



Work organisation and restructuring in the knowledge society – WORKS



At a glance: WORKS

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Website: www.worksproject.be

Project coordinator

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Partners

HIVA-K.U.Leuven (BE), FORBA (AU),
WLRI (UK), FTU (BE), KEKMOKOP (GR),
University of Twente (NL), ISER (UK),
ISB (HU), ISF (DE), ITAS (DE), IET (PT),
IRES (IT), SINTEF (NO), ATK (SE), CEE
(FR), Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
(BU), NCRWE (DK)

Duration

June, 2005 - May, 2009

Strategic objective

Citizens and Governance - 2.1.3 Changes
in work in the knowledge society

Project identifier

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Funding

6FP Socio-economic Sciences and
Humanities

Budget

3.8 mio euro

WORKS is an Integrated Project with 17 EU and Accession State partners which investigates in a comparative perspective the major changes in work in the knowledge-based society.

Taking account of the global forces and of the regional diversity within Europe, the project investigates the evolving division of labour within and between organisations and the related changes at the workplace. The implications for the use of skills and knowledge, for flexibility and for the quality of work, as well as the impact on occupational identities, time use and learning of individuals are investigated in a comparative perspective. The role of the social dialogue and of the varieties of institutional shaping in Europe receive particular attention.



1. The main objectives and key issues

The WORKS project integrates knowledge on changes in work; analyses existing quantitative data on changes in work; carries out organisational case studies and qualitative research at the individual level; identifies relevant institutions and policy trends in the areas work regulation and industrial relations. Four thematic issues are at the core of the research:

- changes in work organisations from the perspective of global restructuring of value chains;
- changes in use of knowledge and skills and different ways of achieving flexibility;
- changes in the use of time and occupational identities and implications for the quality of life;
- the social dialogue and the regional institutional context.

The research covers the variety of European national economies, labour markets and welfare systems. Gender mainstreaming is included in all dimensions of the project.

2. Research plan and achievements


The research objectives are achieved through a comprehensive and coherent programme of research involving several disciplines (sociology, economics, organisation analysis, labour studies, psychology, gender studies, political science) and carried out by 17 expert research institutes from 14 European countries. WORKS encompasses four key pillars.

2.1 Theories and concepts

In the first phase of its work the WORKS partners collaboratively carried out a major review of the relevant literature in order to generate clear research questions to guide the empirical research to be undertaken in the second phase of the project. A series of papers were synthesised into a book, titled *'The transformation of work in a global knowledge economy: towards a conceptual framework'*. In addition a comprehensive *glossary* of key concepts of the project has been developed and published in a book and as a practical tool on the website.

In its final project phase a series of books will bring together all the results of the WORKS theoretical and empirical research around key topic areas, to make them accessible to a wide academic and policy audience. These reports will focus on:

- value chain restructuring in Europe in a global economy;
- changes in work organisation and representation at the workplace;
- strategies to reach flexibility in the organisation;
- global value chain restructuring and the role of knowledge and skills;
- new career trajectories and biographies;
- changing patterns of segregation and power relations in the workplace;
- working time, gender and work-life balance;
- changes in work in transitional economies;
- health, safety and the quality of working life; and
- employers' use of technology and the impact on organisational structure.



The project will also produce a working paper on change processes and future perspectives which will contribute to the development of future scenarios which will be published both on the project's website and in the form of a report.

2.2 Quantitative research

The 'Quantitative research' pillar of the WORKS project studied the changes in work in Europe on the basis of comparative analyses on data from existing organisation and individual surveys. For the organisation surveys, a thematic analysis of 13 major national and international organisation surveys, focusing on the major results with respect to the key issues of the WORKS project, has resulted in an overview report '*Comparative analysis of organisation surveys in Europe*'. The key issues of this report are: changes in work organisation; skills and internal labour markets; flexibility; career trajectories and the quality of the working life.

Another major activity was the organisation of a series of international expert workshop on 'Measuring changes in work by organisation surveys'. The first workshop assessed the different indicators used in organisation surveys to measure changes in work. The second workshop investigated challenges for the future of organisation surveys, such as the growing inter-organisational division of work and networking amongst organisations and the linking of employer and employee survey data. The final workshop brought together experts from several universities and from national and international bodies, such as Eurostat, National Statistics Institutes, the European Foundation in Dublin, the US Bureau of Labour Statistics, National Bank, etc. This workshop focused on measuring employment shifts related to global value chain restructuring and globalisation.

For individual surveys, three major sources of individual data allowed to carry out longitudinal and EU comparative analysis on the issues relevant for the WORKS project: the Community Labour Force Survey (CLFS); the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) and the European Community Household Panel (ECHP). Based on these three key data sources, four different reports were published, each focusing

on the EU comparative analysis and on the identification of trends with respect to key WORKS issues. A synthesis report, '*Transformation of work?*' brings together the executive summaries of the separate analyses. The reports are:

- 'The transformation of work? Tracing employment in business functions: a sectoral and occupational approach';
- 'The transformation of work? Trends in work organisation and working conditions';
- 'The transformation of work? Work flexibility in Europe: a sectoral and occupational description of trends in work hours, part-time work, temporary work, and self-employment';
- 'The transformation of work? Occupational change in Europe';
- 'The transformation of work? A quantitative evaluation of the shape of employment in Europe. Introduction and executive summaries'.

2.3 Qualitative research

The 'organisational' case studies within the WORKS project aimed to contribute to a better understanding of the impacts on employment and work of outsourcing, geographical relocation and other forms of value chain restructuring. The case studies covered a number of business functions (R&D, production, logistics, customer services and IT) in manufacturing industries (food and clothing), the service and the public sectors (software development, public administrations and public services). They represent a wide variety of activities and labour processes in the 'knowledge society' ranging from highly skilled 'knowledge work' to semi-skilled manual tasks. Each business function was studied in a range of countries with diverse employment and welfare regimes. Overall, 58 case studies were conducted in 14 countries. This approach allowed to analyse business functions as windows into value chain restructuring and to illuminate changes in the organisation of work within and between organisations. While focusing on the consequences of value chain restructuring on employment relations and day-to-day work practices, the report also captures

general current trends in employment and work in Europe. The results of the comparative analysis of the organisational case studies are published in the book *'Restructuring across value chains and changes in work and employment - case study evidence from the Clothing, Food, IT and Public Sector'*.

The final synthesis report of the workpackage on occupational case studies brings new insights on changes in occupations in the knowledge-based society. This book is entitled: *'How restructuring is changing occupations - case study evidence from knowledge-intensive, manufacturing and service occupations'*. It highlights how individuals perceive and experience these changes and how they cope with restructuring in their everyday life. In this research, 30 occupational case studies were carried out in 14 countries, in total 246 in-depth individual interviews were carried out, according to common interview guidelines. These occupational case studies are closely related to the organisational case studies. The report focuses on six occupational groups: designers in the clothing industry; researchers in information and communication technology; IT professionals in software services; production workers in food or clothing; logistics workers in food or clothing; front office employees in customer relationships in public services. In this report, a specific section on gender is included in each monographic chapter, and targeted comparative analysis of gender aspects is drawn in the final chapter. The main part of the report consists of occupational monographs, concerning the six occupational groups and focusing on the impact of restructuring on work biographies and career trajectories, occupational identities and quality of work life. Another part of the report is devoted to transversal comparative analysis based on three clusters of occupations: knowledge-based (creative) occu-

pations; manufacturing occupations; service occupations (front office, back office and management activities). Key trends in occupational changes are identified for each cluster of occupational groups and in a comparative perspective.

2.4 Policy, institutions and social dialogue

For the empirical phase of the project the activities of this third project pillar are integrated in the qualitative organisation case study research. The objectives were to collect data in the organisational case studies on industrial relations and regulation to obtain information on forms of worker representation (including information and consultation rights), issues of negotiation, and the impact of national and EU regulation and problems of enforcement. In the final project phase, these data will be the basis for summary reports to identify key thematic policy issues and recommendations.

3. Dissemination: going beyond the project

The project website www.worksproject.be has been developed as a major tool for informing the broader public about the project and its progress. The website includes the main project publications, as well as information on the events organised in the frame of the project and beyond if relevant. The Digital Toolkit on organisation surveys and the Globalisation Glossary are accessible from the home page of the website. Visitors can register to be kept informed about the project events, such as the WORKS conferences and to receive the project Newsletters to be issued five times during the project's lifetime.

All WORKS publications are made broadly available to the project audience and can be downloaded from the website.