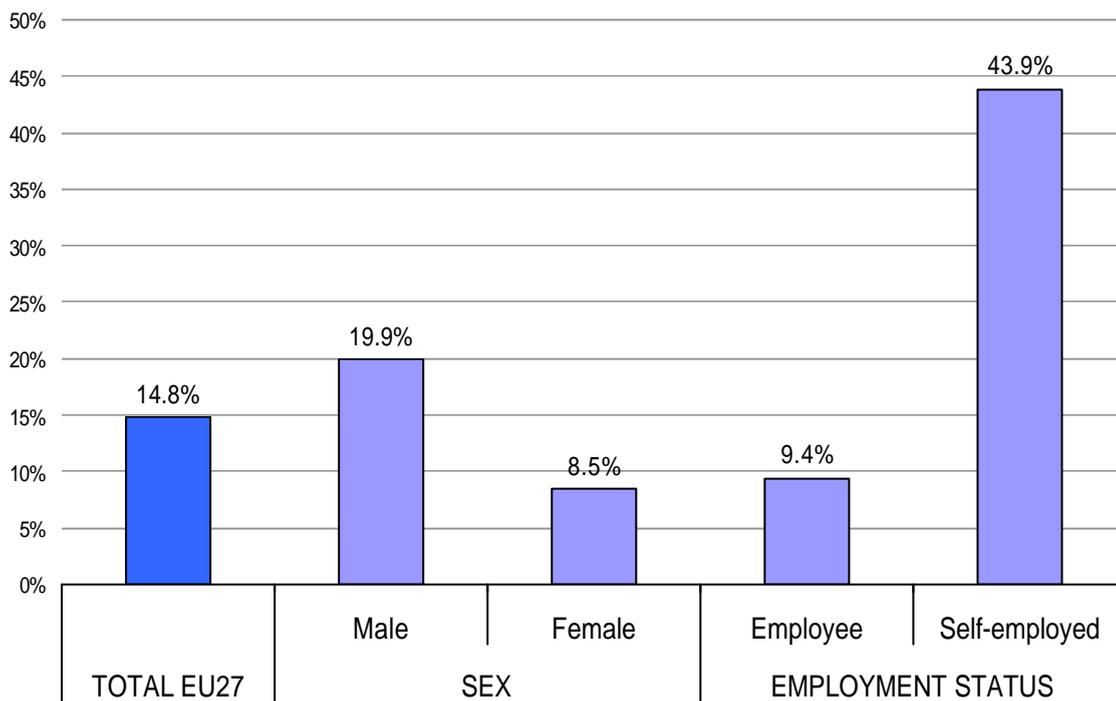
24. The indicator on in-work poverty is a very useful inclusion in this list, but should be defined carefully.

¹² Strengmann- Kuhn, 2002, *Working poor in Europe*, paper for BIEN network, referred to in Pena Casas and Latta, 2004, *Working poor in the European Union*, p.5

25. Another important indicator is the one on very long hours. In the 4th EWCS, on average, the number of weekly working hours have been consistently reducing in the last 15 years, because of higher percentages of part-time work but also because of a reduction in the proportion of people working very long hours.

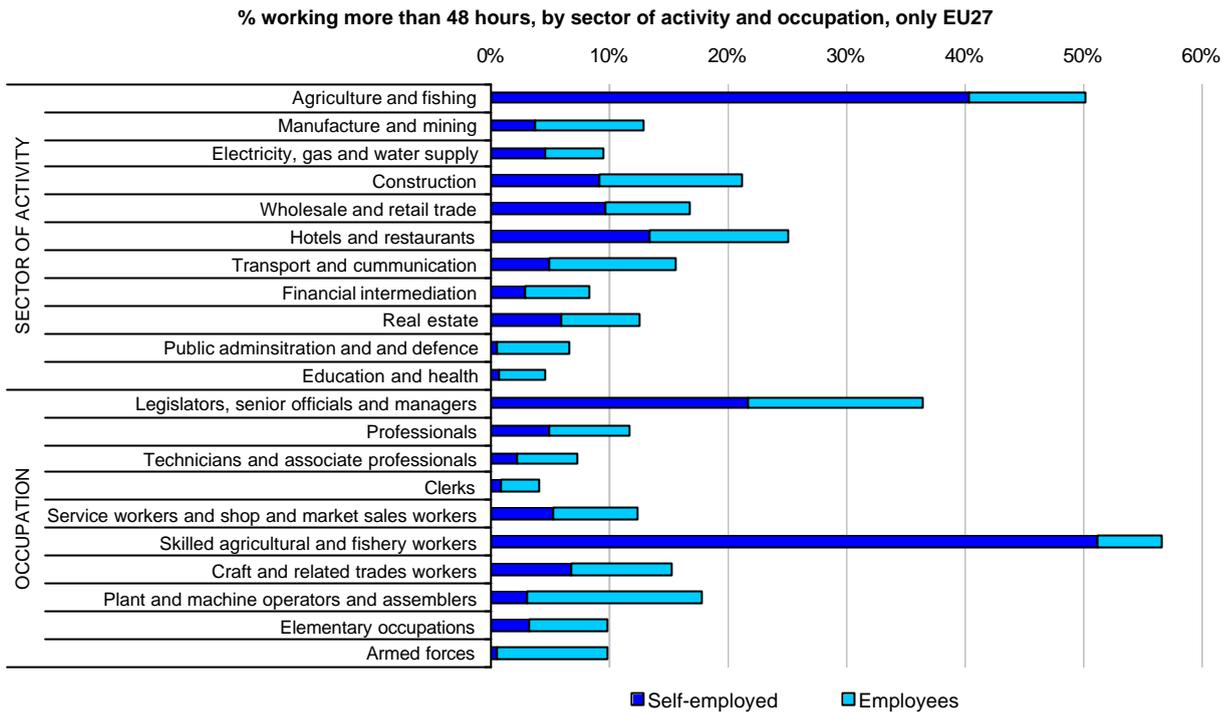
26. However, still 15 per cent of workers in EU27 report working more than 48 hours, and nearly half of the self-employed do report working more than 48 hours.

% working more than 48 hours, by sex and employment status, only EU27



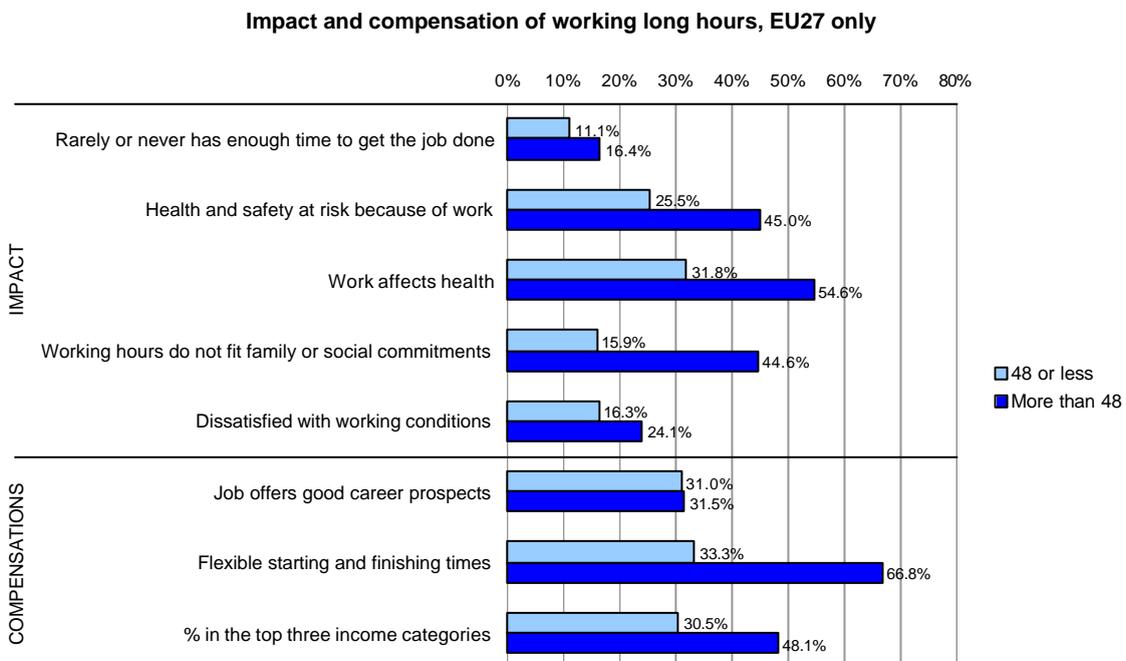
Source: 4th European Working Conditions Survey (EU27)

27. Long working hours can be found mostly in certain sectors such as agriculture and fishing and hotels and restaurants. Apart from agricultural workers (most of them self-employed), they can also be found in some high skilled white-collar jobs, such as legislators, senior officials and managers.



Source: 4th European Working Conditions Survey (EU27)

28. Consequences of these long working hours may not be underestimated. Indeed, long working hours does not only have an influence on work-life balance for the worker, but has also very important consequences for possible health outcomes. While one of four workers in general indicates that their health and safety is at risk because of their work, this is the case for 45 % of workers who do work long hours.



Source: 4th European Working Conditions Survey (EU27)

29. The indicator proposed in the list of quality of employment is an important and straightforward indicator.

30. A dimension, which is not yet covered in the list of Quality of Employment indicators, is an indicator on competence development, for instance an indicator on training.

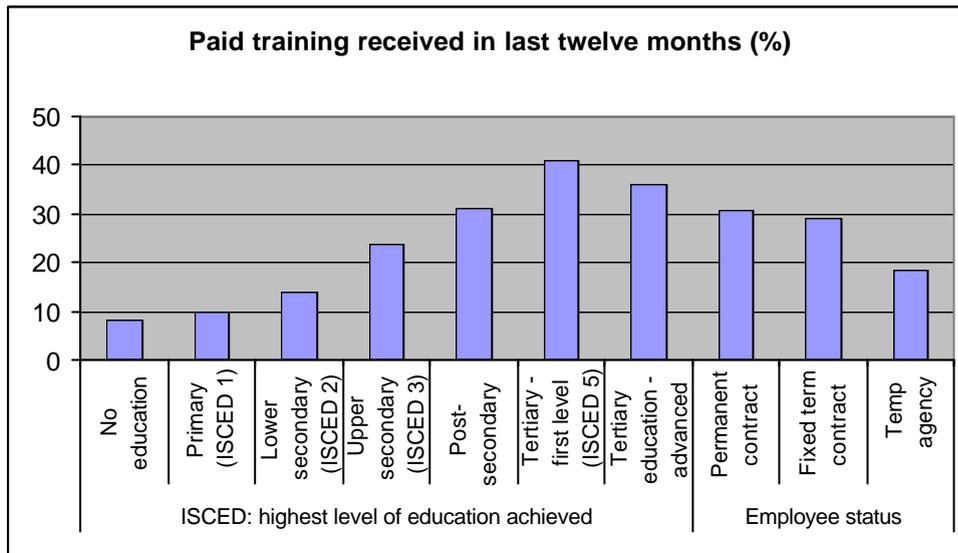
This dimension, covered in the Quality of Work and Employment framework as competence development includes different elements such as training, life long learning and skills development. Different ways of updating skills and learning are considered. Development in the job can have two effects: through development, one could better deal with his or her current job or progress in his or her own job on the one hand, and it could also increase the chances of finding another job, if necessary or wanted, on the other hand. It has an impact on evolution of careers of workers. It is also an important element in the discussion on flexicurity, whereby employment security is a vital element. It could 'equip workers' and enhance the capacity of workers to deal with changes.

31. There are different ways to develop oneself in the job: either through training or through the way work is organized. Some findings from the working conditions survey on this regard could be revealing. Only 27 % of the EU workforce has received employer-provided training in the last year, according to the responses to the EWCS. This means that the proportion has reduced from 2000 to 2005.

Training indicators: In the last 12 months, have you undergone...?	1995	2000	2005	(2005)	
	EU15	EU15	EU25	(EU15)	(NMS)
Training paid for or provided by your employer, or by yourself if you are self-employed?	30.0%	30.6%	27.1%	27.3%	25.6%
<i>Average number of days per worker</i>	13.5	14.3	11.2	11.4	10.6
Training paid for by yourself	<i>n.a.</i>	<i>n.a.</i>	6.0%	6.0%	6.5%
<i>Average number of days per worker</i>	<i>n.a.</i>	<i>n.a.</i>	25.2	25.9	22.6
On-the-job training (co-workers, supervisors, etc.)	<i>n.a.</i>	<i>n.a.</i>	27.1%	26.8%	29.0%
Other forms of on-site training	<i>n.a.</i>	<i>n.a.</i>	17.5%	17.0%	20.5%

Source: 4th European Working Conditions Survey (EU27)

32. There is however a strong link between the initial educational level and the training received by the employer, whereby workers with the highest educational level receive most training. The highest educated are also the ones who choose for more training paid for by themselves. There is also a link between employment status and the level of training received.



Source: 4th European Working Conditions Survey (EU27)

33. There are other ways to develop oneself in the job: either through the contents of the job (cognitive demands for instance) or through the way work is organized.

34. Valeyre and Lorenz did some analysis on the basis of the 3rd EWCS in order to investigate how work organisation could support the development of learning of workers. Functional flexibility has an important impact on learning, problem solving and innovation¹³ at organisation level. Four 'types' of work organisation could be identified: 'learning', 'lean', 'taylorist' and 'traditional' form of work organisation.

35. Within these four types, there are two types which could increase the (internal) flexibility of (the workers within) the company: learning organisations and lean or high performance organisations. In these companies, employees are involved in problem solving and decision making. There are more possibilities to develop themselves in the job.

36. Furthermore, there is a close connection between the way people work and learn in a company and the way the company can innovate. This is, however, more the case for learning organisations than for lean organisations. The high frequency of workers engaged in highly constrained work in a lean production does not allow for as much innovation as a learning organisation.

37. But these indicators are more complicated to construct and need another instrument specifically designed to study this (e.g. include a series of questions in a employee (or eventually employer) survey).

38. However, it would be interesting to cover some dimension on competence development. Skills development could not only help workers to cope better with their tasks in the current job,

¹³ Lorenz E. and A. Valeyre (2004), *Organisational change in Europe : National Models or the Diffusion of a New 'One Best Way'?*, DRUID Working Paper, n°04-04, Aalborg University, Danish Research Unit for Industrial Dynamics, and Arundel A., Lorenz E., Lundvall B and A. Valeyre (2006), [The Organisation of Work and Innovative Performance : a Comparison of the EU-15](#), DRUID Working Paper, n°06-14, Aalborg University, Danish Research Unit for Industrial Dynamics.

but it could be conceived as a form of employment protection¹⁴ in a broad sense.¹⁵ It could therefore be interesting to include an indicator on training in the framework on Quality of Employment. This indicator could be copied from the one used in the structural indicators list from the European Union and refer to how many workers have received training in the last 12 months.

39. To conclude, the list of indicators proposed by the Task force on Quality of Employment gives a good and comprehensive framework, which could be used in an international context for all countries (high, medium and low wage countries). It combines indicators, which give a good global picture on all four dimensions (core rights in work, employment, social protection and social dialogue). It has the advantage of looking at (quality of) work in its entirety (including social protection and rights).

40. This would be a good basis for discussions between member states on quality of employment and could form the basis for action plans to try and increase quality of work for all workers.

41. A suggestion could be to complement this exercise at a later stage, with a global working conditions survey, in which different aspects of working conditions could be examined in more detail. Such a survey could cover a very wide range of aspects related specifically at the conditions of the job (work and status), including also outcome questions. The advantage of a specific and longer questionnaire to workers would be that one could examine the correlations between different aspects of working conditions in more detail.

42. This would complement the exercise which is at the table at the moment, in which a global framework to measure quality of employment would be established.

¹⁴ Employment security (as opposed to job security, linked to the job itself) as a form of commodification and meaning here that one would have more chance of finding another job on the labour market through training and life-long learning, eventually combined with active labour market policies. In a wide sense this could be part of the new form of social protection. This could also be linked with the ideas developed by Amartya Sen, in what he calls 'capabilities' (Sen A. (1992), *Inequality re-examined*, New York, Oxford university press)

¹⁵ Vielle P. and Walthery P. (2004), *Flexibility and social protection*, European Foundation, Office for Official Publications, Luxembourg, as well as Vermeylen G. and Hurley J. (2007), *Varieties of flexicurity, reflections on key elements of flexibility and security*, European Foundation, background paper