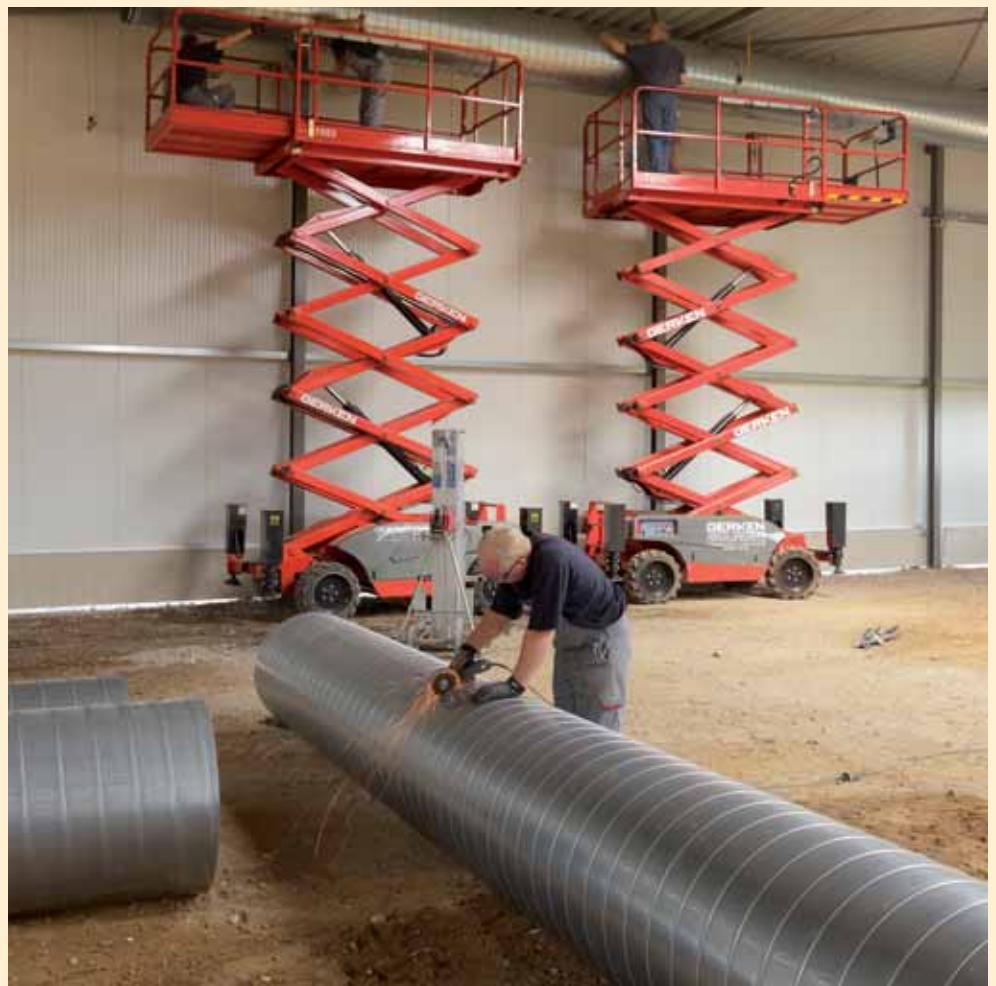




Flexicurity: Actions at Company Level



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European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Flexicurity: Actions at Company Level

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Executive summary

Introduction

Flexicurity is a concept that has been promoted as a cornerstone of the European employment strategy since the mid-1990s. Its aim is to increase employment opportunities for workers, while at the same time increasing flexibility, enabling organisations to adapt their operations to business needs and increasing employment levels. The main element of the European flexicurity strategy is therefore the parallel development of flexibility opportunities on the one hand and security measures for both businesses and workers on the other. Flexicurity is a relatively new concept and therefore lacks a universally accepted definition. Nevertheless, an agreed central feature is that the dimensions of flexibility and security in labour markets do not oppose each other. The past few years have, however, been particularly challenging for European labour markets: the recent financial crisis and recession have had an inevitable negative impact on EU labour markets and unemployment levels. This has called into question the effectiveness of the flexicurity strategy in terms of supporting vulnerable workers.

The main hypothesis in this research is that companies do develop measures for vulnerable groups of workers or measures which are especially beneficial for these workers. This report examines initiatives that could be considered as flexicurity measures, developed by companies to support women, young workers and older workers. The purpose is to show that even if the measures are introduced for business reasons and are not the result of a deliberate company flexicurity strategy, many may be considered as flexicurity measures as they contribute to improving both flexibility and security of vulnerable workers. On the basis of 16 company case studies in six EU Member States – the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia and the United Kingdom – the study examines the motives of companies for developing these actions and the lessons learned.

Key findings

Although there is a wide difference in the national contexts in which the case study companies in this research operate, there are a number of common findings. There needs to be a solid business reason for the measure – if not, it is unlikely to get off the ground. Most of the time, the main reason is to diversify the workforce. In the case of younger workers, the key drivers are a need to balance the age profile and a desire for home-grown talent, thus avoiding costlier recruitment exercises on the open market. In the case of older workers, the organisation relies on the expertise of its workforce and therefore needs to ensure that they can carry on working. In the case of women, the main driver is a strong willingness to attract and retain female talent in a tight labour market – the employer will therefore put into place the measures that the female workforce require in order to become an employer of choice. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the role of the environment as an enabling or hampering factor for the development of company measures is very important, as company-level measures all operate within national contexts in the areas of labour market policy, legislative framework, lifelong learning policy and collective bargaining framework and traditions.

Another important influencing factor is the company environment itself. The multinational companies in this study had measures in place that were rooted in their corporate policy in areas such as diversity and gender equality and which would then be translated into local-level policies. At the other end of the spectrum, SMEs face specific problems when trying to implement flexicurity measures due to having fewer financial resources for workforce management and difficulties in attracting suitable staff.

Social dialogue at company level can smooth the process of implementing flexicurity measures. Further, within a company, the attitude of individual line managers can also influence implementation. Some case studies reported that this could cause problems, for example in cases where employees were given access to a specific measure depending on the view of the manager. This was particularly pertinent in areas such as home working or flexible working, which required a degree of trust.

Even application of measures can also be an issue: it is important to ensure that a measure does not merely benefit employees who are aware of it and can avail themselves of it easily. This is particularly relevant for training measures, where uneven application can lead to a situation where those most in need of training and development – those with no or low levels of skills – are not receiving it.

The specific challenges faced by young workers centre on a need to develop the skills, qualifications and experience necessary to enter and remain in the labour market. In the case of young workers, therefore, the measures presented in this research are largely focused on employment security and external numerical flexibility.

Older workers face challenges in keeping their skills up to date, countering employer perceptions that they may not be as capable, adaptable and flexible as younger workers, and coping with health and other physical challenges. They also face issues in combining work and private life if they have caring responsibilities, either for older family members or grandchildren. The measures presented in this research are largely based on job security and functional flexibility, which is in line with the challenges faced by older workers and the perceptions of employers.

For women, the main issue is trying to ensure that family responsibilities do not undermine labour market chances, and the measures presented in this study are therefore based on improving combination security and internal (and external) numerical flexibility, which mirrors the challenges faced by women and the employer response.

Policy pointers

Vulnerable worker groups can benefit from various measures designed or implemented at company level and policies developed at national, regional and local level.

In terms of helping young workers specifically, national governments, social partners and employers should redouble their efforts to try to offer young workers a way into the labour market. The flexicurity approach provides benefits to both the young workers and the employer, largely in terms of gaining a labour market foothold in the case of young workers, and being able to train the future workforce and increasing external flexibility, in the case of employers.

With regard to older workers, governments, social partners and employers need to work together to encourage companies to put into place appropriate measures, offer targeted training and skills development, improve working conditions and to try to combat negative views associated with this group of workers.

In the case of women, support for flexible working including working time flexibility and part-time working, should be developed and enhanced, particularly in terms of a strong enabling legislative framework. In order to support culture change in terms of gender roles, flexible working and work-life balance options should be encouraged for men as well as women.

Moreover, at company level some aspects have to be kept in mind. For example, when putting a measure into place, it is wise for employers to consult with trade union or employee representatives. This is partly for practical reasons – employee representatives are best placed to know the views of employees about the measures that would help them, and what will suit employees. Further, if an employer consults the workforce, they are more likely to obtain buy-in from their employees – there is little point in an employer trying to put a measure into place in the face of resistance.

Introduction

This report is the final part of the study aimed at examining measures that could be considered as ‘flexicurity measures’, developed by companies specifically for vulnerable workers, such as women, young workers and older workers.

The recent financial crisis and ensuing recession, experienced by most EU Member States, have had an inevitable impact on labour markets and unemployment levels. Flexicurity has been promoted as part of the European employment strategy since the mid-1990s, to increase employment opportunities and, more specifically, to support workers who find it difficult to enter or to stay in the labour market, such as young, older and female workers. Increasing flexibility has been seen as a way of adapting to businesses’ needs and developing employment. There are two main aspects of the European flexicurity strategy: developing in parallel opportunities for flexibility and increasing security for businesses and workers.

However, the impact of the recent downturn has put into question the effectiveness of the flexicurity strategy in developing such policies, measures and initiatives.

The purpose of the study is to show that, even if not labelled as flexicurity, measures developed by European companies address both the flexibility and security dimensions of labour markets. The study was commissioned in the autumn of 2010 by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Working and Living Conditions (Eurofound). The work outlined in this report was led by the Institute for Employment Studies, in partnership with researchers from the following organisations:

- the Human and Employment Relations Agency, HERA (France)
- the Institute for Applied Economic Research, IAW (Germany)
- the University of Milan, WTW – work, training and welfare (Italy)
- the Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs, RILSA (Czech Republic)
- the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia).

The report is set out in chapters, as follows:

- Chapter 1 introduces the concept of flexicurity and sets out the methodology used in this study.
- Chapter 2 examines the flexicurity aspects of the company measures in place that are designed to help young workers.
- Chapter 3 examines the flexicurity aspects of the company measures in place that are designed to help older workers.
- Chapter 4 examines the flexicurity aspects of the company measures in place that are designed to help women.
- Chapter 5 provides a summary for each of the three groups of workers studied in this research, plus an intergroup comparison of the relevant flexicurity issues and challenges.
- Chapter 6 examines the impact of the crisis on the company-level measures presented in this study.
- Chapter 7 offers some overall conclusions, including where relevant those that relate specifically to flexicurity in terms of young workers, older workers and women.

Background to company-level flexicurity

The main hypothesis in this research is that companies are developing measures which are especially beneficial for vulnerable groups of workers. These measures may help to combat some difficulties that vulnerable workers face in their attempts to enter or stay in the labour market. Importantly, even if such measures are developed by companies for business reasons and are not the result of a deliberate flexicurity strategy at the company level, many of these measures may be considered as flexicurity measures when they contribute to improve both the flexibility and security dimensions of the labour market.

Definition of flexicurity

Flexicurity is a relatively new concept in the academic and policymaking arena, and lacks a universally accepted definition since the idea it puts forward implies a redefinition of the way flexibility and security in labour markets have been working so far. Typically, economic studies have focused on the benefits of flexibility for labour markets, companies and employees, while social security and employment security were normally considered as negative for economic growth and competitiveness. However, sociologists and political scientists have focused on the positive effects of employment protection, social protection policies and welfare distribution, without looking at their effects on labour market flexibility and competitiveness.

The flexicurity concept is based on the idea that flexibility and security in labour markets do not oppose each other. As Bredgaard et al. (2005) state, the flexicurity concept implies a new understanding of the relationship between flexibility and security in labour markets:

The fundamental idea that the flexicurity concept rests on, is that flexibility and security are not contradictory, but mutually supportive ... However, the idea behind the flexicurity approach is that flexibility is not the monopoly of the employers, just as security is not the monopoly of the employees. In modern labour markets, many employers are beginning to realise that they might have an interest in stable employment relations and in retaining employees who are loyal and well-qualified. On their part, many employees have realised that to be able to adjust their work life to more individual preferences they too have an interest in more flexible ways of organising work, e.g. to balance work and family life (Wilthagen and Tros 2004). So, the foundation is there for a new interaction between flexibility and security.

Several overlapping definitions of flexicurity may be found in the literature. The concept was first used in the Netherlands, to refer to reforms in its labour market and social protection system in the 1990s. With the so-called 1999 Flexibility and Security Act, the Dutch government tried to correct the imbalance between an inflexible labour market for core workers (insiders) and an insecure labour market for the more vulnerable groups of workers (outsiders). The *flexicurity package* reformed the dismissal requirements for permanent workers and eased the requirements on temporary agencies, while the social protection benefits and rights for workers under finite contracts were strengthened. This example inspired the first definition of flexicurity by Ton Wilthagen (1998) as 'a policy strategy that attempts, *synchronously and deliberately*, to enhance the flexibility of labour markets, work organisations and labour relations, on the one hand, and employment and income security, notably for weaker groups in and outside the labour market, on the other.'

In Denmark, flexicurity would be better understood as a concrete set of labour market institutions. These are the product of social agreements in different areas and a historical process that started

decades ago, long before the flexicurity concept existed. The Danish situation led to a new definition of flexicurity in which it referred to a certain state or condition of the labour market:

Flexicurity is (1) a degree of job, employment, income and ‘combination’ security that facilitates the labour market careers and biographies of workers with a relatively weak position and allows for enduring and high quality labour market participation and social inclusion, while at the same time providing (2) a degree of numerical (both external and internal), functional and wage flexibility that allows for labour markets’(and individual companies’) timely and adequate adjustment to changing conditions in order to enhance competitiveness and productivity

(Wilthagen and Tros 2004, p.170)

The definition of different types of flexibility and security led to the development of the so-called Wilthagen matrix (see Table 1). There are different forms of labour market flexibility and security. Four different forms of each aspect can be identified.

Numerical flexibility (numerical external) refers to the scope of the employer for adjusting the number of employees at the individual workplace through hiring and firing.

Working time flexibility (numerical internal) is achieved through adjusting the number of working hours (e.g. working overtime or part-time) and their placing (working shifts or weekends) to allow the employer to adjust production and enable the employee to combine work and private life.

Functional flexibility is about the scope for transferring employees between job functions and work areas (horizontally or vertically) and is closely related to organisational flexibility, which is concerned with changes in the organisation of operations and management.

Wage flexibility enables the wage bill to be altered to adapt to specific circumstances (rate at which nominal and real wages respond to changes in supply and demand for labour, for instance).

There are four forms of security:

- Job security is the security of being able to stay in the same job; this can be expressed via employment protection and tenure with the same employer.
- Employment security is that of staying employed, though not necessarily in the same job; here the general employment situation, active labour market, training and education policies play a key role.
- Income security relates to having secured income in case of unemployment, sickness or accidents, and is expressed through the public transfer income systems, such as unemployment and cash benefit systems.
- Combination security refers to the opportunities available for combining work and private life, such as retirement schemes, maternity leave, voluntary-sector unpaid work, etc.

These different forms thus offer 16 potential combinations of flexibility and security.

Table 1: Combinations of flexibility and security

	Job security	Employment security	Income security	Combination security
Numerical flexibility	Types of employment contracts; Employment protection legislation; Early retirements	Employment services/ ALMP; Training/lifelong learning	Unemployment compensation; Other social benefits; Minimum wages	Protection against dismissal during various leave schemes
Working time flexibility	Shortened work weeks/ part-time arrangements	Employment protection legislation; Training/lifelong learning	Part-time supplementary benefit; Study grants; Sickness benefit	Different kind of leave schemes; Part-time pension
Functional flexibility	Job enrichment; Training; Labour leasing; Subcontracting; Outsourcing	Training/lifelong learning; Job rotation; Teamwork; Multiskilling	Performance-related pay systems	Voluntary working time arrangements
Wage flexibility	Local adjustments in labour costs; Scaling/ Reductions in social security payments	Changes in social security payments; Employment subsidies; In-work benefits	Collective wage agreements; Adjusted benefit for shortened work week	Voluntary working time arrangements

Source: Wilthagen 1998; Wilthagen and Tros 2004. Model filled with examples by an EMCO report from the working group on flexicurity, May 2006.

Table 1 shows examples of different policies and measures that can be developed to address both flexibility and security in labour markets in a simultaneous way. For example, training and lifelong learning improves employment security and working-time flexibility and functional flexibility. Similarly, voluntary working time arrangements (such as flexible working or part-time working) increase combination security but also increase functional flexibility and wage flexibility.

The flexicurity strategy, aimed at improving both flexibility and security in labour markets, involves different actors and different levels, including the government, the social partners and companies, at national, sectoral, regional, territorial, local and workplace level. All of them may have a role to play in the design and implementation of measures that contribute to the success of the flexicurity strategy. Of course, there is no unique strategy. Each country may have its own flexicurity approach, and the set of initiatives at different levels, and the actors involved, will differ widely.

From the start, there have been questions about the suitability of the concept in the European context. For example, it has been argued that, because it was first implemented in two countries in specific contexts (Denmark and the Netherlands), it cannot simply be transplanted into other countries. Indeed, when the Commission drafted its Communication *Towards Common Principles on Flexicurity: More and better jobs through flexibility and security*, it limited itself to defining the components of successful flexicurity policies in order to provide the basis for a strategy that could be adopted by all EU Member States without altering the concept's underlying principles. The Commission therefore avoided setting the features of the Danish or Dutch model as the only valid example, and defined four basic and general flexicurity components that can potentially be applied in all countries with the aim of improving the functioning of their labour markets:

- Flexible and secure contractual arrangements and work organisations, both from the perspective of the employer and the employee, through modern labour laws and modern work organisations, which could include issues such as flexible forms of working time (for example, part-time working) flexibility in working time organisation, fixed-term contractual arrangements and flexibility in the workplace, including teleworking and homeworking.

- Effective Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) which help people to cope with rapid change, unemployment, reintegration and, importantly, transitions to new jobs – for example, the element of transition security. This could include skills-training, outplacement, help with job applications and benefit systems that do not deter unemployed people from looking for work.
- Reliable and responsive lifelong learning systems to ensure the continuous adaptability and employability of all workers, and to enable firms to keep up productivity levels. Continuous skills adaptation is a vital response to technological change and labour market innovation. State policies aimed at supporting lifelong learning can help to support companies and individuals by ensuring that training is an integral part of an employee's working life.
- Modern social security systems which provide adequate income support and facilitate labour market mobility. These include provisions to help people combine work with private and family responsibilities, such as childcare. It is crucial for social security systems to provide a safety net for those who lose their jobs, which will also facilitate mobility between jobs. In addition, measures such as flexibility in working time organisation and the provision of affordable and good-quality childcare are vital to helping employees to combine work and family life.

A strong role for industrial relations has been suggested by the European Commission as a fifth component that must work as a general background to the rest.

Flexicurity as an integrated policy approach would imply a ‘unified’ strategy, meaning that all the components should be taken into account simultaneously, not selectively.

At the start of the crisis, questions about the effectiveness of the flexicurity strategy were raised again. In June 2009, the European Council adopted a set of conclusions on the issue of flexicurity in times of crisis, at a sitting of the employment, social policy, health and consumer affairs council. These conclusions contained a set of policy measures based on flexicurity principles, aimed at helping governments, social partners and companies to manage the impact of the crisis.

Role of the social partners

One fundamental aspect of the Flexicurity strategy is the approach combining several actors, particularly the social partners, and levels.

Governments and the social partners have a varying degree of involvement in the elaboration and implementation of flexicurity policies at all levels, largely depending on the national context. Nevertheless, there is a consensus in both the political and academic arenas regarding the importance of involving social partners in the flexicurity strategy. This is clearly the case in Denmark and the Netherlands, where a strong tradition of corporatism exists and social partners are highly involved in policymaking.

A constructive social dialogue is therefore key to the proper design and implementation of flexicurity measures at all levels. The European Commission clearly states that, as one of the flexicurity principles:

Flexicurity requires a climate of trust and dialogue between public authorities and social partners, where all are prepared to take responsibility for change, and produce balanced policy packages.

Previous Eurofound research (Pedersini, 2009) shows that there is still room for manoeuvre when considering the involvement of the social partners in flexicurity policies.

In almost three-quarters of European countries, social partners have a high impact on the definition and management of flexicurity measures (the so-called political dimension of industrial relations). The relevance of this impact typically depends on the features of the different industrial relations systems, which determines whether social partners are recognised as important actors in the decision-making process on labour and social policies, or are represented in the management bodies of the social security systems.

At company level, social dialogue also has an important role to play. The contribution of joint regulation and collective bargaining (the so-called regulatory dimension of industrial relations, mainly related to the workplace level) in the introduction and implementation of flexicurity is significant in half of the European countries, mainly in the EU15. This points to the important role of collective bargaining in adopting measures that simultaneously introduce elements of flexibility and security.

Methodology of the project

The flexicurity strategy requires the involvement of different actors at different levels to design policies and measures. The policy framework plays an essential role in improving labour market performance by delineating the regulatory and policy framework and offering incentives to the different actors involved in their implementation. This is why the flexicurity concept has largely been dealt with at national policymaking level.

Nevertheless, the company level is key to the success of any flexicurity strategy because that is where the employment relationship is found and where many of the policies are implemented. Moreover, although the policy framework and the actions of governments and social partners may provide very important incentives, companies may develop their own measures too. These, whether an implementation of a policy, or a company measure, may not be conceived as flexicurity when implemented or adopted by the company, but they may contribute to improving both dimensions of the labour market, and therefore they can be considered as flexicurity measures.

This is the approach followed in this study. Hence, a set of operational criteria to define company-level flexicurity measures must be developed (van Eldik, 2009; Bredgaard and Tros, 2008). In this project, we will consider a measure as a flexicurity measure if it contributes to the improvement of at least one flexibility dimension and one security dimension (see Table 1). For instance, training measures for older workers could be considered as flexicurity measures when they enhance workers' functional flexibility, allowing the employer to deploy them in different ways or in different posts and improve job and employment security (enhancing the employees' chances of retaining their jobs and finding work elsewhere in the labour market due to their new skills). There is no assumption here that employers systematically demand flexibility or that employees only want security. Furthermore, the overall design and purpose of the measure is not taken into account here, as only very few measures are being purposely designed to increase both aspects – security and flexibility simultaneously. The focus is more on the outcomes, either sought for or unexpected.

We will also examine the links between company-level measures and the national framework in which they operate, to determine the extent to which the measures are facilitated by national policy or by other actors.

Focus on vulnerable groups of workers

Vulnerable groups of workers are at the very heart of the flexicurity concept, as shown by the early definition of flexicurity by Wilthagen:

Flexicurity is a policy strategy that attempts, synchronically and deliberately, to enhance the flexibility of labour markets, work organisations and labour relations, on the one hand, and employment and income security, notably for weaker groups in and outside the labour market, on the other

(Ton Wilthagen, 1998).

European labour markets are typically characterised by significantly lower employment rates for certain groups of workers. Young, older and female workers normally suffer lower levels of labour market attachment since they face specific challenges in accessing, remaining and developing in the labour market. The flexicurity strategy devised by the European Commission was aimed at increasing labour market transitions as a way to create more opportunities for all groups of workers. When this is not the case, labour market segmentation arises, which the European Commission warned against in its 2007 Communication of Flexicurity:

Flexicurity should reduce the divide between insiders and outsiders on the labour market. Current insiders need support to be prepared for and protected during job to job transitions. Current outsiders (including those out of work, where women, the young and migrants are overrepresented) need easy entry points to work and stepping-stones to enable progress into stable contractual arrangements...Flexicurity should support gender equality by promoting equal access to quality employment for women and men, and by offering possibilities to reconcile work and family life as well as providing equal opportunities to migrants, young, disabled and older workers.

This is why this report focuses on vulnerable groups of workers, by presenting examples of flexicurity measures put forward by companies to improve the labour market attachment of young, older and female workers.

Selection of countries and company case studies

EU Member States differ significantly in several important ways, including:

- policy and regulatory frameworks;
- national industrial relations systems;
- social dialogue traditions;
- culture or the composition of the population and of the workforce.

This study tried to reflect such a variety of backgrounds by focusing on six different EU Member States, where a total of 16 company case studies were carried out. The countries were grouped as follows:

- France and the UK (young workers): The French government has introduced several measures designed to help young people enter the labour market, in an attempt to fight its relatively high

level of youth unemployment. The UK labour market policy has also focused on integrating young people into the labour market or training. Denmark will be used as a benchmark country and its policy framework will be described, since it is a country with a low unemployment rate for young people.

- Germany and Slovenia (older workers): In Germany there has been a range of policies in recent decades aimed at maintaining the employability of older workers, while Slovenia is an example of a new Member State where there is less awareness about the issue of active ageing. The Netherlands will be used as a benchmark country, since it has put forward many policies focused on the abolition of financial disincentives for older workers, with the result that their labour market participation has increased significantly.
- Italy and the Czech Republic (women): Italy is characterised by low levels of female participation in the labour market, while in the Czech Republic employment outcomes are rather similar for men and women.

National policies and incentives such as labour market policies, employment protection legislation, regulation of contractual arrangements, training support policies or state allowances shape the behaviour of companies and other actors, offering them certain options and incentives. This is the reason why we describe the national backgrounds of the companies featured in this study, and look into the links between policy and company measures. (For a detailed description of the national labour market policy framework in each of these six countries, please see the Annex).

The case studies were carried out on the basis of:

- Up to two interviews with a human resources professional within the organisation.
- Up to two interviews with employee representatives or trade union officials within the company.
- A focus group of between six and eight employees.

Table 2: List of case studies included in the project

Country		Case study details	
Older workers			
Germany	Rasselstein (iron and steel processing company)	Randstad (temporary work agency)	Universitätsklinikum Mannheim (medical institution and research centre)
Slovenia	Telekom Slovenije (telecommunications company)	Ljubljana Pharmacy (Lekarna Ljubljana) (chain of pharmacies)	
Young workers			
France	PSA Peugeot-Citroën (motor manufacturer)	Ideal Productions (website design SME)	110 Bourgogne (agricultural cooperative)
UK	Kent County Council (local government organisation)	Mears Group (housing maintenance firm)	Rolls-Royce (engineering company)
Women			
Italy	Vodafone Italia (telecommunications company)	Lubiam (clothing and textiles company)	
Czech Republic	Nestlé (food manufacturer)	Thomayer's University Hospital (university hospital and polyclinic)	IBM (IT company)

Flexicurity measures for young workers

Young workers face specific problems in connection with the labour market. They can find it difficult to get a job, particularly if they have few skills. Moreover, young workers as such constitute a group at risk, whatever skill level they have. Indeed, the main barrier to them in getting a job is lack of work experience, as demonstrated by the difficulties encountered by qualified young workers.

This group has been particularly hard hit by the crisis. Youth unemployment has increased significantly on average across the EU. In May 2011, the youth unemployment rate (those aged below 25) was 20.0% in the eurozone area and 20.4% in the EU27. In some EU Member States, youth unemployment has reached levels that could be regarded as extremely challenging.

Getting that first job is therefore crucial and the case studies in this research show not only how this is being achieved, but also how young people can be provided with the skills and experience they need to enable them to move on.

Main measures

In this section we provide an overview of the measures implemented by the UK and France for young workers.

The Kent County Council ‘success’ project: Developing apprenticeship

In 2006, Kent County Council, a local authority employing around 44,500 people, set targets to increase the number of apprenticeships available within its community by 1,000 between 2006 and 2010. It set new targets for employing 350 further apprentices within the council over the next five years. Its programme, known as ‘Kent Success’, is aimed at 16- to 19-year-olds.

There are a number of strands to the ‘Kent Success’ project. The first is the development of supernumerary apprenticeships within the Council. These are 18-month training contracts during which training can be completed and qualifications gained alongside a significant period of work. These posts provide additional capacity within the council and do not displace existing workers or permanent employment roles. Young workers receive a wage of £105 per week. There is also an opportunity for entry-level apprenticeships. If entry level jobs (grades 2–4) become available, and no existing members of staff need redeployment, the role, which is based on a permanent contract, will be offered as an apprenticeship. During the period the young person is training, they will receive the apprenticeship wage of £105 per week. Once they are qualified, they will receive pay on the relevant scale of the role.

The second strand is offering support and encouragement to local employers to take on apprentices. This entails brokerage and business support for other employers in the county aiming to build links between young people’s work aspirations and employers’ needs. In some instances, where employers have concern over their ability to employ a young worker in the longer-term, Kent County Council will act as an employment agency. Here, when the contract ends, apprentices enter a preferential recruitment pool to ensure they receive details of suitable jobs. Employers are also informed about their availability.

The third strand is the ‘Vulnerable Learners apprenticeship’ project. It has been introduced recently and targets those who have a high chance of entering the Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) category. The council has invested £0.5m from its capital reserve in the 18-month project through which 80 young people (specifically those leaving local authority care, young parents, young people with disabilities and/or learning disabilities and young offenders) will receive support and

training to become ready for a job and then be given the opportunity of an apprenticeship. Kent County Council will cover the salary costs of their one-year employment contracts.

The ‘Kent Success’ programme builds on the nationally agreed framework for apprenticeships in the UK, which ensures that young people receive more than the formal work-based training element. The programme also includes:

- a focus on information, advice and guidance and assessment within recruitment practices;
- generic skills and attributes development (such as confidence building, assertiveness);
- creating social support structures and networking opportunities for young workers;
- a focus on searching for jobs when apprenticeships are nearing completion (such as support with CV writing, completing application forms and interview techniques).

The main impetus for the development of ‘Kent Success’ was a survey which revealed a large proportion of workers were aged over 45. This demonstrated that the council needed to focus on encouraging more young people to join its workforce, while ensuring suitability of working arrangements. It also helps the council to engage with all members of its local community. As with older employees, young workers may benefit from flexible working arrangements. The supernumerary apprenticeships, particularly, offer young people the opportunity to gain qualifications and work experience to underpin future transitions.

Mears Construction: A holistic approach to apprenticeship

Mears Construction, a private sector housing maintenance firm employing around 12,000 people nationally, offers apprenticeship schemes within the UK government’s apprenticeship framework. This framework is funded jointly by Mears, the Construction Industry Trade Board (CITB) and Mears client companies. Mears receives some funding from the CITB, which itself is funded by levies on construction companies. The subsidy works in terms of rebates from the levy, which vary depending on how many apprenticeships are offered. Mears also works in partnership with some of its clients, which co-fund the apprenticeships.

Mears offers opportunities to young people from relatively deprived and difficult backgrounds, and tries to ensure that their apprenticeship experience is as rounded as possible, by equipping them with technical, practical and general workplace and life skills. They can tailor the offer to individuals and therefore can also offer driving lessons and refresher classes in maths and literacy. This sits within Mears’ general CSR framework. The scheme is driven from the top, with the buy-in of senior HR personnel. Mears currently has 260 apprentices nationally, with the schemes devised by the Mears’ regional branches, in partnership with their local clients. However, Mears is centralising the schemes, offering all new apprentices a more structured and uniform introduction to the company, before they begin their informal apprenticeship.

There is no upper age limit on the apprentices at Mears, although the average age is 18–24. After initial selection, apprentices usually embark upon a two-year course, either based on a multi-trade apprenticeship or a specific trade such as carpenter, gas fitter or electrician. The schemes are made up of a mixture of work and training. In general, apprentices spend three or four days working at Mears and one or two days a week at college to learn the theoretical side of their trade.

Apprentices have mentors throughout their contract, and their training leads to a formal and recognised qualification. They are paid according to experience. The pay is set by the government, the construction industry, the CITB, and relevant unions in the Construction Industry Joint Council, and is a proportion of the minimum wage. There is also a Joint Industry Board that sets pay for apprentice electricians. Pay rises in increments, according to the modules they complete and their age, and starts at around £2.50 an hour for an entry-level apprentice.

After the apprenticeship, the majority of trainees are offered a job with Mears, but if none is available they are given extra help and support in finding a job elsewhere, or in how to become self-employed.

This case study shows how an organisation changes the lives of young people by offering something that goes beyond minimum statutory requirements. The advantage for the company is that, apart from giving something back to the community, it can train its own employees, which it says it will always do in preference to hiring staff externally.

Rolls-Royce: Individual apprenticeship programme

Multinational engineering firm Rolls-Royce employs over 38,900 people across 50 countries and operates in five main areas – civil aerospace, defence aerospace, marine, nuclear and energy.

Its apprenticeship programme is based on the UK government's national apprenticeship framework. Training takes place through both work-based and theoretical learning at its factories and in local Further Education colleges. Rolls-Royce also provides basic skills training to those enrolled on advanced/modern apprenticeships, and the opportunity for all apprentices to participate in community projects.

Selection processes for the apprenticeships are rigorous; the firm receives roughly 3,000 applications each year, and recruits about 150 new apprentices per year across nine sites in the UK. They are all new to the firm, and are mostly young, but not necessarily all recent school leavers. The courses last three to three and a half years.

Two levels of apprenticeship are offered: advanced/modern apprenticeships at NVQ Level 3 and higher apprenticeships at Level 4. Level 3 Apprentices can choose between technical and practical engineering, the former being more theoretical and computer oriented while the latter involves more hands-on work. Those with Level 3 apprenticeships have the option to undertake a foundation degree after their initial apprenticeship.

Those selected begin with a pre-induction course. This tells the apprentices about the course and allows the firm to assess the apprentices' skills, needs and to which business area they are most suited. An individual training plan is drawn up for each apprentice, who then receives a corporate induction and attends an Outward Bound team-building course. All Advanced Apprentices are placed on initial basic skills courses run by private training providers. Following this, apprentices formally begin their apprenticeship; they are attached to a specific business area and undertake a variety of placements. Decisions on where apprentices should be placed are made based on their attributes and the company's projections of its needs.

Each apprentice has an Apprentice Development Leader who is their first point of contact if they want to discuss any issues or needs relating to their training programme. When on placements apprentices

should have access to mentors and departmental trainers; in addition they are developing a ‘buddy’ programme on some sites which they hope to introduce more widely.

PSA Peugeot-Citroën: Offering work experience through specific contracts

Within the context of the French government’s ‘Plan for the employment of young people’ in 2009, the private sector motor manufacturer Peugeot-Citroën PSA group made a commitment to recruit 7,100 young people on a range of training and work experience contracts.

PSA Peugeot-Citroën, who employ just over 6,000 people at their Poissy site in the western suburbs of Paris, aimed to recruit 300 young people in total, on one-year ‘professionalisation contracts’, apprenticeship contracts and as interns. It asked the French employment office (Pôle Emploi) to pre-select potential recruits aged 18–25. Out of a possible 3,000, the employment office selected 600 and PSA recruited 336 of these on professionalisation contracts. They were recruited in waves of 15 a week, between September 2009 and June 2010. The contracts involved theoretical and on-the-job training, leading to a nationally recognised vocational qualification. The company also assigned one mentor to every three trainees.

Peugeot-Citroën PSA decided to act because:

- it needed to recruit in order to meet increased production demand;
- it wanted to address the issue of its ageing workforce, caused by downsizing and recruitment freezes;
- the government’s aid to the group during the economic crisis spurred them to give something back;
- it wanted to help maintain social cohesion and develop employment opportunities.

Ideal Productions: Training future staff members

Ideal Productions, a small French private sector website design company employing 17 people, began to develop a recruitment programme for young people after it was approached by a local university asking whether it would participate in the training of young people. The company trains young people in ways that benefit both the trainees and the firm. Training posts are offered on a half-time basis for the first year, paid at the level of the national minimum wage, followed by a second year on a full-time basis. Around half of the training costs are subsidised.

The main impetus for getting involved was not state financing, but the opportunity of reducing the workload of the existing staff, expanding the workforce and growing the business. It also helps the company get staff with the right skills in a difficult market. Moreover, the company feels that it is located in an area that is not deemed to be particularly desirable (workers in this field of work are normally drawn to large cities) and so it is a good way of attracting staff. It is also a cheaper way of recruitment than trying to find staff on the open market.

The company has since been recruiting a regular flow of young people on work experience and training contracts, which are fixed-term and half-time. If the young people fit well into the company at the end of the contract, they are offered employment, which can be full-time. The company has recruited around 10 people in this way over the past five years.

110 Bourgogne: Training for better matching

The agricultural cooperative 110 Bourgogne, which has 268 employees and 60 grain silos in the Yonne and Seine-et-Marne districts of France, wanted to:

- attract young people in order to pre-empt the effects of the ageing workforce;
- meet new demands;
- innovate in order to meet the evolving needs of clients and the continuing progress of new technology;
- recruit into technical posts that are generally not considered to be attractive.

The organisation is expecting that around 30% of its workforce will retire by 2012. It sees the training of young workers as a means of growing its own workforce rather than recruiting on the open market, which is more costly and not as straightforward. It also feels that, by the time the training contract expires, both it and the trainee will know if they are compatible and, if jobs exist, they can go on to work for the company on a formal basis. The organisation wants to keep costs down, because high spending would reduce the level of income available to farmers.

It recruits between 15 and 20 young people every year on work-based training contracts (*contrats en alternance*), which run for 12 or 24 months. These comprise blocks of work with formal training at a local agricultural college.

Flexicurity dimensions

This section attempts to show why the company-level measures described above may be considered as flexicurity measures, when they contribute to both the security and flexibility dimensions of flexicurity.

Table 3: Flexicurity analysis of the measures in the UK

	Job security	Employment security	Income security	Combination security
Numerical flexibility (external)	Education and training measures Post-training employment offers	Education and training measures	Right to claim unemployment benefits	
Numerical flexibility (internal)				Flexible working time and work organisation
Functional flexibility	Education and training measures Coaching and mentoring	Coaching and mentoring		
Wage flexibility				

Table 4: Flexicurity analysis of the measures in France

	Job security	Employment security	Income security	Combination security
Numerical flexibility (external)	Post-training employment offers Education and training measures	Education and training measures		
Numerical flexibility (internal)				Flexible working time and work organisation
Functional flexibility	Education and training measures Coaching and mentoring Trainees to alleviate staff workload	Coaching and mentoring		
Wage flexibility				

The main measures implemented by the companies studied here focus on training, to compensate for the absence of work experience and knowledge of work – either the technical aspects, company culture or work in general. Training, in its various forms, is the prime way of helping young people get on to the labour market and to develop through work. Other measures considered here are those which complement training.

Coaching and mentoring

Coaching and mentoring of young people working on training and apprenticeship contracts was common in all the case studies.

Coaching adds to training through the unique relationship that develops between mentors and mentees and the significant role of teaching by example. Sharing practical knowledge and allowing one-to-one discussions are key elements of monitoring and support. By developing trust between mentors and trainees, coaching increases young workers' confidence in their capacities and adds to their employability. Therefore, coaching and mentoring contribute to the 'security' element of training.

From an organisational point of view, coaching and mentoring provides 'functional flexibility' increasing the ability of trainees to work in a range of areas.

At Ideal Productions, mentoring has contributed to job security by helping the trainees learn company-related skills. Mentors were also available to trainees at Peugeot, although the ratio of one mentor to three trainees was thought to be too low and therefore the efficiency of the measure could be questioned.

The strong mentoring element of some training measures was generally appreciated by mentor and trainee and contributed to both 'job security' (company-specific skills) and 'employment security' (wider skills). This was definitely the case at Mears, where both mentors and trainees were serious about this aspect and knew how important it was. Overall, the mentoring system at Mears tends to work very well, with a ratio of 10 qualified employees to one apprentice on average.

Mentors at Mears are volunteers rather than being nominated, and there is generally no problem in finding volunteers, as employees usually want to give something back. They are not necessarily the older employees, and Mears has found that young employees, with their recent experience of apprenticeship, tend also to make good mentors.

Working time and work organisation flexibility

Many of the training measures presented here use working time flexibility, and contribute to ‘combination security’, allowing employees to combine work with training and, as far as needed, other elements of their private life. It also gives the company ‘internal numerical flexibility’ enabling it to be flexible in the organisation of working time.

The training and apprenticeship measures offered by Kent County Council have a large flexibility dimension in terms of the flexibility of working time and working practices. Flexible working practices have been introduced right across the Kent County Council workforce and are appreciated by young workers. While local arrangements vary, flexible working practices include: flexitime, nine-day fortnight, annualised hours, term-time working only and part-time work.

At Mears Group, although working time for apprentices is mostly standardised, there are some elements of flexibility. For example, the company is open to working time flexibility, such as part-time working. Moreover, apprentices can combine their work and family commitments. It is rare that they will take this up, although one apprentice spoke of being able to take paternity leave. Mears also allows apprentices time off during working time to study for tests. There is also flexibility around the time spent as an apprentice at Mears Group – the standard apprenticeship course is two years, but there are examples of people doing it in one year, if they so wish and are capable of doing so.

The measures both at PSA Peugeot-Citroën and at Ideal Productions also contained flexibility in terms of the length of the initial contract, which was usually for a fixed term, although with the possibility of renewal or the conclusion of an open-ended contract. This is often to give the employer flexibility to assess whether an employee would fit in well with the organisation, and it also gives trainees a chance to assess whether they would like stay on a more permanent basis. This was also the case at Mears, where an initial two- or four-week trial period is offered to potential apprentices, with no loss of unemployment benefit, to see whether they like the scheme.

‘Functional flexibility’ can also be enhanced through apprenticeships. Mears Group in particular developed a multi-trade apprenticeships scheme. Some branches of the company also sometimes swap apprentices with other organisations, in order to give them experience beyond Mears’ core business.

Furthermore, the flexibility introduced via the apprenticeship programme has been extended to the overall workforce in some organisations. Kent County Council reckons that flexibility is important to young people because it can offer them the possibility of:

- varying their starting time;
- working from home;
- compressed working hours;
- career breaks.

However they are a diverse group and other responsibilities, such as being a parent, may be part of the appeal of flexibility. This level of flexibility is a key recruitment and retention measure for the council.

Post-training employment offers

Once training had been completed there were job offers in all the case studied here. This outcome epitomises the ‘security’ element for employees. Furthermore employment offers to former apprentices

allow the employer to vary the size of the workforce in a less costly way, avoiding more expensive recruiting procedures.

At 110 Bourgogne, the work-based training contracts give employees both 'job security', if they are subsequently hired by the company, and wider employment security through the skills they have gained. Trainees feel that the work experience and qualifications that they will gain through the contracts will stand them in good stead in the labour market.

Mears Group offers all of its apprentices a job, if there is one, at the end of the apprenticeship. However, if the apprentices do not want to work at Mears they are offered training in how to become self-employed and are guaranteed a certain level of work as a subcontractor, thus widening their employment security.

At Kent County Council, when the apprenticeship has been completed and the contract ends, apprentices enter a preferential recruitment pool to ensure they receive details of suitable jobs and that employers are aware of skilled young workers that could fill the position.

Similarly, Rolls-Royce offers apprentices post-training employment, if available, and take-up is extremely high, as the company is so prestigious. The recession has made it harder for the company to make permanent posts available, so it has added extra time to the apprenticeship to give trainees more time to find a post within the company.

Triggers for the measures

Companies have several motives for implementing these measures.

Training measures: Tool for flexibility and security

For the employer, the existence of training-based employment contracts increases 'external numerical flexibility', as it increases the pool of potentially suitable employees from which they can recruit, and makes it easier to vary the size of their workforce. It also provides some 'functional flexibility' if trainees are engaged in multi-skill training.

Training also offers security for employers in that it enables them to equip future workers with the specific skills that they need. This was the case at Ideal Productions, where the company used a work and training scheme to train potential employees in the specialised graphic design, website design and building skills that the company needed. This is particularly important in the case of SMEs, which are more vulnerable than larger companies to the negative consequences of an employee who does not fit well with the workforce.

From the employees' perspective, training provides some job security, and even wider 'employment security', particularly if it culminates in a recognised and transferable qualification. At Peugeot, for example, the training contract offered by the company helped young people to gain experience of the world of work, in addition to gaining a recognised qualification. One trainee said:

The training is the best bit. I learned a lot of things, particularly about the metal-working industry, the operation of the plant, safety and the environment. The fact that I was able to take a recognised qualification is very positive. Even those who were not hired afterwards will have a better chance of finding work. I feel that what they are doing is good for youth employment, and I appreciated being paid more than the minimum wage straight away,

whereas normally you only receive 80% of the minimum wage when you're on a professional training contract. Another really good thing is that you benefit from all the advantages that any other employee on an indefinite contract would have.

Trainee, PSA Peugeot-Citroën

And another, talking about her chances of being employed later on, added:

I'm sure that completing a one-year professional training contract has improved my chances of finding a job elsewhere if I hadn't been hired here. If I had applied to Renault, for example, they would have been more likely to take me on in preference to someone without qualifications.

Trainee, PSA Peugeot-Citroën

This view was echoed by trainees in other case study organisations. At Ideal Productions, the training was workplace-based, with a theoretical element supplied by a local training provider. The training contracts were offered by the company both as a way of helping young people, and enabling the company to 'try out' new and young talent.

If I had to do the same thing again, I would, as it's thanks to the training I've had that I now have the skills necessary to work. Even if I had to leave where I am now, I would find work elsewhere.

Trainee, Ideal Productions

The Mears Group apprenticeship schemes were highly sought-after, and some apprentices feel that this is the best thing that has ever happened to them. Some of them have been previously unemployed, or have just done odd jobs, and it has given them a new start.

The 'Kent Success' programme has had immediate positive effects on young people's skills levels. But the key impact for the young people involved was in increasing their confidence in their own abilities.

Kent County Council makes the point that training strategies need not only to give apprentices work-related skills but also more general life skills, which will increase their general employability in the longer term. The 'Kent Success' training and apprenticeship programmes go beyond the statutory support that employers are obliged to provide. Trainees are offered:

- regular networking meetings, to encourage them to make social links which may help them solve work problems;
- generic skills training;
- job search support towards the end of the employment contract.

Tangible benefits were gained not simply from increased skills and qualifications but also from interactions with colleagues and with different work situations. Young people recognised the value of gaining work skills and qualifications which would underpin their future transitions. The confidence young people developed in their capabilities also made them more confident about their ability to find future work.

Tackling the challenge of an ageing workforce

The desire to rejuvenate the workforce is clearly one of the main triggers for implementing measures to help young workers into employment. Most of the case study organisations in this section felt that the average age of their workforce was too high, partly due to previous downsizing. Encouraging younger workers to come into the company, on a fixed term basis, was a good way of boosting the proportion of younger workers while allowing both parties to assess whether a longer-term collaboration would be possible.

PSA Peugeot-Citroën in France, for example, decided to go for the training contract programme as it wanted to recruit relatively large numbers of young people, within the government's national employment plan for young people, to correct the age imbalance, which had been caused by mass departures and recruitment freezes.

The ageing of the workforce was also a key concern at Kent County Council, where more than 75% of the workforce was aged 30–59. This, coupled with the fact that the number of young people locally classed as NEETs was particularly high, demonstrated that the council's focus needed to turn to encouraging young people into its workforce. At the council, the inclusion of young people's voices, through their employment and training within the workforce, is seen as key and an area that requires on-going support.

The agricultural cooperative 110 Bourgogne was founded around 20 years ago when most of the workforce was aged about 40. It decided to act when it was faced with the retirement of around one-third of its staff. In 2011, 50% of its workers aged under 35 joined the organisation via the work-based training route.

Getting the right mix of skills

Another issue facing many organisations is trying to find the right mix of suitable skills. This is particularly acute in small organisations, where there are limited resources and the fit with the rest of the workforce and with the company as a whole has to be exact in order to work properly.

This was the case with Ideal Productions in France, an SME with 17 workers.

The process used – training young people, taking time to know them and assess how they fit in the organisation – has an added advantage of enabling the organisation to recruit young and relatively low-cost workers, rather than try, with no guarantee of success, to attract more experienced (and therefore more expensive) workers.

110 Bourgogne also found that its offer of work-based training contracts for 12 or 24 months to young people was a good way of allowing young people to come into the organisation and training them in the skills that the cooperative needed. For 110 Bourgogne, recruiting new employees with the right skills on the open market would have been too expensive.

The desire to train and get to know staff so that they will subsequently work well in the organisation was also apparent in Kent County Council, where both managers and trade unions stated that this was the priority for the organisation.

Following a similar path, organisations, by providing work experience and training, can teach potential employees the ways of the company, which was held to be more effective and cost-effective than recruiting through the open jobs market.

This was certainly the case for some of the smaller French companies, which felt that they could not attract young people on the open jobs market, but had more success in finding new staff by offering fixed-term placements, which could then be made permanent if the fit was good. At Rolls-Royce too, managers characterised apprentices as ‘the future of the company’. The ‘growing your own’ philosophy is something that also sits very deeply in the culture at Mears Group, which, as has been said, will always recruit apprentices into its permanent workforce wherever possible.

Some organisations, such as Mears, also have an overt desire to help young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and to make a difference to their lives by offering them a chance to learn a trade or a skill. This approach inspires great loyalty amongst Mears’ staff, resulting in very low staff turnover.

Taking advantage of national policy measures

Most of the measures described in this section sit within national policy frameworks that relate to the labour market, training and the activation of young people.

Under the UK national apprenticeship scheme apprenticeships are open to anyone in the UK who is aged over 16 (there is no upper age limit) and not in full-time education. Apprenticeship contracts are for at least 30 hours a week, with the majority of time spent in the company and external training provided either on a day-release basis, or undertaken in blocks of time. Apprentices receive a wage of at least £2.60 an hour. Apprenticeships are increasingly recognised as the gold standard in the UK for work-based training. Nationally, there are over 100,000 employers offering apprenticeships in more than 160,000 locations, and there are more than 200 different types of apprenticeships available, offering over 1,200 job roles. There are three levels of apprenticeship offered. Apprenticeship funding is available from the UK’s National Apprenticeship Service. The size of the contribution varies depending on the sector and the age of the candidate. If the apprentice is aged 16–18 years, 100% of the cost of the training is funded; if they are aged 19–24, the funding is 50%; if they are 25 years old or over, the funding may only be based on a small contribution, depending on the sector and area in which the employer operates. The funding is paid directly to the organisation that provides and supports the apprenticeship; in most cases this will be a learning provider. Large employers with a direct contract with the National Apprenticeship Service may receive the funding themselves.

The measures implemented by the French companies in this research sit within government strategies on youth employment, centred on providing incentives to companies to hire young workers on work experience and training contracts.

For example, the *Contrats de professionalisation* (professionalisation contracts) are employment contracts that include part-time training. They were introduced to help industries to develop skills strategies and to reduce the unemployment rate of vulnerable workers by providing them with vocational training. This contract can be either for a fixed term or on an open-ended basis, and ensures that the recipient will receive training for at least 15% of the length of the contract, and no less than 150 hours in total. In specific cases this contract is subsidised by the state, directly or indirectly. It specifically targets young, unskilled (or insufficiently skilled) workers, unemployed people, beneficiaries of social assistance benefits, and older workers (45+). Apprenticeship contracts are aimed at those between 16 and 25 and can last between one and three years, on a full-time basis. Pay rates are a proportion of the national minimum wage (SMIC) and increase according to age and year of contract. For example, the rate for a young person under the age of 18 in their first year of

an apprenticeship contract is 25% of SMIC, rising to 53% of SMIC in their third year. Employers taking on young workers on an apprenticeship contract are totally or partially exempt from social security contributions for that individual, and are also entitled to a lump sum, paid at regional level, of a minimum of € 1,000 per year. The employer also benefits from tax credits and extra financial help if they employ a worker with disabilities.

The French companies in this study all had links with external institutions, such as the employment office, in the case of PSA Peugeot-Citroën, which pre-selected the candidates for the training scheme. This scheme was the government's 'Plan emploi jeune 2009' which aimed to encourage companies to take on young people despite the economic crisis, on the basis of 'professionalisation' contracts (see above for details). The conditions were that the young people should be offered 240 hours of training and be paid 80% of SMIC (in fact, they were offered 280 hours of training). In return, companies would be exempt from social security charges for these young people and would receive a payment of up to € 2,000 for each young person. External training providers were used in the other two case studies, Ideal Productions and 110 Bourgogne. In the case of Ideal Productions, it was the local university that approached the company with the ideal of collaborating on providing work-based and theoretical training for young people.

However, the apprenticeship schemes examined in this research all went beyond statutory requirements and the overall statutory framework, and were not implemented in order to take advantage of the various forms of government financial help on offer (although this was an important factor). This suggests that although statutory frameworks can be a good incentive for companies to provide work experience to young workers, the impetus and motivation needs to come primarily from the organisation itself.

Dialogue at implementation level

Assessing the role of social dialogue and employee representatives in companies' initiatives towards young people's employment is difficult. Trade unions were present in some of the case study organisations, while other organisations did not have formal employee representation.

Kent County Council recognises the trade union Unison, the UK's largest public service union. Four trade unions are recognised at Mears: GMB, Unite, UCATT and Unison. Mears negotiates with these unions on pay and a range of other issues. There is a monthly meeting attended by all the union reps. The company consults with the unions on any restructuring, and on any specific problems. The relationship is characterised as good. There are also full-time health and safety representatives in the company. At PSA Peugeot-Citroën, four trade unions are formally represented at the company (FO, which is the majority union, plus CGT, CFTC and CEF-CGC for managers). The organisation has a 15-strong works council, 40 employee delegates, and there are 55 union representatives at the organisation. This company is therefore strongly unionised and employee representation meetings take place on a regular basis. In all cases, employee representatives did not tend to play a crucial role in the development of the training initiatives, although they may have been consulted and involved in their implementation.

For example, at 110 Bourgogne, the trade union and works council were not involved in negotiating the work-based training measures, but they monitor the flow of these contracts on an annual basis.

At PSA Peugeot-Citroën, although the company did not negotiate an agreement with the trade union on the recruitment of young workers, the unions ratified the agreement between the company and

the employment office, and were heavily involved in the implementation of the youth recruitment measure, meeting and talking with each new wave of young people hired by the organisation. Mears has carried out some work with the GMB, which has developed its own apprenticeship schemes. There is some joint discussion about Mears working with the unions on apprenticeship schemes. These schemes would, if agreed, run alongside existing apprenticeships, in which unions at present play no role. At Kent County Council the union has acted as a 'critical friend' to the process of establishing projects to increase the number of young workers in the council. For example, the union has provided feedback on the employment arrangements within the projects and is active in ensuring that the mission to increase the proportion of younger workers does not disadvantage existing older workers. A second strand of dialogue has been instigated through the establishment of a recognised young staff representation group (known as Greenhouse). This group provides an informal forum for young workers to network, share views, talk about any challenges they encounter and to learn more about the council at four annual meetings. The forum also organises volunteering opportunities, social events and can support young workers into buddying or coaching relationships, provide access to training and work shadowing and, through this, support career development and progression.

Issues, lessons and challenges

Young workers face, as we have seen earlier in this report, specific challenges when trying to enter and remain in the labour market. They lack experience and in some cases the types of skills that make them attractive to employers. In some countries there is a high level of youth unemployment, and those who fail to find work at the outset of their career will have increasing difficulties in getting into the labour market as they get older. They therefore often need targeted support and training from employers, which can be difficult and costly to arrange.

Kent County Council is aware of these issues, and employee representatives at the organisation argue that the particular difficulties experienced by young people in trying to gain a foothold in the labour market are a good reason to continue with apprenticeship and training schemes.

Youth unemployment provides an argument for keeping the scale of the apprenticeship scheme, and young people are definitely vulnerable to unemployment and need support to adapt to the workplace, particularly if they have been unemployed for some time. They can be vulnerable to exploitation. Young members have identified that they are recruited on temporary or short-term contracts and are concerned about their longer term security.

Trade union representative, Kent County Council

At Mears Group, the company is very keen to give young people a chance to get a foothold on the labour market, and particularly those from challenging backgrounds. For this reason, it selects potential recruits from housing estates and poorer areas of cities, operating one-day recruitment fairs.

The area where we operate is one of the pockets of severe social deprivation, social housing and with multiple generations of worklessness, people who haven't worked. We wanted to break the cycle. We want to give something back. We looked at what we could do that offers more than the standard apprenticeship. We have the work, we have the experience. We also had empty seats in the front of our vans, so we had the capacity to accommodate apprentices.

Regional manager, Mears Group

Positive measures for all

Both the apprentices and the established workers at Mears had nothing but praise for the scheme, believing that it made a significant difference to young people's lives and gave them the opportunity to learn a skill, while benefiting the company and allowing it to grow.

In some cases, the trainees went as far as to say that the training had changed their life completely, giving them a degree of security and confidence that they did not formerly possess. This was the view from trainees at PSA Peugeot-Citroën and at Mears, for example.

I was really happy when I started at Mears, it was such a life-changing experience. I didn't think I had a chance to get a job at all. I couldn't believe it was true. Mears is the kind of place I want to stay for the rest of my life. It's filled that gap in my life that I needed. It's helped me, not just in work but out of work as well. Words can't describe how happy I am now. I feel like I'm starting to make it now. Mears didn't judge me – they understood me and gave me that chance and changed my life, which I grasped with two hands.

Apprentice, Mears Group

Similarly, the apprentices at Rolls-Royce in the UK were overwhelmingly happy with the apprenticeship programme, emphasising that they felt well integrated into the workforce and were treated as equals with the company's other workers. Interestingly, some apprentices felt that what they were doing was much more worthwhile than theoretical training and compared favourably their experiences and prospects to those of university graduates (within the context of the current review of higher education funding, under which university fees in the UK will be increased up to three times the current levels in 2012).

The young people at Kent County Council recognised the value of gaining work skills and qualifications which would underpin their future transitions. One did express concern over the uncertainty of their future position, although recognising it would be improved by the successful completion of the apprenticeship (particularly when compared to their previous position).

Integration into the organisation: A real challenge

Integration is one of the main challenges for an organisation, as young people coming into an organisation for the first time are bound to experience difficulties in adjusting to the world of work. One particular issue is that young people may not have such a strong work ethic as older employees, who have been in the workforce for much longer. This was a specific issue with some of the young people recruited by PSA Peugeot-Citroën, where the recruitment and training drive was deemed to have had mixed results. Here, a total of 300 young people aged between 18 and 25 were recruited to the Poissy site in waves of 15 a week, over a relatively short timescale. As a consequence, it was, according to the industrial relations and HR director, difficult for the organisation to fully absorb and service this concentrated influx of new recruits. There were also seemingly inevitable culture clashes between the younger and the older workers.

They knew nothing about the world of work. We found that there was a real divide between the life that they were living and the life that we were offering them. Constraints such as having to get up early, respond to targets, have a boss, were points of tension between these young people and the older employees on site, who were proud of what they were doing

and of their company. When they are confronted with young people who do not have any respect for what they are doing, tensions are inevitable.

Industrial relations and HR manager, PSA Peugeot-Citroën

However, interviewees at PSA Peugeot-Citroën stressed that, overall, knowledge and skills transfer had worked well between the younger and older groups and one of the trainees spoke positively about his experiences, although he also stated that out of a group of six trainees, he was the only one who had stayed.

Interestingly, there seems to have been a gender dimension in terms of how well the young people adapted to this measure, with girls adapting better than boys. The view from both management and some of the trainees was that the girls were more mature and more ready to try to fit in with life in an organisation.

The work-based training contracts at 110 Bourgogne worked well overall. Nevertheless, there were also a few cases of trainees not engaging as they should with the contract, although it was stressed that this was not the norm.

Conversely, the apprentices at Mears Group seemed to have little difficulty in fitting in with the organisation, due to the fact that they were happy to have a job and the care that the organisation took in ensuring that they were well integrated.

You don't get treated like an apprentice. You get treated like a normal operative. Everyone talks to you normally, nobody belittles you, they treat you normally. Our manager always goes out of his way to talk to us to see that we're all right. They've been really fair, I can't complain about the wages, everyone's been great to us. There's no way I'm leaving this job. You'd have to force me out of here.

Focus group of apprentices, Mears Group

Knowledge transfer is at the heart of the Mears Group apprenticeship scheme, with each apprentice allotted one or more mentors.

At Rolls-Royce, although integration of apprentices was reported to be good, some expressed a view that there could be more guidance available in relation to placements and some said that they would have liked more transparency and communication, particularly in relation to their future career.

Sometimes there were tensions between the older and the younger employees in that the older employees found it difficult to give the time needed to train the new recruits. This was sometimes the case at 110 Bourgogne, although these tensions could usually be smoothed over and the majority of employees appreciated the trainees.

The employees look on it favourably, but do not always have confidence in all the young people. I have heard comments such as 'you're sending me so-and-so, but he doesn't know anything'. Sometimes you have to explain that the young person is there to be trained. But most of the employees appreciate their contribution. It gives us satisfaction to see young people learn, develop and blossom in the job, becoming more independent and gaining in self-confidence.

Maintenance manager, 110 Bourgogne

At Kent County Council, when the apprenticeship and training measures were first introduced, the project paid the apprentices' salaries. This led to some managers not viewing the apprentice as part of the team and there were difficulties about work assignment and provision of sufficient support. The model was reviewed and the funding now passes down to the employing department. In addition, not all managers have been keen to have young workers in their teams, since they have preconceptions that they will be difficult to work with. To help to overcome this, the council developed positive case studies of apprentices who have worked within its departments.

Overcoming difficulties

All sort of difficulties popped up when implementing these training and apprenticeships measures. Some are linked to organisational aspects, some to competition between workers and statuses while others depend essentially on how young people address these opportunities.

Ways to overcome some of the difficulties experienced in the PSA Peugeot-Citroën project, such as difficulties in monitoring too many apprentices or those caused by cultural differences, could include spreading the recruitment over a longer period, preparing the ground more thoroughly, and implementing a period of observation and trial, which would help young people to become accustomed to their new role.

Apart from the need to simplify administrative procedures, we feel it would be necessary to include an observation period, especially for the youngest ones. They have difficulty in envisaging their part in the programme, and what their role in making a car will be. A two-week period to see whether they feel ready to enter the automotive industry, comprising a stint in the internal training centre and one week on the shop-floor paired with an employee would help to avoid a lot of the early departures.

Industrial relations and HR manager, PSA Peugeot-Citroën

This was also the view of the trade union representative at PSA Peugeot-Citroën, who stressed the importance of equipping young people with general life skills and preparing them for entering the workplace.

Trying to mix the intake in terms of geographic location would also help to improve the success of similar measures in the future, according to both the company and union representatives at PSA Peugeot-Citroën.

Ensuring that young people are adequately supported by allotting enough mentors to the role is also important. Young people with no experience of work can easily feel overwhelmed by the world of work, and it is therefore important for them to have access to a mentor in the company who can reassure and guide them, giving them the benefit of their own experience. At PSA Peugeot-Citroën, the problem was that, due to recent redundancy programmes, not enough experienced employees were able to take on this role.

Another important aspect to be addressed is the relative status of the workers. At Kent County Council there were some concerns that entry-level apprenticeship roles would displace existing staff, and while the council aims to ensure that existing staff requiring redeployment are prioritised in the recruitment for these roles, the union had concerns about the career progression opportunities of existing staff. The HR department confirmed that it was monitoring the effects of the entry-level apprenticeships on existing staff on lower grades.

Finally, young people have to ‘engage with training’ to make these measures a success. Going to college can sometimes be something that young people, and particularly apprentices learning a manual trade, are not so keen on. This can be the case in the UK, where the apprenticeship scheme is based on a combination of theoretical and work-based learning. Some of the apprentices tend not to like that as much and would ideally like to skip it. Apprentices in both Mears and Rolls-Royce said that they preferred the practical to the theoretical training.

However, Mears makes sure that the mentors are in contact with them about going to college. The apprentices also realised that although college work may not be attractive, it is necessary.

At the end of the day, if you want to achieve something in life, you have to do things like that – it’s not always an easy ride. The more studying you do, the more you learn and the better you are. I used to go out with my mentor to extra jobs that I wasn’t being paid for, but I wanted to do it, as I wanted to learn.

Apprentice, Mears Group

One point made by young people, however, was that apprenticeships had not been promoted to them while at school. The guidance they had received at this point was more focused on completing full-time tertiary education and progressing to university.

Flexicurity measures for older workers

Introduction

Older workers face specific labour market challenges: they are, in general, less likely than their younger colleagues to access training and keep their skills levels up to date. This problem may be particularly acute in the case of fast-moving areas, such as information and communications technology. This in turn may mean that they become vulnerable during company downsizing, as their skills have become outdated and less relevant to a company's future.

Older workers may also lack confidence when trying to re-enter the labour market, move between jobs, or even move around within an organisation. They may feel that they are not capable of learning new ways of working or new skills, or that they are not as flexible or as adaptable as younger colleagues and therefore may suffer from discrimination based on age (although this is prohibited under EU law), both at the recruitment stage and during employment, in terms of career advancement and access to training. Efforts need to be made to challenge these perceptions.

Exclusion from the labour market on the basis of early retirement is another major issue for older workers. Although early retirement is discouraged by the EU, in line with Lisbon Strategy targets for the labour market participation of older workers, this practice is still widely used in many EU Member States as a relatively painless way of reducing the workforce when companies are restructuring. Older workers often find early retirement attractive in the short and even medium term. However, the disadvantage lies in the fact that these workers are exiting the labour market at a relatively early age, which may not be ideal for them in the longer term and is without doubt a waste of talent and experience for the labour market as a whole.

In this section we provide an overview of the measures relating to older workers that the case study companies in Germany and Slovenia have put into place.

Rasselstein GmbH: Improving working conditions for all

Rasselstein GmbH is a private sector iron and steel processing company employing around 2,350 workers the majority of whom do physically demanding shift work.

Company research showed management that they would have to deal with the issue of an ageing workforce, and they accordingly developed – often in cooperation with universities – measures and instruments to improve working conditions for all. These measures, based upon health issues, training, and organisation of work, even if not especially devised for older workers, address issues particularly relevant for them.

The company has implemented a number of measures to maintain and improve the health status of its workforce, such as:

- developing facilities on site (company-owned fitness centre, physiotherapy services);
- offering medical advice (medical check-ups at the company/vaccinations/nutritional counselling);
- support with psychological problems by an external psychologist;
- developing awareness (adjustments to the workplace to ensure good posture);
- advice on how to change ways of working).

In addition all members of the works council are qualified to carry out health audits in order to improve working conditions.

The company has also set up a specific programme to support workers facing musculoskeletal disorders. The programme aims to help employees regain their fitness so they can return to regular work. The programme includes an examination by the company doctor and a physiotherapist, followed by physiotherapy and independent training. If necessary the worker is coached at their workstation to improve their working procedures and the design of the workstation is evaluated to see if it can be improved.

As for training, the company runs its own centre for vocational training and encourages workers to obtain further qualifications by setting financial incentives. The vocational training takes place during working hours and employees benefit financially if the acquired qualification enables them to perform different tasks in their job. There are 50–60 employees taking part in such qualification measures every day throughout the whole year.

In terms of work organisation, a new shift system was introduced at the beginning of the 1990s. Although it was not designed explicitly for older workers, they benefited particularly from it due to a rest period of 24 hours every two days.

One particular initiative has been aiming at ‘combating the loss of knowledge’. After the introduction of a social plan in 1994, many older workers left the company under an early retirement scheme. Consequently, the company promotes knowledge transfer within its workforce by forming mixed-age teams with older workers assigned as mentors to the apprentices. This has led to a strong intergenerational knowledge transfer. This team structure also enables better support for workers with reduced abilities due to age, injuries or illnesses.

University Medical Centre Mannheim: Health and development measures for all

The public sector medical and research institution University Medical Centre Mannheim (UMM) employs around 5,500 people.

Non-discrimination in hiring and the current employment of older workers at UMM is not exactly a voluntary strategy developed by managers, but more the outcome of unplanned development. Nursing and hospitals are traditionally branches for employees with more life experience and since 2009 this has been deliberately made use of.

Experience shows that familiarisation and integration concepts with mentors or sponsors, common in the care department, are potentially useful for enhancing knowledge transfer in other departments too. Therefore, for the past few years the UMM has been putting significantly more effort into human resources development, further education and professional development for its workforce (including management) and encouraging knowledge transfer between different generations of employees. This concept applies to all the UMM workforce.

The health measures developed by UMM are:

- emphasising rehabilitative and preventive care;
- fixing targets, such as burnout prevention and stress management;
- yearly communication campaign projects on exercise and nutrition;
- maintaining psychological health;
- the development of a company agreement on the prevention of alcohol abuse;
- an employee assistance programme, with three free counselling sessions, run by an external provider.

As for training and development, a 2010 operating agreement between the Klinikum Mannheim GmbH and the works council applies to all of the UMM workforce and promotes the maintenance of already acquired skills as well as further professional training. Employees are also entitled to a regular meeting with their immediate superiors, to discuss any need for further professional training. Training and development is also part of the company's HRM strategy and can range from simply enabling an employee to do their job (which is financed by the employer) to that which the employee co-finances and undertakes in their own time. There is also a lifelong learning programme.

Under the company's corporate integration management (CIM) strategy, employees who have been on sick leave for more than 42 days may, if they wish, participate in a review of their options for continuing to work for the company. These may include changes in the job or department; for example from nursing to administration, or exemption from on-call working or nightshifts, or cuts in the workload (temporary or permanent) and in wages.

Mentoring and sponsoring was introduced about six years ago, with each department head responsible for the development and implementation of branch and task-specific familiarisation with technical support, services and administration.

There is also a focus on teamwork, both within and across groups of employees, such as nurses, technical staff and doctors. The establishment of age-mixed teams is seen as an important component of knowledge transfer.

Randstad Deutschland: Specific measures targeting older workers

Randstad Deutschland is a private sector temporary employment agency which has 54,000 employees. It takes an active stance in hiring older workers. It believes that many companies do not hire older workers due to what they consider higher risks, such as higher sickness absence rates. However, when these companies do not act as the employer they do not have to bear these risks and are, therefore, ready to employ older workers. They can do so by hiring them through a temporary works agency such as Randstad.

Developing training programmes

Randstad's experience has been that the qualifications of workers older than 50 are often outdated. However, if given the opportunity, they often manage very quickly to acquire the skills necessary for successful integration in the labour market.

Randstad systematically and strategically provides this opportunity to its employees. While the training programmes are not age-specific, older workers particularly benefit because the agency has turned to hiring older workers who are not given a chance elsewhere on the labour market.

Many older workers with experience in commercial occupations have difficulties finding new employment because they lack experience with the latest computer software and English language skills. If given these qualifications, they usually integrate well into the labour market. This prompted Randstad to organise training courses offering both English and SAP programming. This idea has been taken up by the public employment services agency, which subsidises these programmes. Randstad also supports those who have difficulties with the course, providing e-learning and extra coaching. There is a great variety of training on offer, covering almost all occupations (except construction) and educational levels. Training lasts, on average, for three months and takes the form of external training courses and e-learning courses among others. In 2008, more than 15,000 workers underwent further training at Randstad. Curricula are developed jointly by the training providers and Randstad to reflect the needs of Randstad's customers.

Some of these programmes are exclusively financed by Randstad, others are co-financed by the public employment system. However, most are subsidised by the Federal Employment Agency and are aimed at the unemployed. Randstad's local branches have a certain budget set aside for training measures which they can use according to local demand. However, all e-learning courses are financed from Randstad's central budget.

Workers who register with Randstad still receive unemployment benefits during the training course, and Randstad guarantees that all participants successfully completing the course will get a job.

Telekom Slovenije d.d.: Training and transfer of knowledge

Telekom Slovenije d.d. is a leading provider of domestic and international telecommunications including fixed, mobile and internet telecommunication services, and system integration in Slovenia. At the end of 2010, the Telekom Slovenije Group had 4,841 employees, with 1,741 of them employed in the parent company, Telekom Slovenia d.d.

Telekom Slovenia d.d. is one of the few Slovenian companies that has made at least a few steps towards a strategy for its ageing workforce. The company brought in several measures after a 2006 survey showed that workers got much less annual training as they got older:

- those aged under 30 had 59 hours of training every year
- those aged 30–40, 46 hours
- those aged 40–50, 33 hours
- those above 50, 22 hours.

Since then, the company has tried to reduce this imbalance by encouraging all employees to train, taking into account their wishes and the needs of the job. Every two years management publishes an educational booklet, which contains not only technical knowledge, but also content on cooperation, emotional intelligence and diversity management, including age management.

The company, as part of a restructuring process, is transferring older workers from different departments to call centres. These workers will replace 100 students working on their ‘technical help desk’, ‘teleshopping’ service and ‘telephone information’ service.

This is a challenge for all the workers involved, due to the nature of call centre work; however, the transfer is accompanied by training lasting between three and six months, during which the employee is mentored. The training, provided by external partners, covers issues such as working with difficult clients, talking on the phone, and adapting to a new working environment. Furthermore it allows older employees especially to stay in work and maintain their salary.

The 2006 survey showed that older and younger workers have specific qualities that need to be transferred in an effective manner from one group to another. Although there is no systematic approach towards intergenerational cooperation and transfer of knowledge, this concept has been integrated into the company’s corporate culture, involving mixed teams with older employees transferring their knowledge to younger employees.

Lekarna Ljubljana: Prevention, education and knowledge transfer

Ljubljana Pharmacy (*Lekarna Ljubljana*) is Slovenia’s largest public pharmacy, employing more than 300 people in its 40 branches. Its main activity is the sale of pharmaceuticals, but it also gives advice on the prescription and use of medicines, the production and dispensing of medicines for human and veterinary use, health education and mentoring. In 2011 the average age of the workforce was 41 and 28% of workers were over 50. As the pharmacy is state funded, its employees have civil servant status.

The company has a policy of adapting work organisation to allow for older employees’ specific needs. They can, for example, ask to work in a pharmacy nearer their home. This policy also applies to parents with young children. Given the nature of the work (standing for long hours, and the preparation of drugs) some specific initiatives have been developed such as special shoes and allowing workers not to be involved in the preparation of some specific drugs.

Older workers also benefit from the ‘Employment Relationships Act’ (ERA). Under this they may not be ordered to work overtime or at night without their prior written consent. Furthermore, older workers have the opportunity – and use it quite often – to work ‘unsociable hours’ (Sundays or on statutory holidays). This can suit them as they usually have less childcare constraints at these times, and can be paid extra for working unsociable hours. If the organisation of work in individual pharmacies allows for flexibility, older workers can therefore agree with managers on their working schedule. Older workers can also attend IT courses, professional training and assertive communication courses, which focus on solving issues or problems emerging at work. However, this training takes place outside of working hours.

The importance of knowledge transfer is recognised by the company, which has developed various initiatives to promote it.

Older workers have a lot of professional knowledge, for example about discontinued drugs, and the company uses this. Three or four times a year the company invites retired workers to work as assistants in the pharmacy, to do the stocktaking (once a year the company carries out a whole month of night stocktaking) or to perform some specific task, such as measuring clients’ cholesterol. All of these contractual workers are the company’s former employees. They remain in touch via email,

phone and an annual meeting. On average, around five workers per month are engaged in this way, each for around 50 hours

The company has also developed a network of 10 coaches who are experts in their fields and who are qualified for coaching. These help other workers to develop better communication skills, to overcome problems with difficult customers and to manage their workflow more efficiently. Each pharmacy also has up to two mentors, professionals that train students in practical work and newly employed young workers. Older workers can become coaches and mentors, but this role is not limited to them.

Flexicurity dimensions

This section attempts to show how the company-level measures described above can contribute to both the security and flexibility dimensions of flexicurity.

Tables 5 and 6 below show standard measures for older workers in Germany and Slovenia.

Table 5: Flexicurity analysis of the measures in Germany

	Income security	Job security	Employment security	Combination security
Numerical flexibility (external)	Right to claim unemployment benefits while receiving training in the case of temporary agency work contracts (Randstad)		Acquisition of skills that allow workers to fit into different user enterprises (Randstad); Qualification/knowledge transfer	
Numerical flexibility (internal)	Study grants	Continuous shift system; flexible working time (32-35 hours a week)		Working time flexibility and working time reduction
Functional flexibility		Knowledge transfer; Further training for older workers; Transfer to different duties in the case of ill-health	Qualification/knowledge transfer; Further training for older workers	
Wage flexibility		Cuts in workload and pay in the case of ill-health		Working time flexibility and working time reduction

Table 6: Flexicurity analysis of the measures in Slovenia

	Income security	Job security	Employment security	Combination security
Numerical flexibility (external)		Re-activation of retired workers on the basis of part-time civil contracts		
Numerical flexibility (internal)		Flexible working time; Some working time flexibility to help workers adjust to their new duties		Flexible working time
Functional flexibility		Flexibility of the content of work Reallocation of workers to jobs closest to their home Education, training and coaching/career development Transfer of workers to call centres Age-mixed teams	Education, training and coaching/career development Promotion possibilities Age-mixed teams	Reallocation of workers to jobs closest to their home
Wage flexibility				Re-activation of retired workers on the basis of civil contracts

Adaptation of work organisation

Various measures implemented by companies allow for adapting work that will suit both the company and older workers' needs.

Flexible working time

Flexible working can provide internal numerical flexibility for the employer, and combination security for the employee. One important factor for working time flexibility to be a positive experience for both company and workers is the latitude given to workers in deciding their working time. In the case studies presented here, most of the employees can choose how to organise their working time.

Working time flexibility is not devised primarily for older workers, but clearly some regulations address issues particular to them.

Shift working is a way of organising working time that is primarily geared towards ensuring that the production process runs smoothly; on the other hand this type of organisation impacts on working conditions. In Rasselstein, for example, the reform of the shift system allowed older workers to work more efficiently; moreover, due to increased downtime between shifts, fewer workers suffer health problems. However, it should be noted that the new shift system reduces combination security, because the fast-rotating shift changes mean workers find it more difficult to arrange their social and private lives.

The new shift system at Rasselstein also increases working time flexibility – normal working time within the shift system is 31.5 hours a week and workers can choose their actual working hours between 32 and 35 hours a week. Therefore they have to work between three and 21 extra shifts a year, depending on the hours scheme that they have chosen. This also means that the company has more flexibility to react to fluctuating plant utilisation.

Working time flexibility has also been enhanced at Telekom Slovenije, in order to ensure that the call centres operate on a 24-hour basis, even though they are being staffed by a greater number of older workers. A limited amount of working time flexibility, in the form of regular short breaks, was also introduced for the older workers to help them to cope with the specific demands of working in a call centre. This measure increases job security for the older workers, as it enables them to carry out their duties, and also increases internal numerical flexibility for the company.

Job adaptation

Ljubljana Pharmacy offers older workers the option of relocating to one of its 40 branches that is closest to their home. This measure is also open to workers with small children, who can request a transfer to a site that is nearest to their child's kindergarten.

Telekom Slovenije's measures were triggered by a need to restructure and downsize, rather than out of concern for the health and performance of the older workers. However, it has put measures in place to help the older workers manage the transfer of jobs, enabling them to stay within the company and to maintain their previous salary. This measure also increases wider employment security for these workers, as it enables them to learn a new skill that may be transferred to other jobs if they wish. This transfer of workers has provided the company with functional flexibility, as it has been able to move workers around in the company.

Income guarantees

A range of pay and income arrangements can increase income security for employees. For example, income security for Randstad's workers is increased by their rights to claim unemployment benefits while undergoing training. Further, additional employment and job security will positively influence income security. Also, depending on contractual pay arrangements, salaries for temporary workers may increase if, due to their job-related skills, they become more valuable to the user company.

Income security is increased for Rasselstein workers by the company measures enabling them to obtain higher education qualifications – for example, Rasselstein will give grants for tuition fees for employees who embark upon a programme of study with a university.

At Telekom Slovenije the transfer of workers to call centres implemented in a reorganisation process has been accompanied by income guarantees. All transferred workers are guaranteed their previous salary, as they are all educated to high school level which is, in any case, a requirement for work in the company's call centres. It is also possible for some workers, given the company's job classification system, to receive a pay rise. No worker faces a pay cut because of the transfer.

Measures designed to maintain and improve the health of employees

Many organisations in this study have measures that enable workers, particularly older ones, to maintain or improve their health. These can normally be classified as measures increasing both employees' security and functional flexibility for the employer.

For example, Rasselstein's health measures increase security in a variety of ways. Better health increases both job and employment security, as where health is improved and health risks are identified early, job security is increased and the potential for having to take sick leave is reduced. The integration and health management measures facilitate the transfer of employees to positions better suited to them, which increases both flexibility and job security.

Measures relating to integration and health management at the University Clinic Mannheim can also increase functional flexibility by facilitating the transfer of employees to different positions in the company, where they can work more productively. At Ljubljana Pharmacy, the health measures for older workers may help them continue with their job.

Training measures

Training programmes have been analysed in several studies as epitomising flexicurity policies. They increase employees' job security, by providing them with the skills they need to continue to carry out their job. Moreover, they may equip employees with skills potentially needed to get a new job, increasing employment security as a whole. From the employer point of view, training programmes increase functional flexibility by allowing them to deploy workers in different ways, as well as increasing external numerical flexibility (for user companies in the case of Randstad).

Training programmes are devised mostly according to the various aspects mentioned above. For example, Telekom Slovenije offers two types of training to its older workers: specific training to help those who have transferred to call centres to cope with their new duties; and general career development and promotion opportunities for all workers, including older ones. The training measures at University Clinic Mannheim, while increasing job and employment security, also give functional flexibility, as they help workers develop skills to perform different kinds of tasks. Ljubljana Pharmacy offers a range of education and training courses for older workers, including IT courses, a variety of

professional training courses and assertive communication courses, at which problems arising at work are discussed.

At Randstad, training is clearly aimed at helping older workers to develop their employability. The objective is to be able to acquire skills that make temporary workers better adapted to the differing needs of different user companies. Job security for Randstad employees is also enhanced by the fact that, due to job-related training, they can be employed more flexibly in the user company. This helps to increase the length of stay in the user company and also their length of stay at the agency. These options may be important for workers who either do not want, or who have no chance of getting, regular employment.

Workers at Rasselstein benefit from increased employment security by means of the further qualification measures the company offers, and the knowledge transfer between different generations of workers. The company has its own training centre that offers a range of programmes. These enable workers to increase their employment and job security by allowing them to switch jobs more easily within the company. These measures also increase functional flexibility, as Rasselstein can react fast to changes in demand by assigning different tasks to its workforce.

Mentoring and knowledge transfer measures

Many of the organisations studied for this report offer mentoring and training, which contribute to job security, as they enable employees to develop vital job skills. They can also provide wider, transferable skills that could potentially contribute to employment security. For the employer, these measures can increase functional flexibility, both in terms of the older workers who are taking on a new role, but also in the case of those who are being coached and mentored, as this will enable them to move into other roles.

At Ljubljana Pharmacy the company has developed a network of coaches who help other workers to develop better communication skills, to overcome problems with difficult customers and to manage their workflow more efficiently. Each pharmacy also has one or two mentors: professionals who train students in practical work and who guide newly employed young workers. Older workers can take on this role, although it is not limited to them. Older workers have much to offer, as they have a great deal of professional knowledge, which the company is keen to use.

Rasselstein's knowledge transfer measures increase employees' productivity, which in turn increases the possibility that workers will remain with the organisation until retirement. Other relevant measures here include the knowledge transfer measures at the University Clinic Mannheim, and two relevant measures at Telekom Slovenije: young mentors being assigned to the older workers transferred to call centres and mixed-age teams to try to encourage knowledge transfer across generations.

Background to the measures

Triggers for the measures

These measures were triggered by several things. In many cases, the older employees were a large part of the workforce, and the organisations wanted to retain their expertise. At Rasselstein, for example, the company is trying to improve working conditions for its older employees, and although its measures do not explicitly target older workers, they address issues that are relevant to them. This was also the case at Ljubljana Pharmacy, where the organisation had a relatively large proportion of older workers and decided that it needed to find ways to motivate them to improve their performance.

Some more ‘ad hoc’ triggers explain other measures; as in the case of Telekom Slovenije which made use of the existing workforce when restructuring, or making use of old workers’ life experience at the University Clinic Mannheim. Furthermore, at Randstad, there was a realisation that, contrary to some assumptions, older workers can perform well and learn new skills quickly, with the right training. Randstad found that although user companies are nervous of employing older workers directly, they will use them willingly through a temporary employment agency.

Links between the measures and other policy levels

All of the measures presented above for older workers sit within national regulations. In the two countries selected here regulation is quite strong and it has developed along the lines of older workers protection (SI) or of more general flexibilisation of the Labour market (DE).

In Slovenia, older workers are protected by the Employment Relationship Act (ERA), which provides older workers with special protection, especially against discrimination, and on other issues including termination of their employment contracts, overtime and night working, and other flexible working arrangements.

However, this strong rights framework appears to have hampered flexibility in some instances with, for example, managers at Ljubljana Pharmacy refusing older workers overtime (even though they are keen to do it), believing it to be against the law.

Although the German labour market is considered to be relatively inflexible, there have been various attempts by the government to try to increase flexibility during the last few years. Among these is the liberalisation of temporary agency working, which has contributed to the growth of organisations such as Randstad. Working time has also become more flexible due to working time accounts and opening clauses from central collective bargaining.

A range of public subsidies are available to encourage employment. For example, state funding is available for training courses, and Randstad concluded a cooperation agreement with the Federal Employment Agency under which unemployed workers were permitted to retain their benefits while training. This type of agreement is common among temporary employment agencies in Germany. Randstad gives an employment guarantee to participants successfully completing the training course.

Social dialogue aspects

Following the German tradition, the three German companies have a works council and trade union representatives. At the University Clinic Mannheim, there is a works council of 27 members, 11 of whom are full-time members. There is also an 18-member board, with six employee representatives. Workers at Rasselstein are organised by the engineering trade union IG Metall, and union density is high, at around 90%. There is a works council consisting of 19 members and half of the 12 members of the company’s supervisory board are employees. Randstad, somewhat unusually for German temporary work agency, has a works council, which has been in place for 40 years.

The Slovenian companies also recognise trade unions. In the Ljubljana Pharmacy, two trade unions are recognised while Telekom Slovenije has dual worker representation: trade unions and workers’ participation in management under the Worker Participation in Management Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia No. 42/1993). In the latter, trade unions work under the umbrella of the Confederation of Telekom Slovenije Trade Unions, made up of nine different trade unions. Almost

90% of the unionised workers belong to the independent Telekom Slovenije trade union. Employees' interests are also represented by a workers council; by a supervisory board, of which three out of nine members are worker representatives, elected by the workers council; and by a worker-director on the management board.

Nevertheless, the existence of trade unions at company level does not guarantee involvement in devising and monitoring the various measures. In the Ljubljana Pharmacy, the drive for measures targeting older workers came from management, and the union representatives interviewed did not feel that they were particularly well informed about management thinking in this area.

By contrast, at Telekom Slovenije, the trade unions were involved in the measures, and agreed to them. Trade unions meet with the management board once a month and deal mostly with strategic issues, as not many disputes arise from individual employment contracts. Interviewees in the focus group remember only two disputes being submitted to the Labour and Social Courts. A new collective agreement at company level has recently been negotiated.

In the three German cases, the involvement of trade unions is important, due to a strong trade union presence and a tradition of collective bargaining. There is also a high degree of consultation of the workforce as a whole with, in some cases, measures not being implemented if the workforce objects.

At the University Clinic Mannheim, the relationship between social partners is described as good and based on trusting cooperation. The works council and management worked together on their measures. Since 2001, Randstad has negotiated company-wide collective agreements with the service sector trade union ver.di.

Rasselstein is covered by the sectoral agreement in the metalworking sector, although there are a range of opening clauses concerning issues such as:

- working time;
- the length of fixed-term contracts (which can be for up to four years, instead of two);
- no layoffs for reasons due to the operation of the business;
- no use of temporary work.

Relationships between the works council and company management are good, and they have concluded several additional company-level agreements. All measures at Rasselstein are introduced with the consent of the workforce. This means that the works council takes a very active part in initiating, implementing and promoting new measures – including those studied here.

Issues and challenges

Older workers face specific challenges, as discussed above, when trying to stay on, re-enter the labour market or move between jobs. They may be reluctant to participate in training and lack confidence about their ability to learn new skills or interact with new technology. Many older workers may, from their mid-50s, have left the labour market as a result of early retirement within the context of downsizing and collective redundancies, and therefore may not have worked for some time.

For their part, employers may be reluctant to hire older workers, fearing that they do not have the right skills, may be slow to learn, or may not fit in with their existing workforce.

Lack of confidence and reluctance to participate in training

Despite training being one key tool for developing workers' employability, offering training is not enough, given the specific employment needs of older workers.

As already mentioned, companies have first to acknowledge that, in the field of training, older workers generally lag behind. The results of an internal survey (2006) on education and training by Telekom Slovenije show that older employees were less likely than younger colleagues to participate in training. Indeed, the amount of training undergone by older workers could be half or one-third of that experienced by workers younger than 30. Recently, however, this has been addressed by raising awareness and encouraging managers and their employees to train.

Secondly, workers' motivation is key for training measures to work. The complexity of the situation is illustrated in several cases.

Rasselstein, for example, has invested significant resources in improving the working conditions and health of its workforce. However, participation in these measures is voluntary and it therefore finds that only those who are motivated tend to take advantage of the measures, rather than those who are most in need of them. So far, the company has not found a solution to this problem. It has rejected the idea of setting individual goals for employees as there may be issues of potential discrimination. Interestingly, absence levels (still below the industry average) have increased at Rasselstein over the past few years, despite the introduction of its health measures.

At University Clinic Mannheim, motivational problems are seen to be more common amongst older employees, particularly in the years leading up to retirement. Furthermore, the University strives to be the most attractive employer in the region and employee recruitment and retention have a high priority. There are various challenges related to the measures that the organisation offers, however. For example, the participation of the nursing and medical staff in the voluntary programmes on health management is relatively weak. This is possibly due to the fact that it is difficult to organise these programmes as there is a lot of part-time and shift working, as well the fact that medical practitioners tend to believe that they already know how to keep healthy.

Similarly at Randstad, the lack of motivation among older employees to take part in training courses has sometimes been a problem. For example, an English language course directed at office workers and financed solely by Randstad, was piloted in the Frankfurt area and the company hoped to roll it out across other urban areas around Germany. However, the programme failed because employees were not willing to spend their spare time doing the courses. This was a disappointment for the manager interviewed, who organised the programme. However, another attempt in Hamburg turned out to be more successful.

The specific employment relationship created through temporary agency work could explain part of this difficulty. The older workers feel that access to training courses depends significantly on the individual relationship between them and their manager; in an agency this can be particularly difficult, as temporary worker is more likely to be in contact with employees at the user company rather than at the agency. In many cases, contact with Randstad is maintained by telephone only. However, workers who meet their manager in person tend to be much better informed about training

opportunities than other workers. The works council provides information in the form of newsletters, but this cannot fully compensate for a lack of personal contact.

Again, the transient nature of the employment contract complicates the matter. There were problems with participation in training offered to employees on short-time working at Randstad. This training was financed by the employment agencies. The head of the works council at Randstad noted that even though participation would have improved their labour market prospects, the workers on short-time work either did not participate or voiced their discontent with the programme. This finding is in accordance with overall research findings concerning participation in training in the context of short-time working in a range of European countries (Eurofound, 2010).

Thirdly, the lack of confidence in their own learning capacities is one of the main issues for older workers in regard to training.

Randstad encountered this lack of confidence in the older workers that it has hired. It found that they are distinct from other workers in several ways. Many were afraid of performing badly in training courses and were worried about returning to school at a relatively advanced age. Some were also worried that they might lose their job if they did not pass the examinations that were part of their induction. These types of concerns were particularly prevalent among older workers from immigrant groups, who often feel ashamed to tell their families that they are receiving classroom training and are required to sit exams.

More generally, employers need to see a rapid 'return on investment'. There are issues concerning whether a worker who has participated in an expensive training programme will acquire skills that are in demand and, as a consequence, will be hired by another employer. Randstad feels that this is why public subsidies for training are important. Training with low public subsidies is therefore offered by Randstad only to employees with long job tenure, who could therefore be expected to remain with Randstad for some time in the future. Overall, at Randstad, it would appear that short and intensive courses with a clear focus on the demands of the market are the most effective, and mixed-age courses tend to work better than specific courses for either younger or older workers.

Problem solving

The involvement of the works councils is particularly important in helping to resolve the reluctance to participate in training. At Randstad, for example, if workers are unhappy with the training course, the works council sometimes approaches the course operators and discusses ways to improve their content. The works council also actively encourages workers to participate in the courses.

At Rasselstein, a key issue for the success of the health measures that it offers to its workforce is the employees' acceptance of them. Management therefore cooperates closely with the works council to ensure acceptance, and several measures have been introduced at the instigation of the works council. Overall, measures are not introduced if they are opposed by the workforce.

Improving information about measures and actions to be implemented

The University Clinic Mannheim tries to counteract lack of participation in training with improved communication, and a management style that is based on mutual respect and confidence. The organisation believes that the most effective instrument that can be used to motivate older employees to commit to their work is a good working environment, particularly in the last few years before retirement.

Improved communication and dissemination of the measures on offer for older workers at Ljubljana Pharmacy would help to broaden knowledge and understanding amongst the workforce. Further, consultation and communication about the legal position would help to clarify the interpretation of points of law that affect older workers, such as whether they are allowed to work overtime.

At Telekom Slovenije, issues relating to the stress of the call centre work for older workers were addressed by organising working time in the call centres. This takes the form of regular 15-minute breaks. The company also tries to promote a good working atmosphere and mutual understanding by team-building and holding workshops. Employees from call centres can potentially be promoted to another post within the company: Telekom usually has internal applications for job vacancies and every worker who is qualified for a post can be promoted even if not supported by their manager.

Flexicurity measures for women

Women face specific labour market challenges and their experience is an important aspect of the flexicurity debate. Overall, because it is women who are still mostly responsible for childcare and looking after elderly or sick relatives, their link with the labour market is less strong than is the case for men. They may have taken a career break to look after children or family members, or they may be working part-time, or non-standard hours, in order to accommodate domestic commitments. This means that women are less likely than men to progress in their jobs or access training and development. It also means that, while women offer significant flexibility to employers in terms of working time and working arrangements, they may suffer from lower levels of job and employment security than their male colleagues.

Women are also more likely to experience sex discrimination than men, both in the workplace and at the point of recruitment. Employers may have different expectations of their skills and commitment than they do of their male colleagues, which in turn may affect women's confidence and performance. Occupational segregation and the gender pay gap also remain problems.

Main measures

The various companies studied in this section have mainly implemented flexibility in work organisation, along with measures linked with career development and care facilities.

IBM Czech Republic: Flexibility and career path programme

The private sector IT company IBM Czech Republic employs over 3,000 people, and women are in the minority. IBM wants to encourage women to enter the company and has introduced measures aimed at meeting their needs. They offer flexible forms of working, childcare support, training and support in personal development.

IBM's Flexible Office programme, open to all employees, is based primarily on working from home and on flexible working hours, including part-time working. This is worked out on an individual basis, between the employee and their direct superior. The overall aim is to enable employees to harmonise their work with their personal lives, and if the type of work permits it, to organise their own working hours according to their personal needs. Employees do not need a specific reason to work from home. The company provides employees with a laptop and usually also a mobile phone.

Following a 2010 internal gender audit, the company decided to create a dedicated space for breastfeeding and nappy changing, to be used by women who work from home but who come in for meetings. During maternity or parental leave, women can use the internet to keep in touch with the company, their manager and colleagues. For this purpose, IBM offers a laptop to mothers with children up to one year, through which they have access not only to company information but to e-learning courses and training sessions enabling them to continue their professional development. This contact is also a way of motivating employees to return to work as soon as possible.

Employees can work on their personal development by choosing from a wide range of educational programmes. These include:

- certifications, which are compulsory for an employee aiming for positions such as software specialists and IT architects;
- courses that are part of the compulsory curriculum within the framework of career development (such as management development for managers and team work).

These programmes are either provided by company instructors brought in from abroad, or the employees are sent abroad. Voluntary courses and training, mostly on the development of soft skills, are provided by local suppliers. IBM also offers, and finances, MBA courses for selected employees. As this is expensive, it is the only training for which an employee has to commit to continue working for IBM for a certain period after graduating.

Employees are also motivated to work systematically on their career progress and to increase their skills.

The Women's Leadership Council, an informal company association, is focused on promoting women's career development. The council works at international level and aims to help women plan their careers with the company by providing company information, working opportunities, development and career progress. The organisation's activities are based on regular meetings, with a weekly newsletter for the company's employees.

One of the council's main programmes, called 'Taking the Stage' helps women learn how to prepare for a managerial position, develop their networks and look for management opportunities. They are encouraged to learn from the experiences of senior women and are supported in developing an active approach to their own professional development.

The council's project entitled 'Women into IT' motivates women and girls to study IT and seek work in this field. The project involves cooperation with universities, workshops for secondary school girls, educational and information seminars for women and round table public discussions dealing with the question of women in IT. The seminars give information on current opportunities and work in IT, as well as how to overcome barriers. Workshop participants gain direct experience of the IBM working environment with the training taking place at the IBM Delivery Centre in Brno.

Nestlé Sfinx Holešov: Flexibility for all

The private sector food manufacturer Nestlé Sfinx Holešov employs 500 people on the site covered by the case study. The trigger for this company's measures was a need to attract and retain qualified and trained workers, particularly women returning from maternity leave. Overall, the company realises that skilled employees are highly valuable and not easily replaced.

The main measures offered by this company are flexible work organisation and training.

Its policies on flexible working time include a time bank that enables administrative workers to store up to 37.5 hours of overtime. The employees may choose whether to have the overtime hours paid or to take the time off. Overtime payments are paid directly, as part of an employee's monthly salary. There is also a flexitime scheme for employees such as specialised clerks, planners, maintenance supervisors and production supervisors who can work flexibly around the core hours of 8am to 1pm.

The firm also has a policy of informal shift-swapping. The company has two production buildings, each with a different type of operation, the so-called old, original building, which focuses its production on hard candies, and the new building, where jelly and marshmallow sweets are produced. In the old building there is a two-, or occasionally, three-shift system. In the new building, work is non-stop. For production workers, arrangement of flexible hours is informal and depends on the team in each workroom. It should be noted that in general the introduction of flexible working regimes is very difficult in a manufacturing enterprise.

The company hires temporary staff and staff on fixed-term contracts to cope with fluctuations in demand, such as at Christmas and at Easter.

The company provides training in IT, languages and soft skills for technical and economic staff. It also operates a Continuous Excellence programme, which has four main elements:

- setting quality standards related to the international market agreed with employees;
- training of managerial employees to develop leadership skills, and how to develop and motivate members of their teams;
- goals alignment;
- operation reviews, which mostly affect production-line employees.

The operation reviews are based on daily and weekly meetings, continuously measuring the results of the individual workplaces; and training in problem-solving.

Thomayer's University Hospital: Flexibility and lifelong learning

Thomayer's University Hospital is a public sector health organisation employing over 2,000 staff, of whom almost four-fifths are medical staff. This organisation has a wide range of measures aimed at work-life balance and human capital development. The reason for this is that the overwhelming majority of employees, apart from doctors, are female and the healthcare system has been struggling with a critical lack of medical staff. Thus, it encourages applicants with family commitments by offering a range of family-friendly measures. The main measures include flexible work organisation, childcare facilities and training.

The hospital offers part-time working, even though it makes shift planning more difficult. This is because many employees want to choose their working hours to fit their private lives. The hospital runs a shift operation and, depending on the ward, organises the pattern in one, two or three shifts. The overwhelming majority of wards, however, have a roster with unevenly distributed working hours. The shift roster is the responsibility of the head nurses and is planned well in advance. Within each ward shifts are subsequently rescheduled as required, according to the needs of the medical staff (illness, care for a family member, training) – which all depends on mutual agreement and willingness to accommodate individual demands. Work at the hospital operation is characterised by a large volume of overtime. Employees may be paid for their overtime or to opt for lieu days for the respective number of overtime hours.

There is childcare available from 6am to 8pm, and for those on night shifts the hospital offers night babysitting of employees' children aged from three to 10 years at its paediatric clinic, where children are supervised by paediatric nurses. This is part of the project 'Nurses back to work' financed by the European Social Fund (ESF).

The Hospital's Science and Education Centre provides a wide range of educational activities. This is because medical staff are legally obliged to enhance their qualifications so that they can practise independently. The centre also offers other educational activities that exceed the scope of compulsory lifelong learning in professional skills. Thanks to the education extended to external trainees and to ESF funding, the hospital has been successful in financing educational activities even during the economic crisis, which led to a cut in government subsidies.

Lubiam: Flexibility and support measures

Lubiam is an Italian family-owned clothing company established in the early 1900s. The firm has one main plant in Mantua, Italy, where the headquarters are also located, and one establishment overseas in Tunisia. Total employment is around 700 workers, with around 250 employees at the Mantua plant and company headquarters at the end of 2010. Lubiam also has a Joint Venture in China, to which it essentially contributes knowledge-transfer. In order to be able to adjust to changes in market demand, Lubiam offers several flexibility and support measures which can be associated with external numerical flexibility, essentially through using temporary agency work, and external production/organisational flexibility, by outsourcing production to third parties in Italy and abroad.

The company has a high percentage of female workers (85% overall, and 94% among blue-collar workers) and wanted to introduce measures to provide a better work environment for its female employees, enabling them to combine work and family life, thus increasing their commitment to the company and reducing absence rates, which were relatively high. The measures were promoted by the spouse of the CEO, who knew that public subsidies were available to help finance work-life balance measures at company level.

The measures include flexible work organisation, training, medical and counselling services, IT assistance and a company crèche in school holiday periods, such as Christmas and Easter.

Flexible work organisation includes allowing employees to switch to part-time working. Under this measure, full-time employees can shift to part-time working, and be replaced by temporary workers on two-year contracts. The replacements are trained by the workers shifting to part-time work. Workers in the data processing department were offered the chance to work from home, but this measure was stopped after a short while due to lack of demand. Pairs of workers are also allowed to job-share, enabling them to organise their tasks and working time on an autonomous basis. This was intended for blue-collar workers, to help them reconcile their work-life balance and to organise their working time, under the supervision of the personnel office. There is also flexitime for white-collar workers, in terms of daily start and finish times.

A special training team works with women returning from maternity leave, in order to identify whether they need extra training to return to their former position or if they need to acquire new skills if that position is no longer available. The 'tutor' responsible for the re-entry of the worker has completed a specific course on the reconciliation of work and family life, thereby contributing to the creation of organisational 'know-how'.

Vodafone Italia: Flexibility and gender policy

Vodafone Italia is the Italian subsidiary of the Vodafone Group, a leading multinational company headquartered in the UK which operates in more than 30 countries and employs some 84,000 workers worldwide. Vodafone Italia is active in the telecommunication sector and offers a full range of business and domestic telecommunications services, with a primary presence in the mobile telephone market. It has some 8,200 employees in Italy, as at 31 March 2010, with women making up 52.4% of the total workforce. Women make up the majority in staff positions (57.5%), in commercial and marketing activities (52.1%) and in customer care – essentially the company call centres – (76.3%). Women are in a minority in technical activities (18%) and in the group resources division (38.9%).

Vodafone Italia believes that a diversified workforce can represent an important asset to respond effectively to customers' demands and expectations. The company helped to found 'Valore D'—an association of large companies which aims to promote women in top managerial positions through specific programmes and which runs an observatory.

The company has a wide range of measures in place to promote the on-the-job development of women. These include mainstreaming gender equality and equal opportunities in the recruitment and assessment process and aiming to have at least one female candidate for every position offered.

Its support measures for women also include:

- an increase of its maternity/parental allowance from 30% to 100% for 4.5 months;
- support for re-entry after maternity leave, in the form of a special 'come back training' initiative (also offered to any employees after a long absence);
- health insurance for children;
- support for formula milk and crèche expenses;
- medical assistance;
- laundry services.

There are company crèches in Milan and Naples that cover employees' entire working time. The firm has also signed agreements with private crèches to provide further childcare facilities for its employees,

The company offers flexible work organisation with

- special shift arrangements for working mothers in specific areas of the business, such as call centres;
- flexible working time arrangements, although in practice this tends to be flexibility of an hour a day;
- the opportunity to work part-time on a temporary basis, usually for six months.

Training is provided to all employees, through career development paths, and there is a very active internal jobs market within the company. A special training module is available for all managers to increase awareness about the potential of diversity for the company and to enhance their diversity management skills. The company has also appointed 'diversity inclusion champions'.

Flexicurity dimensions

This section attempts to show how the company-level measures described above can contribute to both the security and flexibility dimensions of labour markets

Tables 7 and 8 below show standard measures for women in the Czech Republic and Italy.

Table 7: Flexicurity analysis of the measures in the Czech Republic

	Income security	Job security	Employment security	Combination security
Numerical flexibility (external)		Part-time work	Part-time work	Flexible working Fixed-term contracts Seasonal work
Numerical flexibility (internal)				Flexible working Time banking Flexitime Part-time working Workplace childcare facilities
Functional flexibility		Job rotation Training and educational measures	Job rotation Training and educational measures	
Wage flexibility				Time banking Flexitime

Table 8: Flexicurity analysis of the measures in Italy

	Income security	Job security	Employment security	Combination security
Numerical flexibility (external)				Reduction in working time and recruitment of new employees (trained by existing employees)
Numerical flexibility (internal)		Training after maternity leave Training, education and development measures	Training upon returning from maternity leave Training, education and development measures	Working from home Job-sharing Flexitime Discounted laundry and shopping services Company childcare facilities over holiday periods
Functional flexibility		Training upon returning from maternity leave	Career development programmes Training after maternity leave	Job-sharing
Wage flexibility				Opportunity to switch from full-time to part-time work for a temporary period

Flexible work organisation

Introducing flexibility in organising work is one of the most powerful tools for meeting the needs of both employees and employers. Flexible working arrangements can offer considerable combination security to employees as if they are voluntary, they can allow individuals to balance work and private lives, including family and caring commitments. These measures also offer internal numerical and functional flexibility to the employer.

Among all the company cases studied here, flexible working arrangements are systematically present, even if their nature and significance vary.

There are at least two patterns in working time: companies either offer working time flexibility for all or develop specific measures to address the issues women, specifically mothers, face while trying to stay in or re-enter the labour market. Moreover, some companies have a limited range of measures whereas others offer a wide range.

IBM offers working time flexibility to all its employees through its 'Flexible Office scheme'. In particular, the flexible working and working from home measures allow employees to combine work with private life and particularly with the responsibilities of caring for children. In a similar way, Thomayer's University Hospital also offers employees a broad range of flexible working measures. It should be noted that the labour market situation of nurses is rather specific in terms of a severe lack of qualified nurses (due to low wages, a long education, low prestige, high work demands and difficult working conditions, resulting in a westwards emigration). The hospital does not use fixed-term contracts to try to counter this – it tries to retain its staff and to redeploy them as necessary throughout the hospital, thus providing functional flexibility for the hospital.

Flexible working was offered to some extent by Lubiam in Italy by allowing white-collar workers flexibility in their start and finish times. This measure was reported to work well and is in fact essentially the only the measure that remained after the project at Lubiam, as it was not dependent on any state funding, merely requiring a modification of internal organisational elements.

On the other hand, by developing a targeted policy, Nestlé offers a range of measures that enable women with small children to return to work, such as flexitime, time banking and informal working time flexibility. These are supported by legislative provisions such as an employer being obliged to hold a job – equivalent to the employee's previous post – open for three years after parental leave. Nestlé Sfinx hours bank system allows employees to store overtime hours and either to take the time at a later date or to receive payment for the time worked. Employees can also take this time in the event of illness. Nestlé, on the other hand, operates a flexitime system for its specialised clerks, planners, maintenance supervisors and production supervisors. The company also operates a more informal system of working time alternations, under which shifts can be selected or swapped depending on need, for example to fit in with summer holidays, sick children or kindergarten closures.

There are also a range of flexible working time provisions at Thomayer's University Hospital, such as informal shift swapping and part-time working, aiming to help nurses to combine work with the care of a family of young children.

Moreover, some companies limited their offer of flexibility – such as Vodafone, which seems to propose some working time flexibility, although in practice it is said to be limited to an hour a day of flexible scheduling. Others display a wide range of measures to make work arrangements flexible. Lubiam, responding to workers' demands about reconciling work with family needs, developed the opportunity for the workers in the data processing department to work from home (although this measure was eventually abandoned when the workers no longer wanted it).

Some companies use part-time working arrangements to address the issue of female work. Despite part-time work not being widespread in either Italy or the Czech Republic, this is a significant measure regarding women in employment. Part-time working is common among female employees with family commitments, as it is assumed to offer combination security to employees, while also offering internal numerical flexibility for the employer.

In Italy, one of Lubiam's main measures supporting women's employment is allowing employees to switch to part-time working. The overall coverage of this measure was limited, as it involved 12 people (six switching to part-time work with six new workers being hired and trained) or 5% of the workforce. This measure allows female employees (essentially mothers) to increase their combination security and flexibility, but it also brings employment security for the temporary workers recruited. The company

felt that it was important to respond to the widespread demand among the workforce for part-time work and to provide a ‘stabilisation path’ for temporary agency workers already present in Lubiam.

As stated, Lubiam allows blue-collar employees to job-share, with the aim of increasing their combination security and empowering workers to self-organise their working time, under the supervision of the personnel office. To some extent, this was meant to ‘institutionalise’ informal practices developed autonomously by certain employees and supervisors, with a view to providing guidelines for the extension of such good practice. While there are problems relating to the informal nature of this measure, and the specific circumstances of individual employees, this measure nevertheless offers combination security to employees while offering internal flexibility to the employer, combined with some functional flexibility.

The part-time working option at Vodafone Italia is limited in that it reverts to full-time after six months, so that as many employees as possible can take advantage of this measure. While these restrictions place limits on its effectiveness in terms of flexicurity, it can nevertheless help to increase combination security for employees.

Part-time work in the Czech Republic is generally more difficult to achieve, due to the legislative framework. However, part-time working is offered to employees at Thomayer’s University Hospital. Nestlé offers a job rotation scheme and its ‘continuous excellence’ programme, which serves to increase the skills of individual employees. This means that individuals’ job security at the company is increased, as their positioning can vary; moreover their employment security will also be increased, as they (particularly the more highly skilled and managerial staff) will learn new skills that will enable them to find work more easily outside of the organisation. From the organisation’s point of view, the increase in employees’ skills offers functional flexibility.

Support measures

Various other measures help women – or workers with caring commitments – to stay or re-enter the labour market.

The provision of childcare facilities and services that are aimed at helping to care for children and the family in general can be an important component in increasing combination security. This helps the employer to attract and retain staff and can increase internal numerical flexibility.

Lubiam offers childcare facilities to employees during the Christmas and Easter holidays, a measure popular with employees. Lubiam has also recently financed a crèche near its Mantua plant which has reserved places for employees’ children, but also serves the wider community. Other practical measures introduced or in the pipeline at Lubiam include a discounted laundry service and shopping services for employees.

Vodafone Italia also offers childcare facilities. The company directly organises two company crèches, one in Milan and one in Naples. Employees can use these on favourable terms and with the assurance of covering their entire working time. The company has also signed agreements with private crèches to provide further childcare for its employees. As at Lubiam, Vodafone offers help with laundry and other child-related expenses.

The kindergarten at Thomayer’s University Hospital is considered to be a significant factor in attracting female employees. The kindergarten operates flexible hours, to help fit in with shift patterns.

Thanks to the kindergarten, we are able to retain the nurses who are already working with us. For example, after parental leave, they do not leave us, but return to work with us because they have an opportunity to use this above-standard employee bonus.

Head nurse, Thomayer's University Hospital

IBM decided against establishing a company kindergarten, partly because of relatively strict health and safety and other legislative requirements governing company kindergartens, but mostly because of a lack of interest among employees. Female employees said that it was easier for them to leave their children in childcare near their homes. However, the idea has not been completely ruled out as there are signs of new interest in this from the employees.

Pay arrangements can also contribute to flexicurity, mostly in terms of providing income security for employees. They can also sometimes be linked to improvements in functional flexibility for the employer, for example if pay systems are linked to multi-skilling.

Income security is ensured at Nestlé by trade union bargaining, which ensures wages do not fall below the regional average. The wage system at Nestlé also contains a component (up to 15% of pay) designed to reflect the ability to work with different machines and in different workshops. At Vodafone Italia maternity and paternity allowances have been increased.

Training and development measures

Training is one of the most highly rated measures for combining flexibility and security. Training can increase job security for employees, enabling them either to carry out their job more efficiently or to return to their job after an absence. Training, including multi-skilling and development measures, can also increase employment security for employees, as it equips them with additional skills. For the employer, training increases functional flexibility, as it means that the skills levels and opportunities for redeploying workers are increased.

Some companies develop general policies (for all employees) with an important gender dimension, such as diversity culture development and other gender equality policies.

Diversity training for managers is a key element of the career development measures offered at Vodafone to all employees. This takes the form of a special training module for all managers to increase awareness about the potential of diversity for the company and to enhance diversity management skills. Other more specific targets are then identified at national and local levels. Other, local, initiatives concern internal campaigns to spread a diversity-friendly culture. This is crucial to ensure that line managers accept the company's vision and implement the measures fairly. Vodafone also appoints diversity inclusion managers, whose training includes the same flexicurity elements as the diversity training for managers.

Vodafone Italia mainstreams its gender equality and equal opportunities policies in its recruitment and selection process, both internally and externally. This refers essentially to the need to have female candidates in selection procedures who will be assessed and possibly chosen on merit. There is no quota, but the aim is to make every effort to improve gender balance at all levels, including senior management.

Nestlé offers a range of measures through its 'Continuous Excellence programme', but also gives the employees a degree of combination, job and employment security. The company hopes these

will ensure employees are involved in the running of the organisation as an entirety rather than one particular section. The company's Continuous Excellence programme, as stated above, centres on four principles of quality standards and is based, to a certain extent, on the participation of all the company's employees. However, only production and maintenance supervisors have so far participated in the problem-solving projects that make up part of the initiative. The introduction of this section of the programme at the level of production operators was planned in 2011. This will mean the selection of five operators charged with their own projects, which they will learn to lead from the beginning up to the presentation of the results. The knowledge acquired through this process increases the value of the employees on the labour market, which ensures the employees' cooperation.

IBM's training measures and its 'Taking the Stage programme' provide the same type of functional flexibility and job and employment security as Nestlé's Continuous Excellence Programme. IBM offers a range of training and development courses to its female employees through the 'Taking the Stage' initiative, run by its Women's Leadership Council. The council helps women to access more senior positions and supports their professional development.

In a more traditional use of training processes, Thomayer's University Hospital offers rotation between wards, enabling staff to gain additional skills and experience. Overall, it is not common practice in hospitals for specialised nurses to stand in for nurses with other skills. However, the hospital has not entirely ruled out cooperation of this nature between wards with a related specialisation, and may implement it where there is a temporary lack of personnel. This type of help is more frequent between the outpatients department and wards of similar specialisation. However, in order to cover sudden absences, a team of 'flying nurses' operates throughout the hospital, substituting for colleagues in cases of holiday or illness. This appears to work well.

Job rotation around wards provides for some functional flexibility within the hospital, and may also provide job and employment security for the nurses, as they gain extra work experience and are therefore more easily deployable or employable in other organisations.

Moreover, ad hoc training has been developed in some companies taking into consideration the specific needs of women/parents /carers. Women returning to work from maternity or parental leave, may find that their skills are out of date, particularly if their job is in a fast-moving sector or occupation, such as information technology. Training to help these individuals reintegrate smoothly can therefore be very helpful, contributing to job and employment security for the employee, as they have an opportunity to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to return to their job and perhaps to move around more widely in the labour market. For the employer, the benefits are internal numerical flexibility, and possibly functional flexibility.

Lubiam has carefully identified the needs of women in this position with the help of a special training team. Moreover, the tutor responsible for the re-entry of workers has also been trained on reconciling work and family life, thereby contributing special organisational know-how. This measure offers both job and employment security to the employee.

Vodafone offers re-entry training for all employees returning after a long absence. As with the Lubiam measure, this measure increases job and employment security for the employee, and internal flexibility for the employer.

Background

Triggers for the measures

The most important trigger for introducing measures targeting women is the need for companies to retain and/or attract a skilled workforce which, in some sectors, is mainly female, such as the health sector in the Czech Republic, where it was deemed vital to attract and retain staff (other than doctors), the majority of whom are female.

Another important motive for employers to devise specific measures to help women to return to work, to remain in the workforce and to advance in their career is to combat the negative impacts employment organisation can have on family commitments. For example in Lubiam, one main trigger, in addition to trying to improve working conditions in order to retain its predominantly female workforce, was to decrease absence levels.

It seems that of the three vulnerable groups examined in this report, the trigger for measures to help women is the most clear-cut: employers need the skills, expertise and experience of female workers and will therefore devise solutions to help them combine work and family life.

Furthermore, companies can adopt a more holistic approach developing a broad diversity policy including gender issues. At Vodafone, it could be argued that the company has gone a step further and embraced diversity generally and gender equality in particular. This is based on the belief that a diverse organisation will better enable the company to respond to the needs and demands of the market and its customers.

Social dialogue aspects

First of all, there are companies where trade unions are present and the relationship with management is reported to be good. This is generally the case with companies from the Czech Republic. Within the Nestlé Česko company there are two active basic trade union organisations, of which one is active in Nestlé Sfinx. Both parties, namely the trade union chair and the HR Manager of the Sfinx plant, see their relationship as cooperative and better than average. Similarly, Thomayer's University Hospital has two operating trade unions. The management and the trade unions inform each other on upcoming changes and proposals at quarterly meetings. Other meetings are arranged as needed.

Secondly, there are companies where employees' representatives not only exist but have played an active role in the implementation of the measures devised. This is mainly the case with the Italian companies.

At Vodafone Italia, trade unions, such as Slc-Cgil, Fistel-Cisl and Uilcom-Uil, are well represented in terms of numbers of organisations and density (21.1% in 2010, up from 18.7% in 2009). Interestingly, a number of measures introduced at Vodafone were based on collective agreements signed between the social partners, such as:

- the special shift system for working mothers;
- the possibility of switching to part-time working on a temporary (usually six-month) basis;
- the extension of the maternity allowance.

At Lubiam, the social dialogue arrangements comprise a joint trade union structure (RSU) made up of five representatives – 3 Filctem-Cgil and 2 Femca-Cisl. There are frequent direct contacts between the CEO (who is responsible for negotiations, while another manager covers personnel management and administration) or the supervisors and the representatives. These contacts are mostly informal and concern essentially the solution of practical problems. In a more formal way, the project to implement the flexicurity measures was supervised by a steering committee comprising management and trade union representatives, plus the consultants who designed the measures and the provincial equal opportunity counsellor.

Some multinational companies, for example IBM in the Czech Republic, use ‘imported’ industrial relations traditions, and as a result there is no trade union present on the Czech site. There was therefore no formal involvement of employee representatives in devising the measures presented in this study. However, the company does have a range of employee associations, including the Women’s Leadership Council.

Links between the measures and other policy levels

First of all, it is important for companies’ initiatives to be able to develop in a favourable regulatory context. Regarding flexibility measures in general, companies in Italy can use a broader and more favourable regulation framework than in the Czech Republic.

Italy has a particularly favourable framework in relation to flexibility. The labour market has in recent years undergone a significant liberalisation, particularly in areas such as temporary working and fixed-term work. This had made it easier for companies to introduce flexibility measures. In the Czech Republic, certain laws hinder, rather than help, the introduction of measures facilitating women’s employment. Czech legislation does not recognise part-time working and the social security payments for this are disadvantageous for employers. Despite this, some of the companies in our Czech case studies have implemented part-time working, although there is still discussion surrounding the actual take-up of part-time working, where employees are dependent upon full-time earnings.

Turning to more specific issues linked to women’s employment, public support can be key. The Italian legislative framework is strong in terms of promoting the labour market position of women, especially in areas such as affirmative action, female entrepreneurship, equal opportunities and flexible working. Furthermore, as was the case at Lubiam, companies can use public subsidies, and engage with other interested local parties.

Lubiam applied for public funds to organise conciliation measures at company level. Since the preparation of the proposal presented a series of administrative and bureaucratic difficulties, Lubiam, together with a small number of other local firms, consulted the provincial equal opportunity counsellor, who hired a consultant to help Lubiam. This cooperation developed into a territorial agreement in 2007 between the local authorities, the social partners, the equal opportunity counsellor and the Chamber of Commerce to support the diffusion of equal opportunity practices in the Province of Mantua.

Nevertheless, companies can always develop ‘above standard’ policies. At Nestlé in the Czech Republic, it is evident that the company tries to make the best of national regulations. The company for example, implemented the relatively new hour-banking systems and permitted exceptions to the law, enabling consecutive employment contracts to be entered into for a fixed period. From the view of the technical and administrative staff at Nestlé, the possibility of using flexible working hours can be seen as an above-standard aspect compared to other production companies in the Czech Republic.

On the other hand, the company does not go beyond the state measures covering maternity / parental leave, such as parental allowance payment, maternity allowance, guaranteed job position during the maternity leave and parental leave.

Finally, it is clear that some companies develop a strong culture regarding specific issues and would implement their own policy in whatever regulatory framework their subsidiary is embedded. Multinationals in particular have developed initiatives that, as far as possible, they implement across borders. It could, for example, be argued that multinational companies, such as Vodafone, operate in their own human resources climate, offering measures that are, in many ways, standardised across borders and therefore, while operating within the Italian legislative background, have their own internal logic and structure. Vodafone's policy of mainstreaming all forms of diversity, including equality between men and women, cuts right across its operations, not only in Italy.

Similarly IBM, in the Czech Republic, offers measures that are greatly above average in both the sense of flexibility and the protection of employees, drawing upon the experience and practices introduced in other branches worldwide.

Issues and challenges

All of the case study organisations came across specific issues when trying to implement the measures.

General issues around work organisation

The implementation of policies depends on line managers accepting the process and applying policies fairly across all employees. A certain level of trust on the part of managers also has to be in evidence, particularly in relation to flexible working measures, where employees have more autonomy and might not even be working on office premises.

One significant issue that makes a clear difference is how much the flexibilisation of work organisation is embedded in company policy and therefore backed up at senior management level, as shown for example in the case of Vodafone and IBM.

At Vodafone, it is recognised that implementation of flexicurity measures depends on individual line managers. Indeed, some managers were reported to feel that the measures interfered somewhat with the everyday working arrangements at the company. Vodafone therefore gives cultural training on diversity to all managers, to ensure that they understand the importance of diversity, accept the company's philosophy and implement its diversity policies.

IBM's 'flexible office programme', including flexible working and working from home measures, has been in place for some time, although it is still evolving and developing. The flexible working arrangements system at IBM provokes a mixture of reactions among those involved, largely due to its reliance on permission from individual managers. Some of the female employees interviewed at IBM noted that initially the programme had a relatively cool reception, due to problems related to managers' trust in their employees.

I do not distinguish in my team whether the people work more from home or in the office, because with me it is more about their performance. If they fulfil their duties, then it is evidence for me that I should support them and further develop and try to promote their opportunities.

Marketing and communication manager/women's leadership council leader, IBM

Managerial employees were reluctant to admit that it would be possible for an individual manager to refuse requests to work flexibly. However, some female employees pointed to situations where this had in fact been the case. The employees who work at home said that they actually work harder at home, because they are keen not to lose the trust of their superior.

When I'm at home, I try to pick up the phone by the third ring, because I have the feeling that if I don't do that, they will suspect that I'm 'having a nap'. There is that responsibility.

Female focus group participant, IBM

However, the pressure from abroad for a greater use of the programme and for its incorporation into IBM's company culture was so strong that those with initial doubts later embraced the programme.

I have experience with a specific manager. At the beginning, he was very mistrustful of this and tried to say that I could [only] use the flexible office system one day every three months. He was exactly the type of manager who does not think you are working unless he can see you working. Under certain pressure to make more use of the programme, he was forced to provide his employees with days off and he gradually acquired the experience to see that they perform well and work [even if he cannot see them]. Now he is more open to it.

Female focus group participant, IBM

This reliance on the individual decision of the manager can be seen as a serious barrier to the successful implementation of this measure, if the manager does not trust employees to work when not on company premises. However, the transfer of positive experiences from other countries and the pressure of international head office for the expansion of this programme has had a great influence on dispelling initial doubts.

In other companies flexibility measures are still on an informal level.

Nestlé Sfinx in the Czech Republic operates a more informal system of working time alternations, under which shifts can be selected or swapped depending on need, for example to fit in with summer holidays, sick children or kindergarten closures. This also appears to work well. However, the fact that this informal system relies on the willingness of managers to accommodate shift changes, and good mutual relations within teams, means that it could be subject to difficulties (although none of the informants in the focus groups for this study had encountered difficulties). Further, the lack of formal anchoring of this flexibility can be potentially stressful for employees.

For example, one employee described a situation in which, after her children began attending kindergarten, she had to deal with their frequent illnesses through repeated requests for working time adjustments.

I'd got used to it and grandma had already retired, but the first year [was] a disaster; I was worried about what would happen, the children were ill all the time and I didn't know what to do ... I went home twice a week and expected to be given notice.

Female focus group participant, Nestlé

The main barrier to the successful implementation of all the flexible working measures at Nestlé was reported to be the attitude of some managers, who are nervous about allowing employees to work from home or to work flexibly. In addition, Nestlé found that some highly qualified positions with

managerial demands cannot be worked flexibly, and so it is possible that some skilled employees will be transferred to a position with lower demands if they want flexibility.

However, this system is viewed as too difficult to be formalised; one argument being that ‘production cannot be stopped’. Therefore, it will continue to depend on the willingness of employees’ direct manager and whether they can meet the requirements of individual employees.

Informal arrangements

Many flexible working practices rely on informal arrangements made between individuals. This can work well, in that those concerned can agree on working patterns that suit their particular circumstances. However, there can be issues related to reliability and the possibility of replication of arrangements.

Thomayer’s University Hospital is a positive illustration of the use of these arrangements. Informal working time flexibility arrangements are in place in the form of shift rosters that can be rescheduled on an ad hoc basis, according to the needs of medical staff (such as illness, the need to care for a family member, or the need to participate in training). It was felt that this type of informal arrangement was indispensable to the smooth functioning of the shift system where employees with children are involved. The employees appreciate this. One female employee, who is a single parent, brings up her son in alternating care with the child’s father. Her shifts are mostly during the week when her son is with his father, and she has free time when her son is with her. Other interviewees for this project appreciated the shift system as, if a child is ill, they do not have to take time off on sick leave to look after them.

Nevertheless, this unofficial working time flexibility can cause problems in terms of breaking up regular work teams. It can also cause discontent among employees without children, or those with older children, who feel that they are bearing the brunt of other employees’ needs to take time off.

For example, at Nestlé, there were a variety of opinions on the company’s job rotation scheme. Many employees who work in this way report that they feel uneasy when rotating among production lines. They also felt that they can be more easily substituted by other employees, because many other employees have their skills. However, the trade union representative at the company stated that this measure provides job security to employees, due to growth in production volume.

The situation at Lubiam highlights some limits of informal flexibility arrangements. The company introduced a measure allowing employees to job share and to organise their tasks and working time informally on an autonomous basis. Here, however, the necessity of finding a particular combination of needs that can be satisfied by the fixed morning-afternoon part-time structure as well as the degree of trust and cooperation required for self-organisation have proved quite hard to meet. When the workers chosen to take part in this aspect of the project found themselves facing situations such as maternity and retirement, it was immediately clear that replacements were not easily available. Eventually, after a review, a system of ‘informal pairs’ was set up, but the peculiarity of each case and the time consuming process of forming such pairs make the aim difficult to achieve.

Issues around part-time working

Part-time working is a core element of measures designed to help women to combine work and family life. However, the legislative framework can play an important role.

Part-time working is comparatively rare in the Czech Republic, but Thomayer's University Hospital offers this to employees, even though it makes shift planning more difficult. Employees can choose the working hours that suit them. However, the volume of part-time working has caused problems in terms of shift planning and some of the head nurses believe that the number of employees working on a part-time basis is excessive. The hospital plans to make an effort to employ more nurses on a full-time basis. The hospital's chief nurse states that for organisational reasons the hospital is considering measures curtailing part-time employment. By contrast, the trade-union chair believes that the management does not see any problem in the number of part-time jobs and the trade unions do not have to take any action in this regard.

At Nestlé, due to the nature of the work in the production process, shift-sharing appears to be the only way of introducing part-time work, although there were different views of the issue of part-time jobs. While management see the part-time jobs as impossible for the production process, the trade union chair thinks that it could be possible to establish positions in the company that would make the part-time jobs possible. The all-female production-line employees stated that they would welcome the existence of such a workshop, but they themselves would probably not take up any offer of working part-time as they depend on their full-time income.

At Vodafone Italia, one measure offers women the opportunity to switch to part-time working for a fixed term period (usually six months). The measure was made temporary to enable as many people as possible to benefit and to allow a certain 'turnover' among potential beneficiaries. However, the duration is now considered too short for workers to take advantage of it effectively. While it is clear that part-time working allows workers more power in combining work and their private life, switching back to full-time working requires employees to then 're-engineer' their arrangements and often entails significant costs, especially if basic needs (especially responsibilities of care) have not changed. Moreover, the queue system at Vodafone Italia, which gives priority to those who have not yet benefited from the measure, increases the probability that the present beneficiaries will have to give up part-time work at the end of the term. Therefore, the relative uncertainty linked to the temporary assignment can discourage requests.

At Lubiam, employees and union representatives particularly appreciated the measure enabling workers to switch from full-time to part-time working. Although the measure enabling employees to work from home was taken up at first, the policy was discontinued as employee needs changed. The measure relating to flexibility in terms of start and finish times for white-collar workers was easily and fully implemented.

Issues around training

Training is a key flexicurity measure and one that is vital to women's development, both within the workplace and in terms of re-entering the workplace after a break for caring responsibilities.

IBM's 'Taking the Stage' initiative was very much appreciated by its female workers. However, women said the main barrier to taking part was a lack of time, particularly for women with small children. In this respect, there has been some criticism of the Taking the Stage programme in that it does not include a European context of working habits at national level. This could be an inevitable consequence of a centrally driven corporate culture, but could be resolved, at least partly, by using local instructors who would be able to share their own experiences of the local context with programme participants. Further, some of the time demands associated with training courses can be resolved by conducting much of the educational programmes online, which eliminates the need for travel.

The Nestlé Continuous Excellence programme is reported to create a certain tension between the workers, who consider the quality of products to be a priority, and the company leadership, which is concentrating on aspects such as work safety and other production-related issues. Attempts to fulfil the programme's criteria and maintain product quality is reported to have increased employee stress and workload. The company does try to motivate employees to take part in the programme by paying overtime for participation.

Thomayer's University Hospital organises a range of educational activities, ranging from statutory lifelong learning for medical personnel (not doctors), to retraining courses and voluntary training on a range of healthcare topics. Lifelong learning at the hospital includes seminars, training events and conferences, specialised studies, certified courses and professional internships in accredited healthcare facilities. Courses specifically aimed at women include a course entitled 'innovations in nursing care', which is run for women returning from parental leave after more than five years. One of the main issues that the hospital has with training measures is that, because there is a statutory obligation to participate in lifelong learning, many nurses try to reduce educational activities to the minimum required. It is also reported that employees often do not attend the courses for which they register.

At Lubiam, the company provides specific and targeted re-entry training to employees following a break for maternity leave. The company has tried to formalise existing practices, and although the measure is deemed to be well-run, it does not appear to be popular among the workforce.

Vodafone Italia also offers re-entry training to all employees who come back to work after long absences, including maternity leave. Training and career development is also offered to all employees, 'mandatory' courses linked to a worker's specific position and 'on demand' courses (up to one training day per year) chosen by the employee (and approved by their direct manager), with a mid-year employee – manager joint evaluation. There is significant opportunity to move jobs within the company at Vodafone. Nevertheless, it was reported that the pressure of targets, performance evaluation, and workloads are a common feature of all Vodafone jobs, so that individual circumstances, beyond the statement of the company willingness to value diversity, cannot always be taken into consideration.

The lack of progression opportunities could stifle motivation to pursue further training. This issue has been raised at Nestlé as many workers say they do not have the opportunity to develop their career and that the company training is not something that could help them. Commonly, the only way to progress, according to employees, is to replace the current supervisor. There was also a feeling among production operators that the skills that they acquire are company-specific and could not easily be transferred to another workplace. Many courses, such as English courses, are usually organised for office employees and management only. Some of the production staff felt that they should also be offered further training in skills not directly related to their work.

Summary and intergroup comparison

This section provides an overview of the main measures for each of the vulnerable groups studied and an intergroup comparison.

Young workers

For young workers, the main challenge is gaining the level of qualifications and skills necessary to gain a foothold in the labour market. The training and apprenticeship measures embedded in special contractual arrangements are therefore at the heart of the flexicurity measures introduced for this group by the companies studied here.

Of all the vulnerable groups of workers presented here, young workers have been the first and hardest hit by the crisis. In many EU Member States, youth unemployment rates have reached levels far above the national average and, in some cases, are well above the usual youth unemployment rate. Difficulties in finding work are not only a problem for unskilled and unqualified young workers, but also extend to those with tertiary education. This means that gaining a first experience of work is crucial. However, young workers are caught in the trap of needing work experience to be able to find a job, and as they cannot find a job, they are not able to gain the necessary work experience.

The measures outlined in this study do seem to address this issue to a large extent. The apprenticeship schemes offered by the UK companies provide the necessary on-the-job training and experience, combined with theoretical instruction, that enable young workers to feel equipped and confident enough to function in the labour market. These measures provide a high degree of employment security, as they usually result in the acquisition of a nationally recognised and therefore transferable skill. The experience of the French companies is similar, in that the training contracts they offer provide young workers with similar levels of recognised skills and qualifications, in addition to work experience.

Overall, the measures presented here for young people improve job security (particularly where young people are subsequently hired by the training firm) and employment security. Training and apprenticeships under special contractual arrangements also offer external numerical flexibility to the employer in that the organisation is able to easily vary the size of its workforce depending on particular circumstances.

Older workers

For older workers the main issues are confidence, having up-to-date skills (particularly in IT), and diminishing performance and physical health particularly linked to specific occupations. Moreover, employers have negative perceptions about hiring older workers. Companies researched here, however, offer flexicurity measures addressing training, confidence-building, health and wellbeing, reactivation measures, job rotation, multi-tasking or more job autonomy.

The measures outlined in this study address the challenges faced by older workers to a large extent. Health issues, particularly in the case of physically demanding jobs, have been addressed successfully by companies modifying working time, the organisation of work and work location, and providing health measures to support older workers. These enable the older worker to remain in their job, perhaps carrying out a different or modified function.

Combating negative stereotypes about older workers on the part of employers is arguably the most difficult issue to address, but the measures at Randstad have shown that it is possible to deploy older workers in user companies successfully.

Training, knowledge transfer, mentoring and forming age-mixed teams feature in almost all of the case studies about older workers. These measures all serve primarily to increase job security, while also increasing functional flexibility for the employer, by increasing the older worker's flexibility in job content and work organisation within the company.

Although job security is of primary importance for older workers, they also need some element of combination security, but from a different perspective than that of younger workers. They are not as likely to have responsibilities for caring for children (although some older workers care for their grandchildren), or for other family members. However, they may need more time off work in order to combine work and private life and recuperate from work. The health measures offered by Rasselstein can, for example, increase combination security as healthier workers need less time to recover after their shifts and therefore have more time for their private life.

Women

Despite decades of equality legislation, the fact remains that women still bear the brunt of domestic responsibilities, particularly when it comes to childcare, which can make it difficult for women to combine having a family with a career. Women also face specific issues related to returning to the workplace after a period away for caring (such as maternity leave, or caring for sick relatives). They may lack confidence, or they may feel that their skills are outdated in a labour market that has moved on without them.

Most of the measures for women described in this report, such as flexible working (telework, time banking or working atypical hours), part-time working or workplace childcare facilities have been devised to enable women to combine their work and private life more easily. While less common, it is worth mentioning that flexible working time arrangements for men, such as part-time working or paternity leave, are also relevant here, as they enable fathers to carry out their family responsibilities, which relieves the family burden faced by women.

Improvements in combination security and internal and external numerical flexibility are at the heart of the flexicurity measures offered to women. Measures aimed at enhancing work-life balance of women mainly improve their combination security, while increasing working time flexibility. This means an improvement in working time flexibility, as well external numerical flexibility for the employer.

The training and development measures that are offered to female employees in many of the case studies, such as training programmes after maternity leave (sometimes combined with reduced work hours), are important as they address many of the issues that women face: confidence when returning to work after a break, how to combine work with family and still build a meaningful career (on a part-time basis if necessary) and how to aim for senior jobs in an environment that may be male-dominated. These measures offer combination security, but also job and employment security.

The establishment of these measures was driven in many cases by a need, on the part of the employer, to attract and retain female workers with relevant skills in a tight labour market. In some cases, women deliberately applied for a job at a particular organisation because they knew about these combination security measures, which increases the pool of female candidates for the employer.

These measures are, on the whole, well-received, and enable women to continue to work, while also being responsible for caring for a family. Short of a wholesale change in societal attitudes, leading to an equal sharing by men and women of domestic responsibilities, these types of measures are probably the most that an employer can offer working women. In some of the case studies, however, the measures would be more effective if they were publicised to a greater extent within the company.

Table 9: Overview of the measures for young workers, older workers and women

	Income security	Job security	Employment security	Combination security
Numerical flexibility (external)	<i>Right to claim unemployment benefits while receiving training</i> <i>Right to claim unemployment benefits</i>	Part-time work <i>Re-activation of retired workers on the basis of part-time civil contracts</i>	<i>Acquisition of skills that allow workers to fit into different user enterprises</i> <i>Qualification/knowledge transfer</i>	Flexible working Fixed-term contracts Seasonal work
		Post-training employment offers	Special contractual arrangements with education and training measures	Reduction in working time and recruitment of new employees (trained by existing employees)
Numerical flexibility (internal)	Study grants	Training after maternity leave Training, education and development measures <i>Continuous shift system</i> <i>Flexible working time</i>	Training, education and development measures <i>Training after maternity leave</i>	Flexible working Time banking Flexitime Part-time working Workplace childcare facilities Working from home Job-sharing Discounted laundry and shopping services <i>Flexible working time organisation</i>
Functional flexibility		Job rotation <i>Transfer to different duties/locations</i> <i>Flexibility of the content of work</i> <i>Education, training and coaching/career development</i> <i>Mentoring, transfer of knowledge and information</i> <i>Age-mixed teams</i>	Job rotation <i>Training and educational measures/career development programmes</i> <i>Education, training and coaching/career development</i> <i>Mentoring, transfer of knowledge and information</i> <i>Promotion possibilities</i> <i>Age-mixed teams</i> <i>Coaching and mentoring</i>	<i>Reallocation of workers to jobs closest to their home</i>
Wage flexibility		<i>Trainees to alleviate staff workload</i> <i>Cuts in workload and pay in the case of ill-health</i>		Time banking Flexitime Opportunity to switch from full-time to part-time work for a temporary period <i>Re-activation of retired workers on the basis of civil contracts</i>

 Key: Measures for women (no formatting) / older workers (*italics*)/ young workers (**bold**)

Intergroup comparison

Although, as we have seen, there are very specific challenges for these three groups of vulnerable workers, there are also some significant overlaps in the challenges they face, and therefore some similarities in the measures they are offered. All three of these groups face difficulties, for whatever reason, in operating in the labour market. All have been specifically hit by the crisis, in terms of their labour market participation. And all need to ensure that their skills levels are current and high enough to allow them to move between jobs in a globalised economy that is characterised by change and restructuring, making a ‘job for life’ a thing of the past.

Training measures are therefore a common theme across all three groups. All of the case study organisations offered some kind of training and development to their vulnerable groups. Although the content was likely to differ according to the specific needs of the group, the training itself was perceived to be vital to the continuing development and labour market participation of these workers. It is worth mentioning that the older workers’ situation is pivotal in this regard. Training has been regularly associated with several other measures such as knowledge transfer, mentoring and mixed-age teams, bringing actions and policies targeting first older workers to a more global level as they necessarily have spill-over effects on other groups of workers.

Mentoring and coaching also plays an important role across the three groups. Young workers and older workers each can benefit from contact with the other in a workplace setting. Young workers benefit enormously from the mentoring and coaching that older workers can provide, not only on the technical or theoretical aspects of a particular job, but also in slightly less tangible ways, such as how to function in an organisation, how to read the organisational culture, and how to cope generally with the world of work. Mentoring is an important element of apprenticeships in the UK. However, at PSA Peugeot Citroën in France, the company acknowledged they needed to improve the ratio of mentors to trainees, which at the time was too low. For the older worker, mentoring and coaching of younger staff provides an important connection to the workplace, the recognition that their knowledge and experience are of value, and a feeling of wellbeing that arises from the fact that they are contributing in an active way to their organisation, or ‘giving something back’. Mentors interviewed at UK case study organisations agreed with this. At Telekom Slovenije, the mentoring works the other way round: younger workers act as mentors to older employees who have been transferred to unfamiliar and often difficult and stressful call centre work.

Coaching and mentoring also plays an important role in the case of women. Many may be struggling with their own and others’ perceptions that they will not progress in their organisation or more widely in their careers while trying to combine work with a family. Coaching and development programmes, such as the ones highlighted in the case studies, can play an important role in increasing confidence, challenging perceptions and giving information, advice and guidance to both female workers and line managers.

Flexible work organisation is another common theme across all groups of workers, again serving different purposes. For women, flexible working is a lifeline as they are trying to combine work with family responsibilities. For older workers, flexible working means that they are better able to combine their work with their lifestyle and possibly health needs, through flexibility in job content and workplace design. For young workers, flexibility usually revolves around combining work with training and education, which are vital to a young person’s first work experience.

Impact of the crisis

The financial crisis of the past three years has had a major impact on the EU's economy and its labour markets. As the three groups of workers examined in this study are all classed as vulnerable, they are highly likely to have been hit hard by the crisis. Overall, young workers have borne the brunt of it, with youth unemployment increasing dramatically in many EU Member States. Older workers have suffered from an overall drop in employment levels, particularly male workers employed in the manufacturing and construction sectors, which have also been badly affected by the crisis. Women have also suffered, as the crisis has hit traditionally female industries too, such as retail, care and education. The current austerity climate in the EU will have a significant impact on employment levels in the public sector, including national and regional government, which employ a high proportion of female workers.

Impacts on flexicurity measures

The effect that the financial crisis has had on the flexicurity measures presented in this study is mixed.

In some companies, the recession has meant that the offer of measures can be increased. For example, Kent County Council has used the recession and resulting youth unemployment as an opportunity to recruit younger employees into apprenticeships and implement its other strategies to open up work experience and training opportunities for young people. At this organisation, the financial crisis has focused attention upon the needs of young people struggling to gain a toehold in the labour market and this has led the council to introduce the Vulnerable Learners apprenticeships, which aim to support some of the most at-risk young people in its community. It should be stressed, however, that at the time of the case study, restructuring in light of the public spending cuts was at an early stage. It may be the case that there are fewer apprenticeships in future, or less opportunity to support supernumerary or vulnerable learner apprenticeships in the longer term.

At Rolls-Royce, the crisis has meant that it has become harder to place apprentices in permanent positions after the end of their training. In response to this, Rolls-Royce has introduced a nine-month paid extension period for apprentices who cannot find a position in their business area. During this time, apprentices have the opportunity to try out new business areas and to develop new skills. If they then find a position in the company, they will receive back pay for the difference between their apprenticeship pay and the wage for the permanent position. However, it should be noted that the crisis was not the sole trigger for this change – prior to the recession, it had been decided that the apprenticeship programme would benefit from allowing greater movements of apprentices between business areas.

In Slovenia, the crisis made it necessary for Telekom Slovenije to reduce labour costs, and was therefore the trigger for the measures discussed here, including the transfer of workers from different departments to call centres. At the same time, the crisis is one of the main reasons why the company's overall strategy regarding age management has still not been implemented.

In other companies, the crisis resulted in a change of focus. For example, during the crisis, Randstad used the German short-time work scheme to increase massively the number of workers receiving training. This resulted in the retention of workers who would otherwise have been made redundant. Since no new hirings were made at Randstad during the crisis, programmes with a focus on integrating unemployed workers were temporarily stopped. As a consequence in October 2008, Randstad changed the focus of its training programmes to securing the employment of existing workers. In April 2009, training during short-time work started, partly funded by the employment agencies. In

several instances, the user companies laid off temporary agency workers, who were then taken into short-time work at Randstad, with a training course financed by the employment agency starting at the same time. A higher share of social security contribution paid by the employment agencies in these cases helped Randstad to retain these workers. While recruiting was re-started in July 2009, the tendency to invest relatively more in the skills of workers already ‘on board’ at Randstad continues today. Due to the crisis, there was also a change from expensive training measures to smaller training units (for example e-learning instead of full-time training courses). Since early 2010, the number of training courses has been increasing. However, public funding for some of the measures declined, because the employment agencies had to divert resources to other programmes.

In other cases, there has been no particular change in flexicurity measures as a result of the crisis. For example, as seen above, compared to other companies in metal manufacturing, Rasselstein in Germany was not as seriously affected by the crisis. However, due to the fact that the company already has a very high rate of employees in further training – every day 2%–2.5% of the workforce are in further qualification – Rasselstein did not use the crisis to promote more qualification measures.

At IBM, in the Czech Republic, the company has not restricted any benefits, although employees felt that there was a considerable reduction in the level of training events abroad, in addition to a reduction in the number of internal and external events, which now take place only when justified and approved by the headquarters in the US. Another consequence of the crisis at IBM was the lack of availability of part-time work, even though the organisation wanted to offer this to its employees. The crisis also led to the company cutting some benefits for employees, such as contributions towards the cost of an internet connection for those working at home.

At Nestlé, in the Czech Republic, the fact that the company is based in a region with a relatively high unemployment rate, which has grown higher as a result of the economic crisis, has meant that the company does not feel the need to proactively implement measures increasing the flexibility of their employees in terms of part-time jobs. Therefore, the company is not increasing the offer of shared jobs, which are disadvantageous for the employer in financial terms.

At Thomayer’s University Hospital in the Czech Republic, due to the fact that it offers training to external trainees and thanks to funding from the ESF, the hospital has been successful in financing educational activities during the crisis, when the volume of subsidies from the national budget decreased. Due to the tight labour market for nurses, it can be concluded from this case study that the economic crisis resulted, ironically, in a certain stabilisation of the situation, since hospitals can recruit nurses who found jobs in other branches during the economic boom and subsequently lost their jobs during the crisis.

Overall, there does not seem to be a great change in the measures implemented as a result of the crisis. Measures are sometimes curtailed slightly, or in some cases enhanced, as a result of the crisis. One exception is at Nestlé, where the HR representative charged with education indicated that the crisis had been the reason for the limitation of training in soft skills: the company decided instead to focus more on the processes and skills associated directly to the quality of the production itself. This indicates a move away from training associated with employment security, to training more narrowly focused on job security.

Conclusions

7

This chapter offers some overall conclusions of this project and, where relevant, conclusions that relate specifically to flexicurity in terms of young workers, older workers and women.

Business environment

The first prerequisite for a company measure to perform well is a solid business reason for implementing it – without it the measure is unlikely to get off the ground. Often, the main reason is to diversify the current workforce. The impetus for an organisation to offer flexicurity measures for younger workers is often the need to balance its age profile, and a desire to grow its own talent, thus avoiding costlier recruitment exercises. This is particularly so in the case of smaller companies operating in areas of the labour market or locations that are deemed to be relatively unattractive. In the case of older workers, the driver is often the fact that the organisation relies on the expertise of its workforce and therefore needs to put into place a series of measures that ensure they can carry on working. In the case of women, the main driver is a strong desire to attract and retain female talent in a tight labour market – the employer will therefore put into place the measures that the female workforce require in order to become an employer of choice.

Nevertheless, the role of the environment as an enabling or hampering factor for the development of company measures is very important; some companies may put forward flexicurity measures despite restrictive national regulations. The company-level measures all operate within national contexts in the areas of labour market policy, legislative framework, lifelong learning policy and collective bargaining framework and traditions. These elements play a role in shaping company policies, either by helping them or in some cases hindering them.

The legislative framework determines key aspects such as the availability of contractual arrangements or working time arrangements, which may affect the success of flexicurity measures put forward by companies. If the legislative framework is disadvantageous, for example, this may stymie the growth or workability of a particular measure. An example of this is the Czech Republic, where the legislation is not conducive to part-time working – it is disadvantageous in financial terms for the employer – and so, for the moment, part-time work is unlikely to grow in this country. Another example of this is Slovenia, where early retirement has been encouraged by legislation, leading to a situation in which companies seldom view the retention of an older workforce as necessary.

Funding from the state or other external sources tends to be an important element of many of the measures presented here, particularly training. In the case of young workers, for example, it is important that external funding exists, particularly if local external training providers are involved. Governments and social partners should try to ensure that the appropriate financial support is available and that information about this is clearly disseminated.

Company size

Another important influence is the company environment itself. The multinational companies in this study, such as those in the Czech Republic and Italy, had measures in place that were rooted to areas in their corporate policy such as diversity and gender equality. These corporate policies would then be translated into local policies, independently of the national framework. It could be argued that company culture and policy framework in the case of large companies is a more important influence than the national framework within which the company operates. Additionally, large companies

are more able to offer flexicurity measures related to internal mobility, job sharing and rotation or flexibility in job content and working time arrangements.

SMEs, on the other hand, face specific problems when trying to implement flexicurity measures. This study has shown several SMEs taking a very targeted approach to their measures. Small companies have narrower internal markets, have less money to spend on human resources management and may have problems recruiting qualified staff. They may find it difficult to offer training because of the cost, or may not be able to offer flexible working time schemes and re-deployments due to their small internal markets. However SMEs can, for example, offer work organisation measures without major financial implications. Additional support can also be given to SMEs by the state, social partners and through collective bargaining, with specific territorial agreements (as is the case in Italy) or integration into supportive networks.

Involving employees

Although business reasons supply the main impetus for these measures, social dialogue at company level can smooth their implementation. The case-study organisations mostly have some type of formal employee representation arrangements, either in the form of trade unions or other types of employee representatives. It makes sense, therefore, for employers to consult with these representatives about planned measures, as they are best placed to know the views of employees about what type of measures will work and fit in with how they organise their lives. Further, if an employer consults the workforce, making them feel involved in the development and implementation of a measure, they are more likely to get support from their employees. There is little point in an employer trying to implement a measure which is opposed by the workforce. At Rasselstein in Germany, for example, the workers' acceptance of the measures was a major factor in their success. Here, management cooperates closely with the works council, with the council initiating several measures.

More formal consultation on the development, implementation and management of the measures could therefore serve to resolve some of the challenges and barriers faced by organisations, such as those faced in integrating young people into the workforce (PSA Peugeot-Citroën), and would also serve to ensure a wider knowledge (and hopefully, take-up) of these measures.

However, with some exceptions, such as the German case studies, employee representatives appeared to have relatively little concrete involvement. Lack of knowledge of the measures for older workers was an issue at Ljubljana Pharmacy, with employees stating that few people knew they had the opportunity to work in a pharmacy closer to their home, as there was no company system for disseminating the measures on offer.

Involvement of line managers

Some of the case studies, particularly those in the Czech Republic, but also at Vodafone Italia, reported that problems could arise when the implementation of measures depended on the attitude of individual line managers. This was particularly so in areas such as home or flexible working, where a degree of trust was necessary. Employees therefore complained that the application of a measure was not consistent across the whole organisation.

This was the case at IBM in the Czech Republic, where the company's programme of flexible working time depended on the decisions of individual managers. Even though it is company policy that the manager should endeavour to meet the needs of the employees in this respect, workers reported

that some managers did not trust employees to work away from the office. The HR department dealt with this by showing managers how well the system worked abroad. There was also pressure on the managers to comply from the company's international headquarters.

In order to counteract this type of differential treatment, companies need to train line managers in the measures that are offered and ensure that they are confident in implementing and applying these measures. Vodafone Italia is a good example of an organisation that recognises this. It carries out targeted training on diversity management for line managers, in order to increase their management skills and ensure that the company's measures are being implemented properly. In addition, at University Clinic Mannheim in Germany, significant focus is placed upon manager training, especially in the areas of communication and leadership skills.

Ensuring even application of the measures

When implementing a measure, it is important to ensure that it does not merely benefit employees who are aware of it and who can easily access it. This is particularly the case in relation to training, which can often be picked up by those who arguably are not most in need – such as staff or management who already have high levels of skills. This can lead to a situation where those with no, or low levels of, skills – are not receiving the training.

For example, at Rasselstein in Germany, one of the challenges identified by both managers and employee representatives was the fact that the health and working conditions measures were offered on a voluntary basis, which meant they were accessed by the most motivated, not necessarily those most in need. Employers therefore need to consider carefully the application of the measures that they are putting into place, to ensure that they reach all staff who need them.

Links between the groups of workers

There are connections and links that can be made between the three groups of workers examined in this study. In some cases, such as at Telekom Slovenije, the company shifted older workers to new duties in order to cut costs, which meant that it could dispense with its student workforce. This is probably the clearest example, in this study, of younger workers being displaced by older ones. There were some fears at Kent County Council in the UK that the recruitment of apprentices may displace existing staff in terms of their deployment and progression opportunities. The HR department was monitoring this issue.

By contrast, many of the case study organisations had schemes in place that were designed to enable different groups of workers to work together effectively and to learn from one another. Examples of this are to be found in the mixed-age teams in the German case studies, which enable knowledge transfer between generations. Other examples include the mentoring schemes in the UK and the French organisations, which enable younger workers to learn both practical skills and life skills from their older colleagues.

Addressing the needs of the target groups

It is clear that the three groups of workers examined in this study have specific needs when it comes to entering, remaining in and progressing within the labour market. These needs are in some cases distinct from one another, but in other cases they overlap.

The specific challenges faced by young workers centre on a need to develop their skills, qualifications and experience, and to avoid the situation of needing experience to find a job, but being unable to find a job without experience. For them, the measures presented in this research are largely focused on employment security and external numerical flexibility, which entirely correspond to the challenges that young people face. The crisis has affected this group of workers more than any other and national governments, social partners and employers should therefore redouble their efforts to try to offer young workers policies allowing them entrance to the labour market. The flexicurity approach provides a labour market foothold for young workers, and gives employers the opportunity of being able to train their future workforce and increasing external flexibility.

Older workers face challenges in keeping their skills up to date, and in countering employer perceptions that they may not be as capable, adaptable and flexible, or even as healthy, as younger workers. Older workers also face challenges in combining work and private life, particularly if they care for older family members or grandchildren. The measures therefore presented for them in this research are largely based on job security and functional flexibility. In policy terms, governments, social partners and employers need to work together to support companies in offering targeted training and skills development, improving working conditions for older workers and trying to combat negative views associated with them.

For women, the main issue is trying to ensure that family responsibilities do not undermine their labour market chances. The measures presented in this study are therefore based on improving combination security, and internal (and external) numerical flexibility. In policy terms, support for flexible forms of working including working time flexibility, telework or part-time working, should be developed and enhanced, particularly in terms of a strong enabling legislative framework, regulating issues like childcare provision or parental leave. In order to support a culture change in terms of gender roles, flexible working and work-life balance options should also be promoted for men.

The company-level measures presented in this research may be considered as flexicurity measures since they address either or both security and flexibility. There are, in all cases, sound business reasons why organisations have implemented these measures. However, their effect is also to increase security and flexibility in several ways for the target group of workers.

This research was aimed at offering an overview of the measures put forward by companies which could be considered as being flexicurity measures even if not deliberately designed or implemented as such. The study did not seek to find evidence regarding the success of such measures in improving the labour market attachment of vulnerable workers nor in the validity of flexicurity as a strategy for European labour markets. The basic purpose of the research was to map the range of measures developed by companies towards young, older and female workers, which may help them to access and progress in the labour market.

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Abstract

The aim of flexicurity is to improve employment opportunities for workers, while at the same time increasing flexibility, enabling organisations to adapt their operations and employment levels to business needs. The past few years have, however, been particularly challenging for European labour markets: the recent financial crisis and recession have had an inevitable negative impact on EU labour markets and unemployment levels. This has called into question the effectiveness of the flexicurity strategy in terms of supporting vulnerable workers. Eurofound research in six EU Member States analysed company initiatives targeting young workers, older workers and women. It shows that there needs to be a solid business case for the introduction of such initiatives and that social dialogue involvement increases the success rate. Drivers for success are a company's desire for maintaining and improving diversity of workforce, the company culture and the specific national, regional and local context in which companies operate.

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