



EU file

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Better living and working conditions in a language we can all understand

The 26th September is European Day of Languages, a yearly event that celebrates the linguistic diversity of a continent with over 200 European languages, 24 official EU languages, around 60 regional or minority languages, and many more spoken by people from other parts of the world.

Eurofound works to ensure that EU-level decision-makers are best served with the highest-quality, timely and policy-relevant information they require to shape the improvement of Europe's living and working conditions. We also reach out to the national level where it concerns the implementation of EU policy at national level, or where we can clearly contribute useful comparative information to issues relevant at European level. In this vein, Eurofound respects and values the role of multilingualism in communicating across the EU and recognises the importance of people in Europe being able to access information in their own language.

Eurofound works to ensure that its website is as multilingual as possible, including by multilingual navigation. Eurofound also has a translation programme in place for publications which aims to ensure that executive summaries of publications are translated into all official languages; key publications are translated into French, German and up to three additional languages as required; and corporate and promotional material is translated as required.

Eurofound maintains a pragmatic and cost-effective approach to implementing its language policy according to the priorities established in its work programme, communication strategy and available resources.

So on European Day of Languages, we invite you to access the information below in the language that is closest to your heart

World Mental Health Day: Common approach to burnout still lacking

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The 10th October is World Mental Health Day, a yearly event held by the World Health Organization with the overall objective of raising awareness of mental health issues and mobilising efforts in support of mental health.

Eurofound has made a limited number of copies of its latest report on Burnout in the workplace available to order, free of charge, via its website. The report maps research on burnout across the EU, and shows that psychosocial risks rank top as work determinants most likely to cause the condition. Employees with a sustained exposure to such risks as high work intensity, long working hours, emotional demands, low level of autonomy and tense social relationships at work were found to be at a higher risk of burnout, or indeed more likely to already be developing it.

Of those risks, differences in individual impact can also be seen across the Member States. For example, studies in Belgium have found that conflicts in the workplace count among one of the top four work-related factors. It is perhaps therefore not surprising to learn that social support from colleagues has been noted as a mitigating factor in several studies carried out in this area. Additional recurrent themes include heavy workload and long working hours, relationship with management and rewards. One element that remains hotly-debated is the issue of autonomy. In many studies, the prevalence of burnout has been shown to be substantially higher when autonomy of the worker is lower. However, other studies report the opposite to be true, such as the association with telework, which suggests that autonomy could be a double-edged sword in the context of burnout, especially when considering work-life balance and the concept of 'boundaryless work'.

EU should not make promises if it cannot deliver, warn Auditors

The EU should not generate expectations which cannot be achieved, the European Court of Auditors (ECA) has warned in its annual report on the EU budget, published on the 4th October 2018. In the Foreword to the report, the President of the ECA, Klaus-Heiner Lehne, points out that the total EU budget is no more than about 1% of the gross national income of the entire EU. For this reason, the EU has to be realistic about what it can do with the money entrusted to

it, particularly as the Union approaches its next seven-year Budget cycle. "The conclusion is straightforward," says Mr Lehne, "the EU should not make promises if it cannot deliver". In their 2017 annual report, the auditors conclude that the EU accounts present a true and fair view of the EU's financial position. For the second year in a row, they issue a qualified (rather than an adverse) opinion on the regularity of the transactions underlying the accounts. In other words, a significant part of the 2017 expenditure that was audited was not materially affected by error. Moreover, the level of irregularities in EU spending continued to decrease, say the auditors. The estimated level of error in payments during 2017 was 2.4%, down from 3.1% in 2016 and 3.8% in 2015. At the same time, sufficient information was available to prevent – or detect and correct – a significant proportion of errors in, for example, rural development payments. If this information had been used by national authorities to correct errors, the estimated level of error would have been below the 2% threshold for an even larger share of the EU budget. Problems remain, in particular where payments from the EU budget are made to beneficiaries based on their declarations of costs previously incurred, such as in rural development and cohesion. Other activities funded in this way are research, training schemes and development aid projects. Using resources from European Structural and Investment funds is still challenging for Member States, and the EU budget continues to face significant pressure owing to the value of payments committed for future years. Measures to increase the flexibility of the budget were helpful, say the auditors, but may not be sufficient. The combination of high commitments and low payments increased outstanding budgetary commitments to a new high of €267.3 billion. This should be a priority for planning the next Multiannual Financial Framework, they say.

The 2017 annual report relates mainly to EU spending under the current Multiannual Financial Framework (2014-2020), but also to some previous years. Mr Lehne says this underscores how several years are usually needed from the time a political decision is taken until such time as funds are actually allocated on the ground. It also illustrates the importance of avoiding problems at the outset, because decisions on how the EU spends its money have implications for many years to come.

Notes to editors

The European Court of Auditors is the independent audit institution of the European Union. Its audit reports and opinions are an essential element of the EU accountability chain and are used to hold to account those responsible for managing the EU budget. This is primarily the responsibility of the European Commission, along with the other EU institutions and bodies. But for around two-thirds of spending – principally natural resources and cohesion – responsibility is shared with the Member States.

EU spending totalled €137.4 billion in 2017, or around €270 for every citizen. This amounts to around 0.9% of EU gross national income and represents approximately 2% of total public spending in EU Member States. In 2017, 'Natural resources' made up the largest share of funds audited (56%), while, in contrast to previous years, the share of 'Cohesion' spending was relatively small (8%) owing to the low level of accepted expenditure.

Each year, the auditors check the EU accounts and provide their opinion on two questions:

whether the accounts are accurate and reliable, and to what extent there is evidence of money being received or paid out in error (known as regularity and legality).

The auditors have given a clean opinion of the EU's accounts since 2007. However, until last year, their opinion on the regularity and legality of spending had been adverse for every year since 1994.

A "clean" opinion means the figures present a true and fair view, and follow the rules of financial reporting. A "qualified" opinion means that the auditors cannot give a clean opinion, but the problems identified are not pervasive. An "adverse" opinion indicates widespread problems.

In order to reach this audit opinion, they test samples of transactions to provide statistically based estimates of the extent to which revenue and the different spending areas are affected by error. They measure the estimated level of error against a materiality threshold of 2%, above which revenue or spending is considered to be irregular. The estimated level of error is not a measure of fraud, inefficiency or waste: it

is an estimate of the money that should not have been paid out because it was not used fully in accordance with EU and national rules.

In 2017, the auditors found 13 instances of suspected fraud out of approximately 700 transactions audited (2016: 11). These cases were forwarded to the EU anti-fraud office, OLAF.

For 2017, the auditors piloted a new approach in the area of Cohesion, which makes it clearer where shortcomings persist, both at the European Commission and in the Member States. This helps to promote accountability and improve the management of EU finances further. They aim to expand the project next year to other spending areas.

Progress in paternity and parental leave for fathers – Are baby steps enough?

Few events challenge the equilibrium between work and life like the arrival of a child. As gender roles continue to change in Europe, supporting the uptake of paternity and parental leave among fathers is fundamental, not just to close the 'caring gap' between men and women, but also to provide the best possible outlook for coming generations.

The importance of maternity leave for child development, as well as broader social cohesion, is well established. Research has shown that maternity leave and extended periods of parental leave for mothers result in lower rates of infant mortality, increases in child birth-weight and higher rates of childhood vaccination.

There is also increasing evidence of the importance of paternity leave and parental leave for fathers. Research carried out for the OECD, for instance, has shown that when fathers take longer periods of leave after the birth of a child, they are more involved in their child's care later in infancy and childhood. This involvement is beneficial for the cognitive development of children.

The uptake of paternity and parental leave by fathers is also important in order to address the caring gap between men and women. The 2016 European Quality of Life Survey showed that 88% of mothers compared to 64% of fathers in the EU care for their children every day. These fathers estimate they give 21 hours per week to the care of their children, while the mothers dedicate 39 hours per week.

