



Working conditions and social dialogue

Conference report

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Introduction

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (‘Eurofound’), in cooperation with the Czech Presidency, organised a **conference** addressing the theme of working conditions and social dialogue in Prague on 22–23 June 2009. The conference aimed to present the findings of a report from Eurofound, *Working conditions and social dialogue – Findings, national frameworks, and good practice at company level*. The report tries to establish whether there is a link between working conditions and social dialogue and if workers covered by social dialogue have better working conditions. It analyses the role of social dialogue in the construction and healthcare sectors in Austria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Spain and Sweden. The six case studies underpinning the report indicate a link between effective social dialogue and better working conditions, a better corporate culture and enhanced flexibility in arriving at better solutions for all parties.

The report is also based on selected working conditions surveys in the six countries and on an analysis of the different national frameworks for social dialogue. The participants included more than 80 representatives from trade unions and employer organisations, public authorities, the world of research, and other interested parties from the 27 EU Member States.

Welcome

Mr Jean-Michel Miller, Research Manager, Eurofound, chaired the opening session. Mr Michal Sedláček, Deputy Minister for European Affairs, from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, welcomed participants to one of the last events organised by the Czech Presidency. He thanked Eurofound for its work and noted that the conference fitted the priorities of the Czech Presidency very well. He described social dialogue as a priority, with employers who look after their employees laying the foundation for good relationships. Social dialogue adds value, helping EU companies to survive in the current economic recession.

Social dialogue and working conditions

Mr Jean-Paul Tricart, Head of Unit, Social Dialogue and Industrial Relations, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, European Commission, regarded the conference as ‘important and timely’ given the Lisbon strategy for more and better jobs and the economic crisis. ‘I believe in social dialogue as a dynamic force but we need to better understand how it works.’ He was pleased the report highlighted how social dialogue can impact positively on working conditions and described social dialogue as a ‘win-win strategy’. He was confident that the conclusions of the conference would help to promote better jobs in Europe.

Ms Stavroula Demetriades, Head of Industrial Relations and Workplace Developments Unit, Eurofound, noted that since Eurofound was set up in the 1970s there have been improvements in the construction and healthcare sectors, such as improved health and safety, working hours and better pay. But she noted that 45% of construction workers still say their work affects their health and many retire with health problems. She concluded that the economic downturn provides ‘no excuse to allow the erosion of social cohesion’.

Session One: Key findings from the report

The first session looked at key findings of the report. Jean-Michel Miller **contextualised** the debate: unemployment had risen in the EU27 by more than half a million in one month alone, with 556,000 more people unemployed in April 2009 than in March 2009. Almost 21 million are unemployed in the EU27. In the 16 countries of the euro area, seasonally adjusted unemployment increased to 9.2% in April 2009 compared to 7.3% in April 2008. Output in the construction sector in the EU27 declined by 5.1% between April 2008 and April 2009 and by 4.7% in the euro area.

After outlining the various historical surveys that were examined, which he noted ‘told us there is a link between social dialogue and working conditions’, Mr Miller summarised that the aim of the project was to explore what link existed between them. ‘We wanted to push and deepen the nature of the links between social dialogue and working conditions,’ he said – specifically ‘Do working conditions differ on the basis of the presence or absence of social dialogue structures?’ and ‘How does social dialogue influence working conditions?’ Another intended outcome of the project was to show examples of good practice at company level within the construction and care sectors in the six chosen countries.

Author of the report, Mr Eckhard Voss, Researcher at Wilke, Maack und Partner/wmp Consult, presented the **key findings** of the report. Most of the case studies presented during the conference are of small and medium-sized companies. Key findings from the case studies indicate that social dialogue is an initiator and driver of improvements in working conditions. Social dialogue improves the workplace culture. Success factors include the active involvement of workers and management and a joint agenda and commitment by both parties. Negotiated and institutionalised structures or bodies prove helpful.

Mr Voss outlined the diversity of national framework conditions existing in the six countries, and throughout the EU27, and cautioned that this made comparisons between countries difficult. With regard to analysing existing surveys, he noted there were significant differences in their methodologies and objectives, and that this is very important to bear in mind when comparing surveys. Moreover, he noted, ‘No survey addresses our crucial research topic directly, namely how does social dialogue improve working conditions.’ In short, the case studies, rather than the empirical surveys, proved the most fruitful in establishing the nature and the quality of the link between social dialogue and working conditions.

Mr Peter Wilke, Researcher at Wilke, Maack und Partner/wmp Consult said there was a direct link between the flexibility of companies and their capacity to react to a crisis. ‘But we cannot prove this. There is a strong impression that from the case studies we can prove it but from the surveys we can’t.’

Session Two: Findings from working conditions surveys

Methodological aspects and findings of the report

Mr Voss presented the **key findings on the impact of social dialogue** from working conditions surveys. Mr Voss highlighted the positive impact of social dialogue on working time regulations, training for employees, measures for older workers, negotiated solutions in the workplace and improvements to health and safety. However, the precise role of social dialogue can be hard to assess from the surveys alone, with the differences in the surveys making comparisons difficult.

He noted that in the sixth Spanish *National Survey on Working Conditions* (2007) employees in enterprises with greater social dialogue were more critical about their working conditions and workplace health issues. He suggested that this may be due to workers becoming more aware through social dialogue of workplace risks and dangers. Meanwhile, in the Spanish *Survey on Quality of Life in the Workplace*, a clear correlation was found between the prevalence of social dialogue and training activities, with more frequent uptake of training and higher participation rates.

Mr Voss said that the existence of a works council or a collective bargaining agreement was very important. For instance, he presented findings from a special evaluation of the German IAB Establishment Panel Survey 2007, which showed the positive impact of works councils on working time flexibility (see Table 1).

Table 1: *The impact of works councils on working time flexibility: proportion of different forms of working time organisation*

	Entire enterprise population		Construction		Health care	
	With works councils	Without works councils	With works councils	Without works councils	With works councils	Without works councils
Work on Saturdays if needed	50%	48%	88%	73%	41%	63%
Shifting working times	47%	33%	42%	20%	66%	55%
Flexible working time for part-time staff	32%	19%	12%	8%	56%	40%
Working time corridors	16%	3%	4%	1%	18%	7%
Working time reduction for employment security	6%	2%	11%	5%	11%	2%

He also presented evidence showing that measures for older employees and providing training for workers were better in companies with works councils than those without.

National experiences of working conditions Surveys: France and Austria

Session Two continued with an exploration of the national experiences of working conditions surveys in Austria and France. First, Mr Hans Preinfalk, Head of the Communication Unit at the Chamber of Labour, Linz, Upper Austria, gave a presentation on what can be learned about the link between social dialogue and working conditions in light of the **Austrian Work Climate Index (WCI)**. The WCI tracks changes in work satisfaction and is the Austrian standard for work satisfaction.

Focusing in particular on one page of his presentation entitled ‘working conditions and social dialogue’ (page 18 of the online presentation), which considered factors such as management style and autonomy, Mr Preinfalk said: ‘In every case, [management style, relationships with colleagues, participation, autonomy] there are positive correlations between working conditions and social dialogue.’

He noted that women in Austria earn on average €420 less per month than men. Possible reasons include their shorter tenure, that they work in smaller companies, are younger, are less likely to be in managerial positions, work for fewer hours than men or suffer from unexplained discrimination.

Mr Nicolas Farvaque, Senior Researcher, *Conseil, Recherche et Formations en Relations Sociales* – ORSEU, gave a presentation on what can be gleaned about the correlation between social dialogue and working conditions from **working conditions surveys in France**. Having outlined three relevant surveys, and focusing mainly on REPONSE (*Relations professionnelles et négociations d’entreprise* or Survey on Industrial Relations and Company Bargaining), he concluded that it was hard to say, using the surveys alone, whether social dialogue had impacted positively on working conditions. Moreover, it was hard to match the different studies due to their different aims, methodologies, and the areas covered.

Mr Farvaque noted that the level of company-based negotiations on matters such as working time, job security and vocational training – but excluding wage negotiations – has increased significantly in a decade. Even in small companies, company-based negotiations about working conditions increased to 64% of establishments between 2002 and 2004, compared to 47% between 1996 and 1998. A quarter of companies signed agreements with worker representatives. There was a slight improvement in working conditions for some workers concerning matters such as time pressure, less night work, and greater work autonomy. However, according to the Working Conditions Survey 2005, blue-collar workers saw

their working conditions deteriorate – especially in the area of work intensity and physical demands, such as lifting heavy weights, and exposure to noise and vibrations; this tends to confirm Mr Farvaque’s conclusion that it is difficult to say from French surveys whether or not increased social dialogue alone has improved working conditions.

Session Three: National situations

Ms Hana Doleželová, Researcher, Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs, Czech Republic, began the case study section of the conference with a presentation on the construction company **Metrostav a.s.** A major construction company in the Czech Republic, the company is keen on improving working conditions. Its reputation is very good and it has received various awards or certificates and is recommended by the construction trade union, Stavba ČR. It was founded in 1971 to construct the Prague underground. It has expanded since then and has a turnover, doubled since 2001, of €800 million. Employing some 3,550 staff, it pays above-average wages – as much as 25% above the average wages for Czech construction companies.

There are almost no works councils in the Czech Republic, even though they are legal in the country. In Metrostav there is only trade union organisation, which negotiates for all employees, regardless of trade union membership. Some 25% of employees at Metrostav are trade union members. Trade union organisation is also active in some daughter companies of Metrostav.

The accident rate at Metrostav is one third the average rate in the rest of the Czech Republic. It also performs well in terms of overtime. It has a pension scheme and the company offers flu vaccinations to workers. When there are fatalities, the company gives financial support to the family. Challenges to the company include its high age profile, skill deficiencies among workers due to the closure of apprenticeship schools in the 1990s and a lack of access to email, making it more difficult for the company to communicate with workers.

A delegate asked if trade unions could influence the choice of sub-contractors. Ms Doleželová didn’t know if they could. Responding to another contributor from the floor, she reiterated that works councils were not common in the Czech Republic. Their role is not significant and they have lower competencies than trade unions. They may be found especially in small companies without trade unions.

Mr Voss gave the next presentation, a case study on a Spanish construction company. It was prepared by the Spanish **Labour Foundation for the Construction Sector/Labour Asociados Consultores**. In 2007 – before the current economic crisis – the construction sector in Spain accounted for 18% of Spanish GNP, compared to an EU average of 10.7%. Construction undertakings accounted for 14% of all Spanish registered companies in 2006. In 2007, the number of construction workers in Spain reached 2.6 million, more than 13% of the working population, compared to 7.2% in the EU. Some 21% of the construction workers in Spain were immigrants. Almost 50% of construction undertakings have only one self-employed worker or contract a single worker. As for collective bargaining, there is a general sector agreement at national level for the period 2007 to 2011, which regulates working conditions. There are also province-wide collective agreements and enterprise-level agreements.

Problems before the current economic crisis included difficulties in retaining a qualified workforce, work-related accidents, poor working conditions and a poor image of construction work. The Labour Foundation for the Construction Sector, a non-profit organisation, was created as a result of social dialogue. It aims to promote occupational training, improve safety and health, enhance employment and craftsmanship in construction, and increase the status of the job.

It has succeeded in raising by 121% the number of workers trained in the last five years. The proportion of foreign workers who underwent training rose from 2% to 11% between 2003 and 2007. There are 40 training centres across

Spain and online training participation is increasing. A professional card scheme was started in 2007, recording experience accumulated through work and training. It is regarded as a transparent indicator of skills and qualifications, as well as an assurance of health and safety competency. Already widely implemented among the various construction professions, the professional card will become compulsory by 2011. In short, the Labour Foundation for the Construction Sector has been ‘highly successful as a stable space for social dialogue born from social dialogue itself’, said Mr Voss.

The final speaker of the first day of the conference was again Mr Nicolas Farvaque who presented a French case study from the care sector, namely **Centre François Baclesse**, in Caen, Normandy. Established in 1947, it is a cancer therapy centre with private non-profit status. It is deemed of public interest and is part of the public health service and subsidised by the State. Its activities include surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy, care services and research. There are more than 200 beds in the centre. It employs some 850 workers, of whom 700 are full-time. Some 50 jobs have been lost since 2005 and a further 50 are expected to go by 2012.

Social dialogue revolves around a works council comprising eight elected members, elected workers’ representatives with 11 members, a health and safety committee of six members, and non-elected trade union representatives – two from each of three trade unions. Wages are decided by a collective agreement at national level. There had been recent litigation in light of redundancies but social dialogue has resumed. The workers’ representatives reported improvements in the last two years and said there is a real will to dialogue, listen and cooperate. For instance, the new Director comes to the meetings of the workers’ representatives. The current burning issue is working time and how it is calculated and organised. Other challenges include an ageing workforce and fewer employees. Three recent target areas for social dialogue were night work organisation, the need for better equipment and training, and working time arrangements. Workers wanted regular working rhythms and a rotation system. A new rotation system was agreed to the satisfaction of all concerned. Agreement was reached on how to improve working conditions through better equipment and training, helping in the prevention of musculoskeletal problems and lower-back pain. Finally, a new consensus was reached on working time arrangements.

In conclusion, employees and management are very satisfied with the new organisation of night time rosters. They deem it a win-win solution. More workers volunteer for work at night, there is less stress and tiredness, and better patient care. A budget was made available to acquire new equipment preventing musculoskeletal problems. Meanwhile, the new working time arrangements are being modified. Mr Farvaque mentioned that the role of trust between worker representatives and management was important in improving working conditions.

Some problems have been put on hold and remain unresolved, such as the issue of psychosocial hazards and problems caused by fewer staff. Financial constraints remain. Communication and training could be further improved. However, on balance, in this French case study of a care facility, there has been a clear improvement in working conditions brought about by well-organised social dialogue.

The second day of the conference resumed the focus on national realities and the case study findings on the impact of social dialogue on working conditions at company level, as evidenced by the construction and the care sectors. The first speaker was Eckhard Voss who presented two German case studies, **Brücke e.V. from the care sector and Freudenthal GmbH from the construction sector**.

Brücke e.V. is a medium-sized social care provider in Northern Germany. A non-profit organisation, it offers psychiatric services and non-hospital services in housing, living, work, employment, leisure, health and therapy. It has some 600 employees in 60 units in nine regional centres. One espoused value of its corporate culture is: *‘Those who support others should feel comfortable.’*

It has a works council, an occupational health and safety committee, special interest representatives for young employees and disabled workers and joint working groups on issues of common interests. Communication is seen as an early warning buffer and a way of motivating the workforce, providing stability and worker satisfaction. Specific challenges faced included working time issues caused by split working days, work-life balance, increased work-related stress, the constant need to restructure the company, retaining qualified workers, equality and integrating older workers.

As a result of social dialogue, the company achieved better holiday planning, an improved working time model, an effective conflict resolution mechanism and successful training initiatives. This led to greater work satisfaction, an improved quality of work and enhanced career prospects. Moreover, vulnerable groups such as older workers, trainees and disabled workers were better integrated. Success factors included a corporate culture with above average communication, consultation and worker involvement, mutual trust, institutionalised dialogue with binding outcomes, a culture of employee representation and ‘win-win visions’ of better work, better life and employee motivation, innovation and competitiveness.

The second case study, that of Freudenthal GmbH, a medium-sized construction company in the Rhineland with an espoused value of ‘*Better instead of cheaper*’, illustrated the positive outcomes of social dialogue. Challenges faced by the company included reducing accidents, increasing safety awareness amongst employees, implementing workplace risk assessment, delivering training and skills development in tools handling and machine operation, retaining a qualified workforce and improving the image of the industry.

Through social dialogue the company achieved fewer workplace accidents, better management of workers’ health, reduced absenteeism, enhanced worker satisfaction and the increased appeal of the company to qualified workers. Success factors included its corporate culture, mutual trust between management and workers, people adopting a win-win mindset, the competence and commitment of all sides, and availing of external support when required.

Eurofound’s work on working conditions and social dialogue

Next, Mr Herman Fonck, Chair of the Eurofound Governing Board, gave a presentation on **Eurofound’s work** with regards to working conditions and social dialogue. Social dialogue leads to a reduced gender pay gap, improved safety, fewer workplace accidents, more training opportunities, better salaries and less staff turnover, he said. Companies without social dialogue tend to be less compliant with safety legislation. Those not covered by social dialogue at company level, such as temporary agency workers and sub-contractors, were more vulnerable. Companies deficient in social dialogue also faced expensive litigation settlements compared to companies that resolve conflicts internally. Some 90% of cases for Belgian labour courts involve small and medium-sized enterprises lacking worker representation.

The empowerment of workers and social dialogue is the way forward, he said. It is part of the European model, a Treaty obligation and part of the Lisbon process. It is ‘more and more called upon at a moment of economic crisis’, he said. Insisting that social dialogue was here to stay, he called it a tool in tackling the crisis. He quoted from the Commission: ‘Employees’ representatives play a crucial role in the four main steps in restructuring processes, namely consensus-building, exploring all possible options before redundancies, giving personalised support to workers made redundant and involving external actors in the process.’ And he cited the ILO: ‘At the enterprise level, the exchange of information, consultation and collective bargaining are essential to avoid or mitigate the negative consequences of crisis-related developments.’ He argued that there is no need for complicated regulations; rather, it is sufficient to allow workers to elect a spokesperson and to allow a spokesperson free speech. The flow of information and communication should be uninhibited by excessive rules.

Turning to challenges facing Eurofound, he said one challenge is to explore the impact of EU Directive 2002/14 and 89/391. He said no research had been carried out or planned regarding EU Directive 89/391, on workers’ involvement in

health and safety arrangements in the workplace. As for the European Working Conditions Survey, he said there was as yet no effective way to get data about social dialogue at company level. Only indirect observations were possible about the link between social dialogue and working conditions. He said the European Company Survey had had a difficult start. Its first wave had ‘huge problems of non-response’ with ‘25% of non-response due to management refusals’. That Company Survey had ‘weak information on working conditions’. The second is on-going.

He called upon Eurofound to pursue the theme of working conditions and social dialogue and to invest in following up social dialogue developments, such as Directives 2002/14 and 89/391. He also called upon it to deliver material for European policy in pushing for more social dialogue at company level.

Session Four: Debate among the social partners and actors

Roundtable: European and international perspectives

The first speaker at the roundtable session was Mr Emmanuel Julien, BUSINESSEUROPE, Conseiller MEDEF and member of the Eurofound Governing Board. Mr Julien said that ‘win-win social dialogue’ was a tautology on the grounds that ‘there cannot be social dialogue without win-win’. He said social dialogue is a pillar of Western democracies. Social dialogue can improve social peace and reduce costs. ‘It can also fail because it’s a human attempt.’ He expressed reservations about the way the word ‘correlation’ is used by researchers: ‘It’s not like a chemical process where we isolate the influence of an element. Correlation is more than observing coincidences. To establish correlation we must go deeper in substance.’ He contested the view that any Member State belonged exclusively to any one industrial relations model. For instance, he said France appeared to belong to the Nordic area given its high rate of collective agreements yet, he suggested, it appeared to belong to the southern area of the EU when trade unionism is considered. ‘I would strongly argue against any country being regarded as belonging to any one industrial relations model,’ he proposed. In support of this contention he cited ‘hundreds of thousands of people moving around Europe’ influencing the countries they move to. CEOs and companies also move and ‘national systems are shaken’. Moreover, ‘individualisation is taking place, challenging all industrial relations systems. We must not underestimate this,’ he said, adding: ‘I think a European identity is emerging now, is being born. There are more works councils in UK and US companies. Researchers like to focus on differences between countries but our differences are narrowing ... We are more than 50 years since the creation of the single market. For most people, working conditions are seen as local but most often it comes from the EU.’

Next, Mr Erik Pentenga from the ETUC, Beleidsmedewerker/Policy Advisor FNV and member of the Eurofound Governing Board, gave a presentation on the **Dutch situation**. ‘We have a very strong social dialogue’ at all levels but ‘social dialogue at workplace level makes the difference for the improvement of health and safety’. Since 1999, the role of trade unions at sectoral level has increased through occupational health and safety (OHS) covenants, OHS collective agreements and sectoral level risk assessment tools. The OHS covenants led to negotiation on the reduction of the number of people at risk in high-risk sectors. Between 1999 and 2007, 69 covenants were agreed. For example, 20 OHS officers were appointed in the construction sector at workplace level, tasked with improving working conditions. However, he judged that covenants have not led to significant improvements in working conditions and that at shop floor level, the benefits have been limited. ‘Covenants are not legally binding – there’s nice talk with employers and then nothing happens.’ Unlike covenants, collective labour agreements are legally binding but only one third of 900 collective labour agreements refer to OHS. They focus more, for example, on sick leave policy rather than health and safety working conditions. New OHS legislation in 2007 opened the way for OHS catalogues, which are developed by employers and trade unions on a branch or sectoral level. They describe how employers can comply with broad target government regulations. They are a guide for employers and works councils at company level. Works councils influence health and safety policy through – for example – their rights to consultation, information or to consult the Labour Inspectorate. When works councils are involved in OHS matters, preventive measures increase. He concluded that ‘with good social dialogue at shop floor level, working conditions are better’.

Mr Youcef Ghellab, from the International Labour Organisation, presented **an ILO perspective** on social dialogue and working conditions. The debate is interesting and timely given the international jobs crisis and ‘the pressure to erode labour rights and working conditions’. There is increased poverty and ‘downward pressure to lower the bar on labour rights and working conditions’.

The ILO’s Decent Work agenda aims at sustainable recovery, seeking to promote ‘productive employment in conditions of freedom, security, dignity and equity’. In common with the Lisbon strategy, it seeks ‘more and decent/better jobs’. The ILO decent work indicators are similar to Eurofound’s index on working conditions. Social dialogue and international labour standards are central to achieving decent working, from the international to shop floor level. Social dialogue balances enterprise adaptability with preserving jobs and workers’ rights. Recent ILO studies confirmed the link between social dialogue and working conditions: for instance, the 2008 *Global wage report* showed that collective bargaining affects the level of wages and wage distribution, while *The evolving world of work in the enlarged EU* from 2007 showed that weak collective bargaining coverage led to poorer working conditions. The impact of social dialogue on working conditions depends on five conditions:

- the existence of independent, representative and strong social partners;
- the degree of cooperation between them, including mutual recognition and engagement in good faith;
- the supportive role of the labour administration including through a sound legal framework and effective law enforcement institutions;
- the existence of effective and integrated social dialogue institutions at national, sectoral, enterprise and workplace levels;
- practice and experience in the conduct of social dialogue.

Mr Petr Šimerka, Minister for Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Czech Republic, gave a closing speech on behalf on the Czech government in which he agreed on the need for social dialogue and recognised that decent working conditions are universally beneficial.

Working conditions and social dialogue: the European Commission’s view

EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Mr Vladimír Špidla, spoke about the European Commission’s view on working conditions and social dialogue, noting that the report upon which the conference was based would be useful for the Commission in improving occupational health and safety and working conditions. He noted that as recently as 2 June 2009 social partners had reached an agreement on the prevention of injuries from sharp objects. The agreement includes steps and training and is to be implemented across the whole EU community. This new agreement, said the Commissioner, shows the role of social dialogue in action.

He went on to talk about work-related stress, mental health and psychological risks at work, mentioning the 2007–2013 Community Strategy on Health and Safety at Work. The Commission has organised a conference in Brussels which will deal with health and safety in Belgium and the UK and some other countries. He said it is important for social partners to focus on the social and economic objectives of the EU. The EU Commission has a strategic role to play, he said. ‘Only a healthy social dialogue can ensure good working conditions, including in a recession. I very much welcome the report. It is a very important contribution to various policies.’ He also described the work of the European Industrial Relations Observatory (EIRO) as very valuable and he looked forward to the fifth European Working Conditions Survey. He concluded that when we try to describe the European social model, an effective social dialogue is a crucial part of it.

Concluding remarks

Mr Jorma Karppinen, Director, Eurofound, in his **concluding remarks** said that he regarded the conference as an ideal occasion to promote dialogue between research and policy-making. Eurofound with its tripartite structure is ideally placed to examine a topic such as working conditions and social dialogue and put it on the agenda. The conference was timely given the need for a European strategy and a shared commitment to employment at this moment of economic downturn. Its timing was also significant, coming almost exactly 20 years after the adoption of the framework Directive on health and safety at work in June 1989. That directive put prevention policies and employee information and consultation at the centre of its binding obligations.

Eurofound's work on social dialogue and working conditions complemented its earlier report from 2008, *Working conditions and social dialogue*, deepening its findings and providing information and in-depth knowledge, testing the hypothesis that working conditions are improved by social dialogue. 'Taking all the limitations of the exercise into account, it is fair to conclude from the survey findings that there is a positive correlation between improved working conditions and social dialogue.' Improved social dialogue may also go hand-in-hand with higher reported levels of workplace risks due to employees' better knowledge and greater awareness of risks.

He noted that the case studies highlighted the driving forces and success factors, namely, mutual trust, corporate culture, 'win-win visions', the competence and commitment of all parties, shop floor-level dialogue and external support. Workplaces need to take good working conditions seriously. Good working conditions and effective social dialogue contribute to a positive company image, enhance employee motivation and allow companies to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

Turning to future research challenges, social partners need scientific evidence to pave the way for their policy decisions. 'At Eurofound, working conditions and social dialogue are at the heart of our work: it is our core business.' Given the wide diversity of national working conditions surveys, the European Working Conditions Survey with its methodology and questionnaire is increasingly important. Another important challenge will be the new results from the European Company Survey, where social dialogue is a key research topic. A further challenge is the debate on the renewal of the Lisbon agenda, in which good working conditions and social dialogue in times of crisis are part of its strategy. Finally, the continuation of the research project on working conditions and social dialogue should see a report on the possibilities of the underutilised potential of social dialogue in the workplace, and how social dialogue can enhance motivation and contribute to the development of safer workplaces.