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Common Position Paper

of 9 Industry and Employers' Federations

Flexible Work from Employers' Perspectives

Flexible forms of work and flexicurity are interesting topics and frequently discussed these days. Flexible-work loads are perceived mainly as a benefit to employees, who can balance their work and private lives better, whilst for employers this can mean added complications and put them at a disadvantage, especially in the case of maternity and paternity leave, where there is a need to replace the valued employee at relatively short notice and a real possibility that they may not return at all or only part-time. The size of the company also has a major bearing where larger corporations are better able to accommodate the needs of their employees, whilst a small enterprise can be seriously endangered by the loss of a few employees and their expertise and knowledge.

Within the framework of last year's project "Promotion of Flexible Forms of Work through Social Dialogue from Employers' Perspectives" Nine employers' federations – from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia decided to find out how their employers use flexible forms of work and what the associated advantages and disadvantages might be. Furthermore they focused on raising awareness of flexible work forms and the future possibilities of using them.

8500 employers in 9 countries were sent the questionnaire survey with a response rate of 11,4 %. The results of the combined surveys showed that 74 % of companies do use at least one form of flexible work. The most common forms being flexi-time or flexible working hours, part-time and working from home. These same forms were also the most intended to be used in future, with the addition of seasonal work. Almost a third of respondents

reported that they do not intend to use any form of flexible work in their company expressing the opinion, that using these forms would require a different style of human resources management, which is a big disincentive. However, they did not agree that using these forms would limit training opportunities, bring about lower job satisfaction or cause deterioration to the physical or psychological health of their employees. Amongst the greatest advantages of using flexible work forms from their point of view were: higher retention of valuable employees (58%); an increase of employee commitment and motivation (56%); allow better staff planning (54%); extension of operating hours without incurring overtime costs (50%) and the opportunity of wider recruitment options (50%). The employers believe that it would be necessary for the state to show its support by lowering taxes and promoting the increased use of flexible work forms in their companies. Only 48% of companies have enough information about flexible work forms, with 35% of them currently using flexible work forms stating they do not have enough information about the differing forms.

In addition we compared the opinions of those who use and do not use flexible forms of work. The results show there is a need to:

- provide more information to employers regarding the advantages that flexible work forms offer
- support their wider introduction and use through state benefits and incentives
- tackle the prejudices which both employers and employees may have and to focus on the possibilities of a win-win solution.

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How to manage this process

The different Employers' federations studied their individual Legal Frameworks, providing basic information about legislation relating to flexible forms of work in their country. From this it was clear that the different countries involved had made concerted efforts to incorporate current EU legislation to make it possible and easier to incorporate flexible forms of work and employment. In essence this has been to benefit both employers and employees in further improving efficiency in production and incorporating the modern stance of the need for a healthy work-life balance as a contributing factor. The benefits for both employers and employees are very apparent from the perspective of the retention of valuable staff is more likely with their invested expertise and knowledge of the company and business, whilst also being able to benefit from being more involved with the up- bringing of their children and pursuits of other challenges and activities to fulfil a modern happy life. However, it is also clear that each country is at a different stage in the 'change management' process and is experiencing problems whether in the form of improper incorporation into all forms of legislature, which make it easier for employers to consider flexible forms of



employment or the lack of proper dissemination of information to both employers and their employees of what is possible. In addition the challenge to 'age-old' stereotypes are still prevalent from both sides in the form of full-time work is best, easiest and more prosperous to all parties, which could be contributed to the recent political history of the countries involved influencing their work ethics and views of the current and previous generations in the workplace. It must also be stated that the type of industry or sector has had a major influence on which forms of flexible employment can and have been successfully incorporated thus far and in some instances the views of the employers have had a major impact, whether in the resistance to change and the additional work, costs and effort it would mean e.g. in recording work hours and the costs of providing equal benefits to part-time workers.

There is a need for governments to ensure that their entire relevant legislature supports employers in being able to consider appropriate forms of flexible employment and in some instances ensure that there are case studies done where flexible forms have not been previously considered or deemed appropriate. In the questionnaire survey the respondents identified lower taxes and reduction of social security contributions as crucial state benefits that are necessary for motivating employers to use flexible forms of work.

There also needs to be a concerted effort to educate and better disseminate information to employers, perhaps through their representative bodies, in order to get them to see how flexible forms of employment could increase production efficiency and the associated benefits to their staff. Employees also need educating and support from government to be able to consider moving from full to part-time work and a loss in earnings whether in the form of grants and subsidies when having and raising children, pursuing other goals in life or even gradual retirement with a population living ever longer and wanting to continue to work.

Flexicurity is ultimately a win-win solution. The questionnaire survey showed that the employer's fears of a growth in administration costs, an increased lack of control over employee work time and other disadvantages are more exaggerated than in reality.

Wider options of recruitment, the possibility to retain valuable employees and to increase job satisfaction are significant benefits not only to the employer but for their employees too. The drive for increased profits by keeping wage and administration costs down will always be a point of contention between employers and their employees but in a lot of cases a happy medium can and has been found. However, in most instances this has been the responsibility of the parties involved at a local level. It is also clear that some forms of flexible employment such as fixed term contracts work in the favour of employers especially where legislature for the dismissal of workers is complicated, so again a review has to be done in how procedures can be simplified to the benefit of both parties.



Conclusions

Current employers who have not used flexible forms of work do not have sufficient information or awareness of the benefits they could offer. A significant barrier to the use of flexible work forms could be more easily removed with support from the state both in promotion and financial incentives.

Desirable changes:

- state support for the introduction of flexible working-time patterns
- dissemination of information about flexible work forms by employers' federations and trade unions
- sharing of experiences
- reduction of social security contributions and lower taxes for employers and employees utilising flexible forms of work

Two thirds of employers expressed an opinion that the use of flexible work forms are possible in their industry or sector and could lead to increased commitment, motivation and higher rates of job satisfaction amongst other advantages. In reality a company with its own best interests at heart also considers the best interests of its employees, which requires significant investment in corporate social responsibility.

