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Coping with Occupational Transitions

Psychologie sozialer Ungleichheit

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Herausgegeben von
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The continuous evolution of the labour market in highly industrialized countries during recent decades has led to the experience of redundancy and unemployment by many people. Coping with career breaks does not inevitably result in a personal crisis including psychological damage for each individual experiencing them. Yet it must be emphasized that such an experience might lead to long-term unemployment especially for members of vulnerable groups, and this situation is often linked to the experience of social exclusion.

The series discusses topics that look into the individual, organizational, and social-psychological effects of career transitions and the resulting risks of social exclusion. The focus lies on psychological unemployment research and intends to demonstrate the individual and societal costs of a mass unemployment that, in the meantime, has become widely accepted. Furthermore, the series draws attention to those indirect effects of the labour market crisis which manifest themselves as job insecurity and precarious working conditions. These effects can be characterized as the integration of social features of unemployment into employment itself. In a similar manner, questions of psychological coping with poverty and homelessness are discussed. An important point of reference is the program "Social Equity and Health" which was conceived by the World Health Organization (WHO) in the Eighties. It clarified the inter-relatedness of unemployment and its effect on health, and discussed possibilities of limiting this damaging influence by the application of various approaches to intervention. This program could also demonstrate the 'spread-off effects' that mass unemployment exerts on employees.

The contributions to the series show perspectives for making it easier to cope with forced career changes in an increasingly unfathomable working world and thus help to reduce the developments of individual crises. To achieve this, the publications included in the series emphasize that both society and the individual are responsible for adjusting careers in the case of industrial and enterprise restructuring.

The series "Psychology of Social Inequality" is directed toward psychologists, sociologists, educators, economists, and social workers who are confronted with the psychological effects of career transitions and social inequality in their scientific and practical work. Independent empirical studies are included as well as literature reviews and conference proceedings. Aside from theoretical discussions, the series also includes practical evaluations that examine the possibilities and limitations of intervention approaches in the areas of unemployment and working conditions.

Thomas Kieselbach
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Coping with Occupational Transitions

An Empirical Study
with Employees Facing Job Loss
in Five European Countries



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Introduction

This volume is one of four book publications¹ of the project “Social Convoy and Sustainable Employability: Innovative Strategies for Outplacement/Replacement Counseling“ (SOCOSE). It is supported by the European Commission, DG Research, under the fifth Framework Programme, Key Action “Improving the Socio-Economic Knowledge Base“² and coordinated by Thomas Kieselbach at the University of Bremen³.

Starting point of our research is the increase in occupational transitions (Rodgers & Rodgers, 1989). This is caused by the ongoing globalisation of markets and economies as a whole, but might also be considered the central aspect of globalisation: changes and flexibility which – on the part of the individual employee – means transitions in his or her occupational biography. These phases might include episodes of unemployment as well as training or re-orientation.

While transitions increase, employees experience insecurity with regard to their individual employment situation to a much larger degree than in the past. The formal

1 Kieselbach, T. (Ed.) (2004). *Social Convoy in Occupational Transitions: Recommendations for a European Framework in the Context of Enterprise Restructuring*. Bremen: University of Bremen, Institute for Psychology of Work, Unemployment and Health (IPG).

Kieselbach, T., Beelmann, G., Mader, S. & Wagner, O. (2005). *Sozialer Konvoi in beruflichen Transitionen: Individuelle und organisationale Bewältigung der Prekarisierung von Beschäftigung in Deutschland* [Social convoy in occupational transitions: Individual and organisational coping with precarisation of jobs]. München: Rainer Hampp.

Kieselbach, T. (Ed.) (2005). *Social convoy in enterprise restructuring: Concepts, instruments and views of social actors in Europe*. München: Rainer Hampp (forthcoming).

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guarantee of a workplace no longer exists, or else only to a lesser degree. Society will have to respond to these changes, as well as research has to redirect its focus. While traditional unemployment research was interested in the individual consequences of losing one's job and the difficulties of re-entering the labour market, future research now has to put more emphasis on the prevention of unemployment (Kieselbach, 1989; Kieselbach & Klink, 1997). Continuous adaptation to the changing labour market – the so-called *employability* – describes the new challenge. Yet, the responsibility for the establishment of this new concept or characteristic can not only be placed upon the individual employees; nor should the results of company restructuring merely be borne by society in general. The companies themselves, that dismiss employees or ask for greater flexibility, should be considered responsible to a greater extent than in the past. At the same time, individuals should cease to merely being receivers of help and benefits, but should become active partners in the process of re-orientation and actively develop personal initiative (Frese, 1997).

The outlined *normalisation of occupational transitions* formed the entrance to the scientific evaluation of the SOCOSE project. Two aspects are central in the frame of this new development. On the one hand, these phases of transitions have to be filled meaningfully for the individual, and coping strategies have to be developed. But as the aspect of globalisation cannot merely be regarded as an individual issue, transitions will also have to be framed by company-based or labour administration interventions. On the other hand, the concept of employability points to more than just the filling out of transitions (Gazier, 1998). Adaptation to the continuously changing labour market is a permanent challenge that has to be addressed also in phases of employment, thus easing possible transitions beforehand through anticipation. This, too, cannot merely be regarded an individual responsibility.

The SOCOSE project is based on interdisciplinary research. In five countries (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, and The Netherlands), psychologists and social scientists analysed the social convoy in the course of dismissal until successful re-integration into the labour market. Two associated partners from Germany and The Netherlands further contributed from the field of labour law and business ethics, respectively.

The approach chosen for the SOCOSE project was inductive in that empirical research was performed exploring: the subjective perspective of employees in insecure jobs (expectations), experiences of successfully re-employed (elements of successful interventions), innovative cases of occupational transition counselling (transferability, suitability to become part of a model concept), and expert knowledge (attitudes and experiences of relevant social actors). In addition, knowledge resulting from psychological research on unemployment, personal initiative, entrepreneurship etc. was systematically added, leading to the following basic assumptions of SOCOSE:

- Job loss and unemployment are capable of exceeding the personal resources necessary for the successful overcoming of these critical life events.
- Outplacement/replacement is part of a proactive strategy of primary prevention: anticipation of and knowledge about potential psycho-social damages will facilitate the process of coping with occupational transitions.
- Professional help as a form of social support in the process of the employment transition can alleviate the unemployment stress, allow or facilitate a constructive transition and prevent the development of psycho-social barriers to re-employment, thus reducing periods out of employment.
- The relationship between the professional as helper and the employee in transition as recipient of help will be more effective if their social interaction and the offer of help are based upon a legitimate claim and not on the self-definition of being in need of help.
- Effective professional help leading to appropriate re-employment can be experienced in retrospect as a form of retributive justice in the process of dismissal that is viewed by the affected employees as a form of social injustice (in the dimensions of experienced distributive, procedural and interactional justice).
- The assumption of social responsibility on the part of the dismissing company can contribute to the de-individualization of job loss and can also exert a positive influence on the survivors-of-layoffs.
- The integration of professional counselling in occupational transitions into a broader framework of sustainable employability including social and individual aspects (interactive employability) could create a more flexible and more competitive workforce that will not experience occupational transitions as a personal failure.

This approach might be seen as an attempt to reconcile economic efficiency with social justice in a specific area. The SOCOSE research is also in line with recent communications from the European Commission on Corporate Social Responsibility and with new topics discussed within the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on socially responsible enterprise restructuring.

From July 2000 to January 2004, the project was organised along four phases. Two expert conferences enabled an exchange between practitioners and politicians.

Phase 1

- Interdisciplinary analysis of existing economic and political structures that are decisive for outplacement/replacement and of existing interventions.

Phase 2

- Qualitative field study: interviews with employees in insecure job situations in the course of company restructuring and of employees who have successfully been re-employed after outplacement interventions.
- Analysis of innovative case studies.
- Preparation and evaluation of an expert conference with practitioners.

Phase 3

- Comparative analysis of legal and ethical bases of outplacement.
- Qualitative field study: expert interviews with actors who are responsible in the process of dismissal (personnel and outplacement counsellors).
- Development of an integrated outplacement/replacement model for guiding occupational transitions.

Phase 4

- Integration of results and formulation of policy recommendations in the member states.
- Dissemination conference with representatives from unions, employers, and political institutions.

The main outcome of the SOCOSE project is a concept which can be used for outlining outplacement/replacement intervention strategies for employees affected by job insecurity within a wide variety of different settings and in different countries. Not only does such a concept integrate the interests of the employee in regard to the working situation with those of the dismissing company, but it also takes into consideration the effects of job insecurity on the quality of life of the affected persons. This means that, as opposed to existing strategies, factors outside the working place are also incorporated and used for such an integrated approach in times of occupational transitions.

This volume assembles the background and results of the major part of the empirical research performed in the frame of the SOCOSE project – interviews with employees who are affected by changing work environments (“insecure jobs”) or who had previously lost their jobs and have found new employment through the help of outplacement/replacement counselling (“successfully re-employed”). In total, 250 employees in five European countries were questioned with regard to their experiences and their future job prospects. This part of our research was joined by the analysis of innovative cases (“cases of good practise”) in the field of professionally supporting occupational transitions. For each country, we will present cases where social actors joined in an innovative way, in order to cope with redundancy; where specific strategies were developed, e. g. targeting vulnerable groups; or where employers expressed their responsibility towards dismissed employees in a way that could set an example.

The description of this part of our empirical research is structured as follows: For each country, we describe (1) the sample composition and results for those employees described as holding “insecure jobs”, followed by (2) the same procedure for those characterised as “successfully re-employed”. Thereafter, we illustrate the various “cases of good practice”. After these five country-specific reports, we present a comparative description across the five participating countries. This comparative description will highlight the main national commonalities and differences – both among the interviews and the case studies. We will conclude this volume with conclusions from our empirical research as to what could be considered “good practice” in the field of professionally guiding occupational transitions.

The annex shows the interview schedules that were used in our research. It also contains some overviews of results that could not be included in the publication itself.

Comparative Report WP 2

Job insecurity and successful re-employment: Experiences in five European countries

Thomas Kieselbach & Sabine Mader

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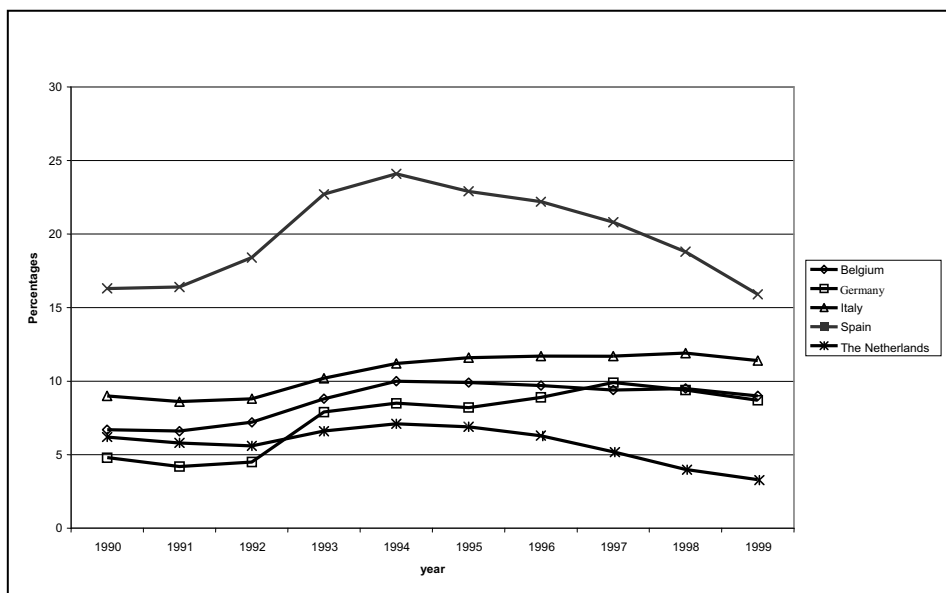
1 Introduction

The work described in this paper was conducted in the second Work Package (WP) of the SOCOSE project, jointly pursued by researchers in Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, and The Netherlands. The first work package served the assembly of information on labour market developments in general and on strategies to combat unemployment. Among these strategies, the knowledge about and implementation of outplacement counselling were key elements.

The social and legal prerequisites for both, the dismissal and the implementation of outplacement counselling differ considerably among countries. (As will be described later, the components of the counselling itself are very much the same.) These prerequisites influence the extent to which company re-structuring will include outplacement, as for example they stipulate redundancy payments and/or additional support that has to be granted. These prerequisites are of importance for a comparative discussion.

There are also differences as regards the social and economic situation in the different countries. One of these is illustrated in different unemployment rates as presented in figure CR-1.

Figure CR-1: Development of unemployment rates in selected countries



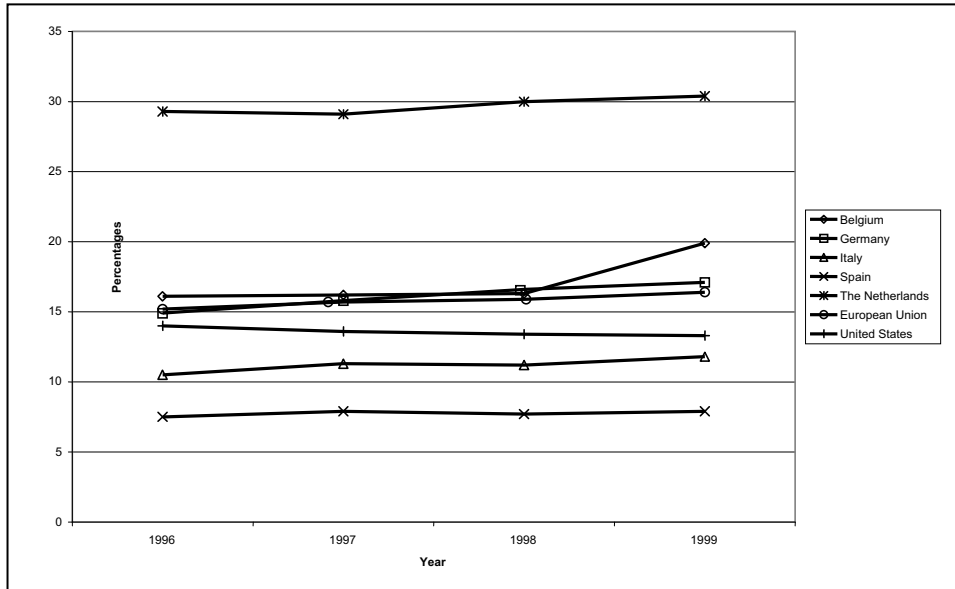
Source: OECD Employment Outlook, June 2000, OECD, Paris, 2000, p 202

As can be seen from figure CR-1, the unemployment rate is highest in Spain, though it is decreasing and thus getting closer to the other European countries. There is a clear north-south divide – with The Netherlands showing the lowest unemployment rates that are still declining. These prerequisites are of importance when it comes to re-

employment chances for persons being dismissed and for the perceptions of those whose job situation has become insecure (see below).

The very low unemployment rates in The Netherlands might be due to an extraordinary high level of part time employment – as is illustrated in figure CR-2.

Figure CR-2: Part time employment as a proportion of total employment



Source: OECD Employment Outlook, June 2000, OECD, Paris, 2000, p. 218

Furthermore, it has to be noted that part-time employment is the kind of employment mostly chosen by women. Their share is nearly 80 % in all the countries studied (OECD, 2001) – with the exception of The Netherlands where this share is slightly more than 70 %. As regards the submerged economy (irregular jobs) – another area of employment that ought not be underestimated – no reliable data are available. There are, however, estimates for certain countries: Germany 22 %, Italy 30 - 46 %, Spain 11.5 – 32.3 % (see Schneider, 2000).

Against these preconditions, the central aspect of the second Work Package was an assembly of subjective experiences of people who experienced job insecurity in a wide variety of settings. Two different groups of people were of interest: those actually facing an insecure job situation, and those who had participated in counselling after dismissal and were successfully re-employed.

In the frame of our research, *insecure jobs* are defined as jobs being objectively insecure in fields that are about to face considerable dismissals. Often, the situation of the respective companies is discussed in the media and in the general public. The selection of branches or areas of business was performed according to the situation within each country (see chapter 3). It is important for the analysis that these people had not

yet been offered outplacement/replacement counselling. They did not necessarily have to feel insecure themselves.

On the other hand, those having been *successfully re-employed* were supposed to have been offered counselling before dismissal and have consequently found new employment. The counselling should have taken place within the previous 12 to 18 months before the interviews. Organisation and financing should have been effected by the dismissing company, an external agency, or with the help of the labour administration.

The next step was to find innovative case studies (cases of best practice) in the field of outplacement/replacement counselling. A broad variety of approaches were of interest so as to gain knowledge from the differences within the participating countries (see chapter 5).

Hereafter we will first outline some key elements as derived from Work Package (WP) 1. These refer to the labour market situations in the different countries, to support schemes, and to the role of outplacement counselling. Some of these will be referred to again in the following chapters when it comes to the description of personal experiences and concrete cases. The report itself will be divided into two parts: the first describes the approach to employees in insecure job situations and to those having been re-employed; the second refers to the case studies.

1.1 The “Renault Law” in Belgium

The Renault Law was established in 1998, following the closure of the Renault factory at Vilvoorde. The law applies to cases of collective dismissal and company closure and is an extension of the Collective Labour Agreement No. 24 (1975). The law specifies comprehensive procedures that have to be followed assuring the consultation of the employees. This consultation must relate to the possibility of preventing and reducing collective dismissal, as well as the possibility of softening its effects, by taking social support measures.

In the event of collective dismissal or company closure, employees receive additional premiums on top of their severance pay. Furthermore, negotiations between employer and unions can also lead to additional grants. Outplacement counselling often forms part of the social plan negotiated. Employers are not obliged to offer outplacement except for employees aged 45 or over: A recent policy measure stipulates the right of every employee aged 45 or over to outplacement counselling. If this is incorporated, its scope is regulated by the Collective Labour Agreement No. 51 of the National Labour Council (a body representing both trade unions and employers). Participation in outplacement counselling is voluntary – it will be seen from the cases selected that often more employees qualify for outplacement than actually participate. The costs are regularly covered by the (former) employer.

The Belgian situation is further characterised by different legal statutes for blue-collar workers compared to white-collar workers. This different legal statute takes, among others, shape in a considerable discrimination regarding the duration of the term of notice.

1.2 The “cassa integrazione” and the “mobility list” in Italy

The “cassa integrazione guadagni” (best to be translated by “earnings integration fund”¹) was created with the aim of preventing temporary, reversible company crises from resulting in actual dismissal. Workers of a company that face difficulties may thus keep their status as employees even though they are not working. The ordinary cassa integrazione finds application in case of temporary difficulties that are not to be ascribed to the employer or company – mostly, for example, due to seasonal fluctuations in business. Yet, only industrial companies, without size limits, have access to this instrument; the areas of agriculture and service are excluded.

The application of the extraordinary cassa integrazione – which will appear in some of the cases described – requires a more severe crisis. This might be significant restructuring or re-organisation of production. Again, only industrial companies have access provided they have at least 15 employees. If they want to make use of the extraordinary cassa integrazione they have to draw up a suitable intervention plan for overcoming the crisis and resuming activity. The workers, on the other hand, will have to attend training and accept any socially useful work that is offered to them. In any case, the system of the cassa integrazione only applies to a very limited set of companies thus creating considerable discrimination within the work force as a whole.

It turned out that the fund granted by the cassa integrazione was, in fact, drawn upon for longer periods than had been foreseen – it was continued even when there was no chance for the company to resume its business. Therefore, the “mobility list” was introduced. This means that the employment relationship is officially terminated and the employees leave the company. All the workers that would have access to the extraordinary cassa integrazione now receive a payment above usual severance pay.² In exchange, they have to accept any job offer that is suitable to their qualifications. This arrangement is temporarily limited. Any employer who hires workers which are registered in the mobility list may profit from certain reduction in taxes and social security contributions.

Neither cassa integrazione nor mobility list include guidance or counselling, but both regulate the financial background for a number of dismissed employees as were subject to our study.

1.3 The Social Security Code III (“Sozialgesetzbuch”/SGB) in Germany

The Social Security Code (“Sozialgesetzbuch” / SGB) forms the basis for various kinds of support and interventions – volume III refers to the area of employment. Among the interventions addressed in this field are retraining and substitutions for re-integration of unemployed people. Crucial to any intervention is its limited duration as it aims at sustainability – that means, employability or re-employment without the need for further

1 As there is no suitable translation and the term is well established internationally, we will use the Italian term.

2 Regular unemployment benefit amounts to 30 percent of previous wages and is limited to six months. It can be drawn upon in any case of involuntary unemployment – except for those working in the public administration.

substitution. The SGB III also includes various options for financial support (for training, application, and substitution in the first months of re-employment).

One of the two parts of the SGB III most relevant for the cases described is § 175. This regulates structural short-time worker benefit in case of temporary financial problems in a company (for example, seasonal decrease in business). In the frame of comprehensive agreements, this can also be drawn upon in the case of company closure.

This prerequisite has been included in the “Social Transfer Concept” which had been concluded between the Federal Employers’ Association of the Chemical Industry and the industrial trade union Mining Chemistry Energy (“Bergbau Chemie Energie”) in June 1998. Redirection of what would otherwise be paid as severance pay is used, for example, for qualification measures – which are usually organised by employment and qualification associations. These provide the employees with new, limited employment. Employees receive structural short-time worker benefit which is usually saved up by the former employer. Within the chemical industry this amounts to 90 %. Usually there are even further benefits, such as support for any necessary move in order to enable re-employment.

§ 254 was introduced into the SGB III in 1998 and it refers to company closure and the implementation of social plans which aim at support of employees towards re-integration. This is most often realised through the implementation of employment and qualification associations that offer – as mentioned above – regular yet temporary employment. (In most cases, a social plan based on financial compensation only is not an option under the new law.³) During this limited period, employees receive guidance in their job search and opt for further training without being registered as unemployed. It is important to know that these new, limited contracts usually contain written statements as to the active participation of the employees towards their re-integration. The active role of the employees is thus explicit part of the contract. Meanwhile, companies exist which are specialised in the preparation and performance of this kind of social plans (also known as “active social plans”) which incorporate an extensive number of administrative tasks. While the duration of these contracts may be up to 24 months under the conditions of § 175, they are limited to three months according to § 254.

1.4 Social plans in The Netherlands

The components included into social plans are probably most developed in The Netherlands (compared to the other countries presented here). What was introduced as the “first generation” of social plans mainly focused on financial aspects; the “second generation” already included outplacement interventions. The “third generation of social plans” now further strengthens this issue. Depending on the specific strategies of the outplacement agency, their measures often incorporate active job search and job placement by an external party (this is indeed regular practice in Belgium and explicitly denied by most of the traditional outplacement companies in Germany, Spain, and also in

3 § 254 also sets forth the conditions for financial contributions from the Federal Agency for Labour (“Bundesagentur für Arbeit”).

The Netherlands⁴). Participation in outplacement counselling, however, is always voluntary.

In many cases, we found joint intervention project where employers, labour unions, the public employment services, the insurance administration, and an outplacement company co-operated successfully. This close co-operation can be regarded as innovative and an example of good practice.

1.5 Compensation in Spain

The legal prerequisites in Spain are mostly limited to financial compensation for dismissed employees (“passive social plans”). They On the one hand, they receive an amount which varies according to previous income and duration of service. This has to be paid by the previous employer. In addition, they receive unemployment subsidies for a limited period – in case they have had regular employment and have thus contributed to the social security system for at least six months.

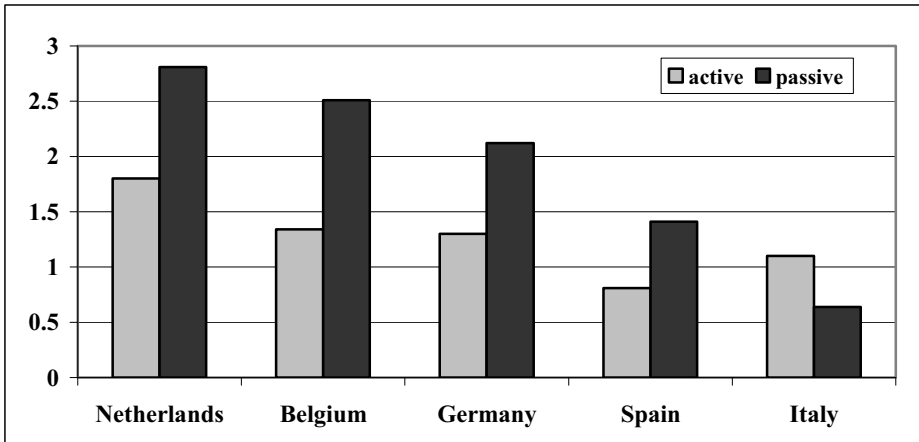
The social security system, however, not only provides for financial compensation; there are also several re-employment programmes, among which the Information and Advice for the Search of Employment (IOBE) programme ought to be mentioned. It is mainly financed by the European Social Fund and concrete interventions are developed by the public administration, the trade unions and/or other social actors. Currently, Spanish administrations are preparing new programmes to be integrated in active labour market policies and which come very close to the idea of outplacement (see chapter 6). Up to now, the offer of training or outplacement counselling in case of dismissal is limited to those companies who consider it their responsibility to offer not just financial compensation.

1.6 Labour market policies in Europe

As has been outlined above, all over Europe there is continuous concern as regards high unemployment rates (with the exception, however, of The Netherlands; yet also there the rates have recently been increasing again). Despite these common prerequisites, there is considerable variation as regards measures to cope with this situation. Figure CR-3 illustrates the proportions of active vs. passive labour market policies in the SO-COSE countries.

The northern European countries have adopted more active labour market strategies than the southern European countries. These are least implemented in Spain – but also the Spanish government is now strengthening its efforts in this direction, as is illustrated in the Spanish National Report (in this volume). The overall proportion of labour market strategies in general is lowest in Italy. This is, however, the only country where active strategies predominate over passive strategies.

4 Most recently, there seem to be changes in this area. For example, Challenger, Gray & Christmas, the oldest outplacement company in the USA, argue that at least an extensive job bank - continuously updated - should be made available to the participants (see Challenger, 1994, p. 38).

Figure CR-3: Active and passive labour market policies in relation to gross national products

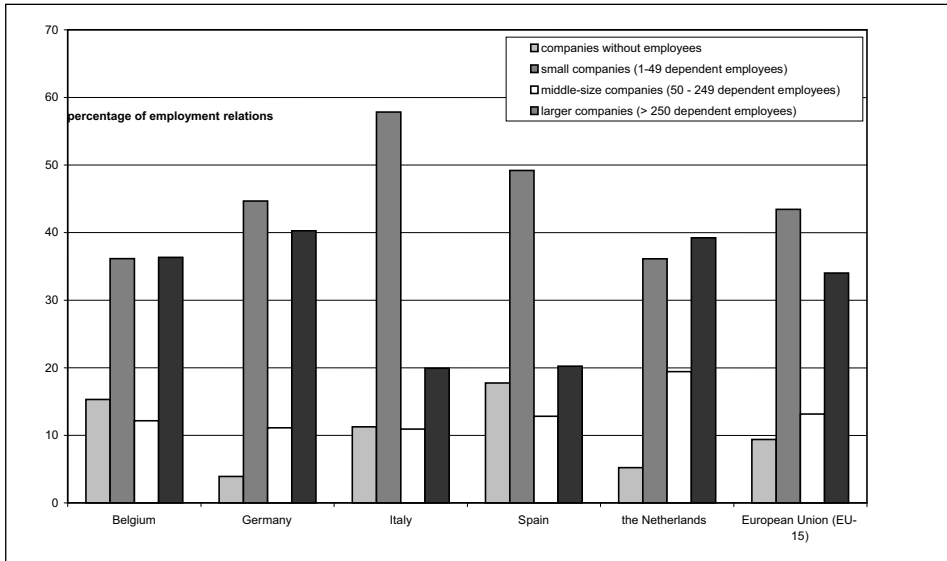
Source: OECD (2002). *Employment Outlook*. Paris: OECD.

The following chapters will sometimes make reference to certain areas or branches of business. Economies are not equally affected by economic changes. Problems are sometimes predominant in certain branches, and larger companies or even multinationals might more readily implement their own intervention schemes. As regards smaller and medium-size companies, most probably forms of association will have to be addressed (sometimes created) in order to regularly implement counselling without too much financial burden being put on one company which is already in difficulty. Consequently, it was difficult to select comparative cases and respondents in each country under study.

Figure CR-4 gives an overview of the number of companies of various sizes in the countries of the SOCOSE project in relation to the number of people employed.

Large and medium-sized companies, which might be the first to develop guidance and counselling schemes given the number of employees affected by restructuring, are not predominant. A large number of companies in the countries studied are small. This supports the request for more innovative models and extended co-operation in cases of dismissal and transitional guidance to be arranged for.

One of these guiding schemes – that is in the centre of our project – is outplacement/replacement counselling. This report addresses this issue by interviewing those directly affected: on the one hand, employees in insecure job situations, and on the other hand, employees who have successfully participated in outplacement/replacement counselling. The first group was, among others, asked for an evaluation of their current situation and for the kind of support they would favour. The second group evaluated the counselling they had received. Furthermore, experts in the area of outplacement counselling contributed their viewpoints and experiences.

Figure CR-4: Proportion of companies assorted per size (1996)

Source: Eurostat Yearbook 2000 – Europe in the view of statistics, Luxembourg, 2000, p. 384

The issue of transition counselling incorporates the broader concept of *employability*. This concept is attributed to various characteristics – in short, it means a continuous adaptation of employees' qualifications to changing labour markets (for more extensive definitions, see Gazier, 1991). Given the increased instability of labour markets in general and an associated increase in transitions in individual occupational biographies (see Kieselbach, 1998, forthcoming), counselling and training during job loss is but the least requirement. Employability has to be continuously assured and maintained – through comprehensive educational programmes that formulate a challenge to all the actors involved. Employability cannot solely be regarded an individual characteristic and an individual task. This issue will be referred to again in the empirical parts of this study as well as in the conclusions.

Apart from this, special emphasis is placed on the issue of responsibility: considering the increasing demand for job flexibility and an increase in occupational transitions in certain areas – who is judged responsible for the structuring and cushioning of these processes? This also refers to the concept of employability. Whose task is it to ensure permanent adaptation to labour market demands – and is this a topic in the field of employment? In the final chapter (chapter 7) we will try to give some preliminary answers – which will also have to be linked to the prerequisites outlined above.

2 Methodology of the overall project

The method chosen within the SOCOSE consortium for carrying out the qualitative studies is the so-called Problem-Focused Interview (PFI) which was developed at the University of Bremen, Germany, already in the 1980s (Witzel, 1985, 1996, 2000). Since then the PFI has been applied to different research settings – also in the field of occupational transitions – leading to the further elaboration and adaptation of the method (Heinz, Krüger, Rettke, Wachtveitl & Witzel, 1987; Kieselbach, van Heeringen, La Rosa, Lemkow, Sokou & Starrin, 2001; Mönnich & Witzel, 1994).

The basic reason for the invention of the PFI both for conducting and analysing qualitative interviews can be traced back to the already long-standing debate between the two main approaches within qualitative research (see Witzel, 1987): on the one hand the standardised methods working with pre-defined theoretical concepts through which a high comparability of research results is ensured, but which at the same time often seem to be rather inflexible with regard to the specific experiences of the research subject (normative paradigm); and on the other hand the process-oriented methodologies (interpretative paradigm) with their plea for a paradigmatic shift within qualitative research towards: (1) openness – allowing for an adaptation of the method to the perspective of the interviewee; (2) communication – in the sense of understanding the interview as a co-operation between interviewee and interviewer; and (3) context-orientation – stressing that the interview cannot be understood without considering the individual and societal context within which it was conducted. It is obvious that the latter approaches give a high importance to the research subjects, but their demands of active integration easily lead to a loss of comparability of the research results.

Looking closely at these two – only at first sight conflicting – paradigmatic points of view, the question immediately comes into focus whether it is possible to develop a methodology using the strengths inherent in both of them, while avoiding their criticised weaknesses. Exactly this thinking is reflected within the PFI which can be understood as a pragmatic qualitative research approach applicable to a variety of different research questions. The adaptation and combination of methods (use of interview schedule vs. interview guide vs. free-response; use of research hypothesis in the interview process; question of comparability; role of interviewer; choice of interviewees) allows the PFI to put its main focus on the exploration of the subjective experiences, the individual course of actions and the interpretations given by the interviewee (interpretative paradigm). At the same time, it is not denied that the interviewer enters the interview process with pre-given knowledge and usually also a theoretical hypothesis regarding the research subject (normative paradigm). Bringing this together, the PFI demands in its application that an openness has to exist with regard to the knowledge of both actors within the interview process in order to guarantee that an understanding of the evolution of the problems and ideas of the interviewee can take place.

The *Personal Data Sheet* gives the interviewer basic information about the interviewee at the beginning of the interview. This type of check-list enables an easier and more personal start to the interview, and helps to formulate additional questions which are of importance with regard to the interviewees biography. These mainly socio-demographic variables also ensure the basic comparability of the interviews.

The core material of the PFI is the *Interview Schedule* which is developed on the basis of the respective research hypothesis. It includes a limited amount of thematic fields each of which consists of a key question (KQ), additional questions and a certain amount of short remarks (in the form of bullet points). Due to reasons of comparability, the KQs are always asked exactly in the way they have been formulated when introducing a new thematic field. They serve as the general framework and orientation for the interview. As opposed to the use of the KQs, the formulation and the moment the additional questions are brought forward depends upon the individual interview process. The short remarks are only meant as an information for the interviewer and can help to get further ideas to deepen the discussion and to formulate additional questions. This combination of a rather formal introduction of each thematic field through the KQs, the flexible use of additional questions, and the possibility of integrating new themes into the interview shows how account is taken of both the perspective of the interviewee and that of the interviewer, and the demanded openness of the interview process.

2.1 Interview schedule of the qualitative studies

Two kinds of interviews were performed during Workpackage 2 – requiring different interview schedules. On the one hand, interviews were performed with employees in insecure job situations, and on the other hand with employees who had successfully been re-employed after participation in outplacement counselling. This part is referred to as “qualitative studies”. A separate set of interviews was performed with experts in the field of outplacement counselling – those responsible for the execution of such interventions; these are termed “case studies”.

Hereafter we will present an overview of the interview schedules as used for the different interviews. We will list the key questions and some of the additional aspects that were to be covered as to the specific situation in the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The interviews for the qualitative studies were fully transcribed – see chapter 2.2. The interview schedules that were developed are included in Annex 1 to 3.

2.1.1 *Employees in insecure job situations*

The questions served to explore the actual situation in the company (1), the perception and possible consequences of job insecurity for the interviewee (2, 3, 4), the process of downsizing or restructuring in case it had already started (5), and the responsibilities of the company and the individual employees during downsizing as perceived by the latter (6, 7, 8). The following key questions were presented to the interviewees in this sub-sample (for selection criteria see chapter 3).

1. Are there plans to reduce personnel in your company/rumours about future dismissals?
2. Do you *personally* feel that you might be dismissed/lose your job?
3. How does it make you feel?
4. In the branch of your company, jobs are no longer as secure as they were in the past. How do you react to this? Does this influence your behaviour?

5. Could you tell me more about these plans and about the introduction of these plans to the employees?
6. What do you think should be the responsibility of the *company* when laying-off personnel?
7. Which concrete aspects have perhaps already been realised in your company?
8. What do you think should be the responsibility of the individual when confronted with the possibility of a dismissal?

As has been outlined above, each key question was followed by a number of aspects, and the questionnaire also explored basic demographic data.

2.1.2 Successfully re-employed employees

The questions served to explore the process of downsizing in the previous company and the responsibilities of the company and individual employees during downsizing or restructuring (1, 2), and the evaluation of the outplacement/replacement counselling that had been implemented (3, 4). Thus, the sequence of questions differed from that chosen for the first sub-sample – given the different situations the respondents were facing – but the very same elements were covered. The following key questions were presented to all the interviewees in this sub-sample (for selection criteria see chapter 3).

1. Can you describe the situation during the time when your previous company planned to dismiss employees? That means, we are going back in time, before the start of the outplacement counselling.
2. What do you think should be the responsibility of the *individual* when confronted with the possibility of a dismissal?
3. Please describe what kind of support you received on the part of the outplacement/replacement agencies or other institutions with regard to your occupational reintegration?
4. If you consider the whole process of dismissal and the treatment from the previous company, what do you think about it?

As has been outlined above, also in this sub-sample, each key question was followed by a number of aspects, and the questionnaire also explored basic demographic data.

2.2 Cases of good practice of outplacement/replacement

The interview schedule for these case studies differed from the previous two since here the interest was not primarily with the personal situation of the respondents. The topics covered here all referred to a concrete example of outplacement counselling that was considered to be innovative (for further details on sample criteria see chapter 3). In this case, no key questions as in the concept above were used. The questions should, more generally, collect information about the institution and a description of the intervention (framework and content). Furthermore, respondents were asked for their evaluation of the transferability of the elements of the measure and future perspectives for the institution and the particular intervention.

2.3 Data analysis

All the interviews were tape-recorded. Those belonging to the “qualitative studies” were transcribed word-by-word and analysed with the help of a specific software for qualitative data analysis. In general, computer-supported text analysis is increasingly used within qualitative research projects. Experience has shown that access to the high amount of data is facilitated through the application of this method. Additionally, a faster control of the complex patterns including their interconnectedness can be secured (e.g., Kühn & Witzel, 2000). The software not only allows for a more precise way of analysing the material, but also for verifying interpretations and retracing conclusions drawn from side of the researchers (Kuckartz, 1999; Tesch, 1990, 1992).

The software programme winMAX (Kuckartz, 1999) was chosen for the analysis of the material within the SOCOSE project due to the fact that many experiences had already existed with the use of this programme in combination with the Problem-Focused Interview (PFI) at the University of Bremen (for an overview see e.g. Kluge, 2000; see also Kieselbach, van Heeringen, La Rosa, Lemkow, Sokou, & Starrin, 2001). In addition, when compared to other software programmes, the fairly simple structure makes this programme especially attractive for an international, comparative research project. As a first step, the transcribed interviews were coded, following the thematic fields as defined within the interview schedule.

This *thematical coding* allows to structure the interviews. Printouts for each code are made upon which the descriptive analysis and the subsequent case interpretations are based. The *descriptive analysis* of the cases is done along the codings. In the beginning of the text a short summary is given of the socio-demographic data of the interviewee based upon the personal data sheet. Then, the codings are summarised on a descriptive level. Comments are added indicating the most important quotations from the original interview. Based upon the descriptive analysis, a short *case interpretation* is developed. These individual case interpretations are summarised under the headings as contained in the table of contents of the National Reports in this volume.

The interviews for the case studies were analysed on the basis of the elements contained in the questionnaire which are represented in the sequence of the table of contents. An elaborated strategy like the one described for the qualitative studies was not necessary, given the limited number of interviews in the case studies (see also chapter 3). The researchers in the different national teams received intensive training as to the use of the software and the procedures for analysis.

3 Qualitative studies: Sample criteria

It is obvious, that the different target groups described in chapter 2 required different sample selection criteria. The general considerations are stated hereafter – as far as the qualitative studies are concerned. We will illustrate some specific aspects that had to be considered in the different countries. The details referring to the case studies are addressed in chapter 5.

3.1 General criteria

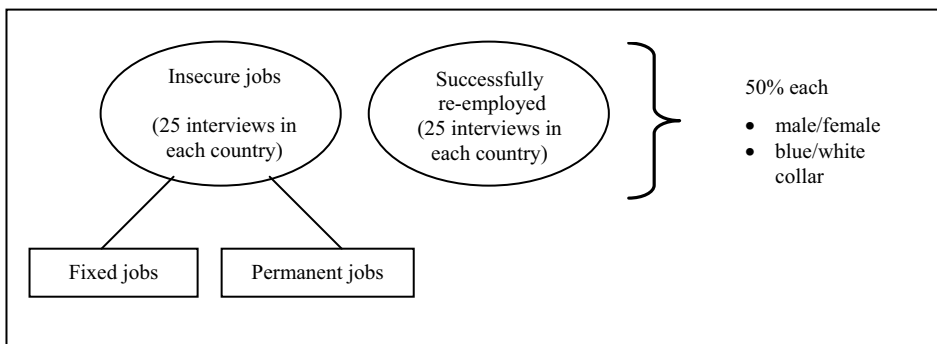
The two groups (“insecure jobs” and “successfully re-employed”) each were to consist of 25 interviews in every country. As regards the criteria of "objective insecurity" (see chapter 1), the “insecure” respondents should, in general, not be employed in fixed-term jobs. Furthermore, we aimed at a fairly equal distribution of males and females as well as blue and white collar workers. The age of the respondents should be between 25 and 50 years. Figure CR-5 shows the most important elements of the sample distribution.

It has to be pointed out again, that “insecure” ought to refer to the objective situation of the branch or company. This must not necessarily be reflected by feelings of insecurity among employees. The selection of branches or areas of business had to be performed according to the situation within each country. The persons selected for the interviews must not have been offered outplacement counselling at the time of interview performance.

As regards the “successfully re-employed”, they ought to have been offered counselling prior to dismissal which should have been financed by their former employers. In this respect, it was of no importance whether the counselling had been performed by members of the company itself or by an external agency or else with the help of the labour administration. It had to be a comprehensive measure, and the intervention must have lead to re-employment.

In any case, respondents should not stem from the management level but from intermediate or lower qualification levels. On the other hand, figure 5 would not lead to an equal distribution of, e.g. “female white collar workers” as opposed to “male white collar workers” or “female blue collar workers”. These details would depend on the branches or specific situations within the different countries. An equal distribution might thus not be considered suitable in any case (see, e.g. construction or coal industry in Germany, clearly affected by insecurity and characterised by fairly low qualification levels – but predominated by male employees). It was agreed that further details for the selection of interviewees should be based on personal access and suitability within each country.

Figure CR-5: Selection criteria for the two sub-samples of the qualitative studies



3.2 National sample selection

As has been outlined, further to the above general selection criteria, each national research team applied further criteria as to, e.g., selection of relevant branches. These are elaborated in the National Reports in this volume. Hereafter, we will present a short overview.

In *Belgium* the food industry was chosen where the requirements to increase competitiveness have led to a number of restructuring processes; smaller companies have been taken over by multinationals. The airline and automobile sectors are further branches that were chosen, as well as banks. Among the branches selected in *Germany* were railway, construction, chemical industry and also banks. As regards the industrial sectors, female respondents were underrepresented in the sample. Branches facing crises in *Italy* were food industry, chemical industry, textile and construction.

The selection turned out to be more difficult for the re-employed sub-sample, as outplacement counselling is not implemented equally in all the branches. Especially as regards the “re-employed”, respondents in *Spain* mainly came from multinational companies as these are, so far, the only companies that make use of outplacement counselling for those being dismissed. Finally, because of the favourable labour market situation in *The Netherlands* at the time of the interviews, no clear distinction could be detected between different branches.

Table CR-1 gives an overview on the interviews performed in each country with regards to the subgroup “insecure jobs”, age composition and branches as well as qualification levels selected.

In *Germany*, ten of the employees interviewed had been employed at the same company for a period of 10 to 19 years, five persons for more than 30 years, and only 5 persons (of which three came from the IT sector) for less than 5 years. In *Italy*, the average tenure of the interviewees with their present company was 14 years. In *Spain*, most interviewees had worked at the same company for many years; only the younger workers had experienced a more complex working life, esp. in the service sector (here we find mostly women and younger persons). Thus, there is a tendency – this is also confirmed for *Belgium* and *The Netherlands* – that a considerable number of employees who are currently facing insecurity with regard to their companies’ situation have been working there for quite a long time – sometimes, as will appear in the National Reports, for more than just one generation. A shorter job duration is mostly found within the sector of information technology (see, e.g. National Reports Germany as well as Italy) where job transitions are normal and people are used to switching jobs whenever there is a better perspective or payment.

Table CR-2 gives an overview on the interviews performed in each country with regards to the subgroup “successfully re-employed”, age composition and branches as well as qualification levels selected.

In most countries under study, the situation resembles that of the first sub-sample in the sense that a longer duration of employment within the previous company was predominant. In *Italy*, however, the average tenure had only been two years.

Table CR-1: Composition of the sub-sample “insecures”

Country	Age in years	Sex / family situation	Branches	Qualification
Belgium (N = 25)	average 39.2	16 male / 9 female; mostly married and with chil- dren	food industry; airlines; car industry; banking sector	almost equally blue- and white-collar workers (almost all with low or medium level of education)
Germany (N = 25)	26 to 51	21 male / 4 female	construction industry; energy and IT sectors; banking; Deutsche Bahn AG (German Railways)	predominantly work- ers (18) and lower staff (7)
Italy (N = 25)	25 to 53 (majority over 40)	14 male / 11 female; mostly married and with chil- dren	mainly industry, e.g. electron- ics and computers (6), textiles (4), mechanics (3), and ser- vice (5)	medium to high; mostly high school degrees; 14 white- collar and 11 blue- collar workers
Spain (N = 25)	28 to 53 (average 40.5)	13 male / 12 female; some married, majority with children	primary sector: mining industry; secondary sector: car and home appliance manufacturing, telecommuni- cation; tertiary sector: commerce, private education, media activities, public institu- tions	predominant level of academic qualifica- tions are secondary studies
The Nether- lands (N = 25)	28 to 53 (average 41)	11 male / 14 female; about half with resp. without children; 17 currently married	banking (2), ministry of de- fence (1), reintegration (6), industrial manufacturing (3), technical manufacturing (1), telecom (2), publishing (3), transport (2), health care (1), education (2), automobile industry (3)	predominantly skilled workers from various job levels

Remark: The entries in the table differ across countries as there were no pre-set categories for these characteristics.