

# Final Report: Quality of life in a changing Europe more

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## Final Report: Quality of life in a changing Europe July 2009

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Universiteit Utrecht



Quality is a Specific Targeted Research or Innovations Project funded within the European Commission's Sixth Framework Programme (contract no 028945), Priority 7, Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge-based Society (March 2006 to May 2009).

**major change, European citizens living in different national welfare state regimes evaluate the quality of**

**their lives. The project will analyse international comparative data on the social well-being of citizens and collect new data on social quality in European workplaces in eight strategically selected partner countries: UK, Finland, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Hungary and a candidate country for EU enlargement, Bulgaria.**

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Lippe, T. van der et al. (2009). Final Report Quality of Life in a Changing Europe. Deliverable of EU-project Quality, Utrecht: Utrecht University



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## 1. Executive summary

QUALITY is an innovative quantitative and qualitative research project that has examined how, in an era of major change, European citizens and workers living in different national welfare state regimes and subject to different public and organisational trends and policies evaluate the quality of their lives.

The project analyses international-comparative data on the social well-being of citizens and collects new data on social quality in European workplaces in the selected partner countries: UK, Finland, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Hungary and Bulgaria.

### Overall aims of this project

1. to give insight, from an internationally-comparative perspective, in the quality of life and work of European citizens, the way the quality of life and work are interrelated, and the impact public and organisational policies have on the well-being of European citizens;
2. to increase our knowledge how and under what conditions European workplaces could be transformed into healthy organisations, where work is organised in a socially as well as economically sustainable manner;
3. to explore future trends by consulting national high-level groups (policy-makers, politicians, researchers, managers) and by sketching/constructing scenarios with respect to trends concerning the quality of life and work of European citizens;
4. to analyse whether, to what extent and how gender matters in the relationship between well-being and public and organisational policies.

### Structure of the project

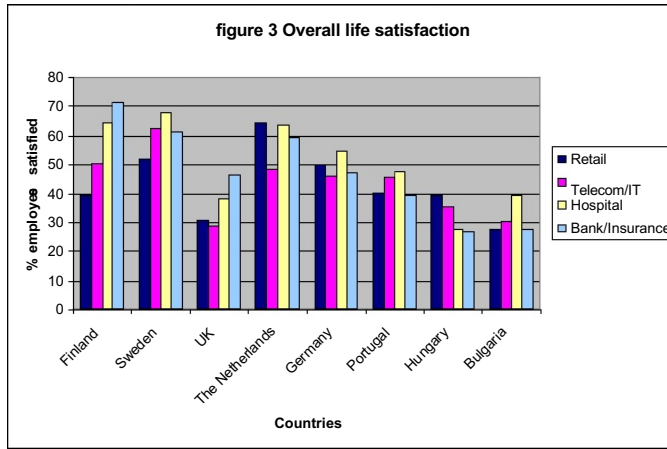
Several ways of collecting information, in a quantitative as well as qualitative way are performed to receive an adequate answer to our research questions and to meet our aims. We have elaborated theoretically, methodologically and empirically the concept of quality of life and analyse quality of life for citizens (men and women) in eight partner countries, these are based on existing internationally-comparative datasets. To get insight in the quality of life of citizens in the partner countries within the context of their working situation, we have set up a new quantitative survey in all participating countries involving employees in four firms per country. We have analysed the institutional context of each participating country, based on national expert meetings and relevant policy documents, by mapping out which current socio-economic trends are expected to have an impact on the quality of work of men and women and on their work-life balance. To gain insight in what healthy and socially sustainable organisations are, we have examined the perspectives of managers and other employees in one organisation in each country, and explore the links between perceptions of healthy organisations and employee well being and quality of life. We have developed an instrument on the social quality of European workplaces by selecting the relevant items for social quality based on the overall analyses of existing data on quality of life and based on our national survey results. To gain insight in relevant future trends and their expected implications for the quality of life of male and female citizens in the eight partner countries, we have developed scenario analyses which were discussed in high-level expert groups in each of the participating countries; and finally we have studied the role of gender in relation to quality of life and work and the impact public and organisational policies have on this relationship, by specifying the perspective of gender in each of the parts of the QUALITY project.

### Major conclusions

#### Quality of life: the importance of resources at the workplace and the family level

This study shows that employees in Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands tend to be the most satisfied with their life in general, while lower rates of overall life satisfaction are found in Hungary, Bulgaria and

the UK, Germany and Portugal are taking a middle position. With respect to the four sectors no clear pattern is found.



We conclude that resources enhance overall life satisfaction while work and household demands negatively impact overall life satisfaction. Long working hours, work pressure and job insecurity negatively influence overall life satisfaction as well as having care responsibilities for relatives outside the household. In contrast to our expectations, we did not find a positive impact of flexible work arrangements and training opportunities. The former finding might be due to the double edged nature of flexible work arrangements. Resources and demands directly affect overall life satisfaction but our findings also indicate that the impact of resources and demands at work and at home are mediated by cross-domain transfers of experiences between the work and home or family domain. Country differences indicate that in a country with more profound social policies and regulations regarding quality of work and life as is the case in Finland, workers appear to be more satisfied.

**Growing similarities between countries but persistent inequalities as well**

Our study shows the importance of the institutional context for quality of life. The greater security of employment, the greater gender equality in both paid and unpaid work, the more extensive state support for family care, as is typical for the social-democratic welfare states serve to provide a better institutional context for the quality of life than high material well being but lower protection and lower equality in the corporatist and the liberal regimes. The countries in the sub-protective and post-socialist regimes tend to combine low living standards with low flexibility of work and low or declining state support. The strong support from the extended family acts to cushion the institutional deficiencies of state and businesses to provide a decent quality of life for their citizens.

Welfare regime	Countries	Employment	Unpaid caring work	Rank in material wellbeing	rank in quality of life
Social-democratic	Sweden	high state support for equal full-time	extensive state support for the	3	1

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	Finland	participation of both partners high social support for equal full-time participation of both partners	involvement of both partners variety of public and private support for childcare	4	2
Corporatist	Netherlands	'flexicurity' (support for both full-time and part-time jobs) with women in part-time work	medium public support, high role of the family	1	3
	Germany	high social support for full-time jobs, encouragement for flexibility	medium public support, high role of the family	5	4
Liberal	UK	medium support for employers' led flexibility	low public support for support from the employer	2	5
Sub-protective	Portugal	low state support, low work flexibility	low state support, low employer support, high family support	6	6
Post-socialist	Hungary	medium state support, low employer support, low flexibility	medium state support, low employer support, high family support	7	7
	Bulgaria	medium state support, low employer support, low flexibility	medium state support, low employer support, high family support	8	8

In general similarities between countries have increased. There is a significant improvement of the employment rate of older workers although reaching the Lisbon target is still a challenge. Flexible working arrangements and better health services allow people to stay active on the labour market longer and leave later in their life course. In low-income countries older people bear the burden of searching for additional paid work and/or informal provision of childcare for their grandchildren. Young people continue to be at a disadvantage in the labour market due to structural reasons among which early school leaving and lack of integrated transitions policies play a major role. Employment insecurity results in the delay of family formation and the transition to parenthood. There is a growing diversification of the legal conditions of employment contracts, their duration and the amount and schedules of working hours. Flexible work brings more opportunities for achieving a work/life balance but may also be a trap of insecure jobs without career prospects. In the current situation of diversified labour markets, not only the quantity but also the quality of employment has to become a central issue for the European welfare states.

In a similar way, European societies experience a rise in the multiplicity of family forms and relationships between genders and generations. In the diversified family situations of people the quality of family life is strongly related to the quality of the family policies and their flexibility. Diversified experiences are becoming also the biographical trajectories of individuals and this raises the need of destandardisation and flexibilisation of social support. Transitions become more complex and reversible and the social security systems have to manage various transitions successfully – from school to work, between jobs, between work and training, between career breaks and care periods, between working life and retirement.







































































































