

Economic Crisis, Quality of Work and Social Integration:

Topline Results from Rounds 2 and 5
of the European Social Survey

ESS Topline
Results Series

3
Issue

Accessing the European Social Survey Data and Documentation

The European Social Survey provides free access to all of its data and documentation. These can be browsed and downloaded from its website: <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org>.

Specific initiatives have been developed to promote access to and use of the growing dataset, including EduNet and NESSTAR, both of which are available via the ESS website.

EduNet

The ESS e-learning tool, EduNet, was developed for use in higher education. It provides hands-on

examples and exercises designed to guide users through the research process, from a theoretical problem to the interpretation of statistical results. Eight topics are now available using data from the ESS.

NESSTAR

The ESS Online Analysis package uses NESSTAR which is an online data analysis tool, documentation to support NESSTAR is available from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (<http://www.nesstar.com/index.html>).

Public attitudes matter in democratic societies. They reflect what citizens believe, want, fear and prefer. They are difficult to measure, are often unexpressed, and cannot be inferred from electoral choices alone. Nor can they be gleaned from media opinion polls which tend to give momentary and incomplete glimpses of attitude formation and change. The European Social Survey provides detailed accounts of public attitudes and behaviour utilising high quality scientific methodologies and repeat measures over time.

The ESS Topline Results Series provides an introduction to key issues in European societies from leading academic experts in the field. The series goes beyond a simple presentation of the data, providing references to theory and detailed academically informed analysis. It is hoped not only that the series is informative but also that it will inspire others to utilise this rich data resource.

Rory Fitzgerald

ESS Director

The author of this issue:

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The report draws upon analyses conducted by the author and other members of the Questionnaire Design Team – Martina Dieckhoff (WZB, Berlin), Helen Russell (ESRI, Dublin), Nadia Steiber (Vienna University of Economics and Business), Michael Tåhlin (SOFI, Stockholm), as well as Vanessa Gash (City University London), Hande Inanc (University of Oxford), Frances McGinnity and Dorothy Watson (ESRI, Dublin), Javier Polavieja (Universidad Carlos III, Madrid) and Ying Zhou (University of Surrey, UK).

The research team is grateful to the British Academy for funding its meetings to discuss the analysis through its Small Grants Scheme. The work of the team is due to be published as: Gallie D. ed. *Economic Crisis, Quality of Work and Social Integration: the European Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2013).

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Economic Crisis, Quality of Work and Social Integration: Topline Results from Rounds 2 and 5 of the European Social Survey

Duncan Gallie

Introduction

The economic crisis unleashed by the bank failures of 2008 has been the most severe since the 1930s. What have been its implications for people's everyday experience of the quality of their jobs, for their family lives and personal well-being and for their sense of commitment to the institutions of their society? Was the experience of the crisis very similar across Europe, or did it differ as a result either of the severity of the crisis or the degree of protection offered by national institutional systems?

These issues were the focus of the first repeat module of the European Social Survey (ESS) carried out in 2010 (Round 5). It built upon a set of questions initially asked by the ESS in 2004 (Round 2) on family, work and well-being, thereby providing a direct comparison between the period prior to the crisis and a period in which most countries had emerged from the recession of 2008-9 (although still without recovering to their GDP levels at the pre-recession peak).¹

In this report we present key findings for the 19 countries for which there were comparable data available by the Spring of 2012 for both 2004 and 2010. These included two Liberal Anglo-Saxon countries (Ireland and the UK), four Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden), four Continental West European countries (Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands)², three Southern countries (Greece, Portugal and Spain) and six East European countries (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia).

In each round of the survey approximately 37,000 interviews were carried out in the 19 countries,

providing representative national samples of the population. Of these, approximately 15,000 were employees in each round – providing the basis for the analyses of work quality. Each country organized its own translation and fieldwork, to standards specified by the ESS Core Scientific Team. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in people's homes.

In assessing the impact of the economic crisis we both related the changes over time to measures of the severity of the crisis in particular countries, whether with respect to decline of GDP or rise of unemployment, and we drew upon a number of retrospective questions in the 2010 survey that provided information about the individual's work and family experiences of the crisis during the previous three years.

Economic Crisis and the Quality of Work

The survey focused on five key issues with respect to the quality of work: opportunities for training, job control, work intensity, job security and work-family conflict.

Training Opportunities

Continuing training is central to the quality of work as it enables employees to continue to develop their skills throughout their working lives. At the same time enriching the skill base is essential for future economic growth. Did the economic crisis affect the extent to which employees had opportunities for training?

Taking the overall pattern for the 19 countries, there was a clear decline in the frequency with which people received training – indeed the odds of getting training were 20% lower in 2010 than

in 2004, even when possible changes in the characteristics of the workforce and of workplaces were taken into account. But there were important differences between countries, as can be seen in Figure 1. There was no significant change in the volume of training in any of the Nordic countries and there was actually an increase in two of the Continental countries. In contrast, there were decreases in the UK and Ireland and, particularly, in the East European countries.

One factor accounting for these differences was the severity of the economic crisis. While most countries were affected by the recession, there were marked variations in its severity and in the duration of the economic crisis. Those countries that had experienced greater decline in GDP growth rates between 2004 and 2010 tended to have seen a sharper drop in training provision. But there were also considerable differences between countries that had experienced similar levels of economic difficulty.

Institutional differences were another factor that explained differences in training trends over time.

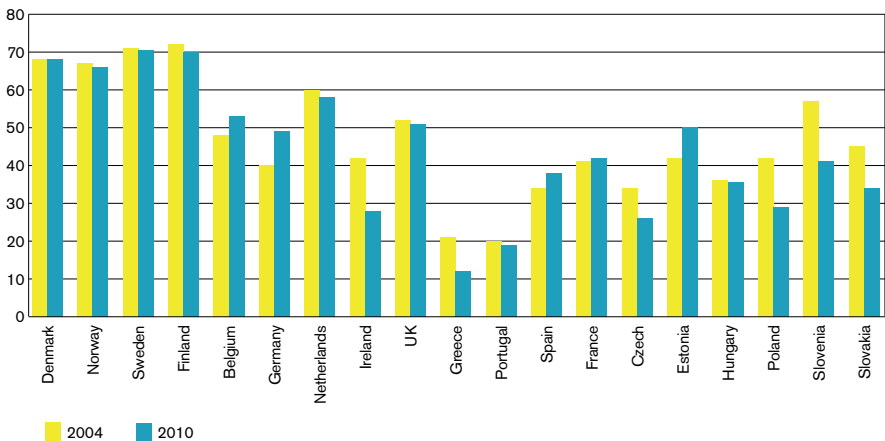
Those countries that had stronger regulations for protecting people's jobs and that made dismissals and redundancies more difficult were more likely to maintain their previous level of training provision than those that allowed employers greater freedom to fire their employees. This suggests that employers make a greater effort to upgrade the skills of their workforce where they know that they will have a relatively long-term relationship with their employees.

Finally, it is notable that there was no tendency for inequalities in training between employees with different levels of education to grow greater over the period of the crisis. Rather education-based training inequality decreased in several countries over the period.

Job Control

Research has consistently shown that job control, employees' ability to influence decisions at work, is one of the most important factors affecting their motivation and well-being. It also been shown to be important in helping employees to deal with

Figure 1 Proportion of Employees Receiving Training 2004 – 2010



high levels of work pressure, in a way that reduces its effects for psychological distress.

The most striking feature of the comparison of the level of job control in European countries in 2004 and 2010 is that the differences between countries remained very consistent over time. Figure 2 shows the country scores for a job control index derived from three items in the ESS about how far their management allows employees to decide on daily work organization, the pace of work and organizational policy decisions. Employees in the Nordic countries had the highest levels of involvement in decisions about their work, those in the Continental European countries had an intermediate level, while employees in the Southern and East European countries had the least influence. These differences in part reflected the extent to which countries had developed effective systems of workplace representation and the national strength of trade union membership.

But there was evidence of change in the Southern and some of the East European countries. This

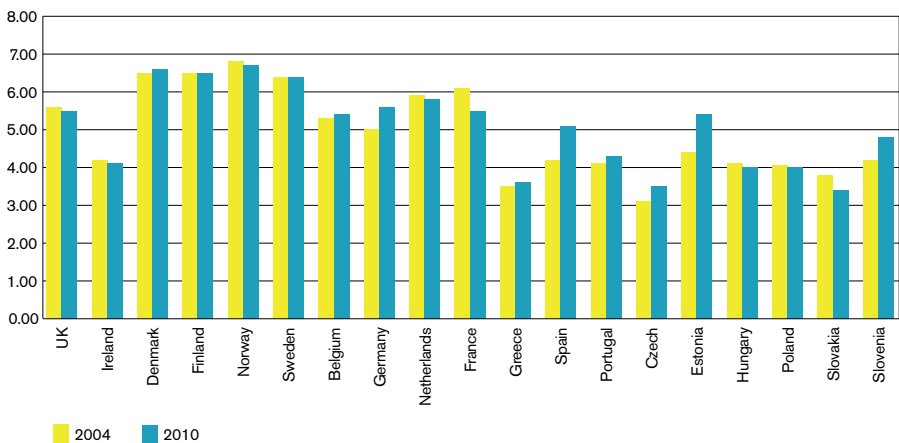
was generally for an increase in employees' control over their jobs. This partly reflects the fact that in these countries the recession had led to a particularly large loss of manual worker jobs that typically have relatively low levels of control. The elimination of such jobs from the workforce resulted in a rise in the average level of control of those who remained in work.

One country that stood out as distinct in pattern was France. This was the only country among the richer EU-15 countries that saw a significant decline in employee influence at work.

Work Intensity and Work Stress

Work intensity in terms of the effort required and the time pressures in the job has been shown consistently to be one of the strongest factors affecting employee well-being at work. The recession of the early 1990s was accompanied by a striking rise in work intensity across European countries, after which the level stabilized in the decade from 1995 to 2005. But the evidence from the European Social Survey suggests that it

Figure 2 Job Control Index Scores (0-10) by Country 2004-2010



rose again with the recession of 2008-9 and its aftermath. Moreover, as can be seen in Figure 3, this was the case in all of the regions of Europe.

The rise in work intensity was clearly linked to the experience of economic crisis. Employees who were in organizations that had experienced financial difficulties over the previous three years, that were in workplaces where there had been staff reductions and that reported that their own jobs had become less secure, were more likely to report high levels of work intensity than those who worked in organizations that had been less affected by the crisis.

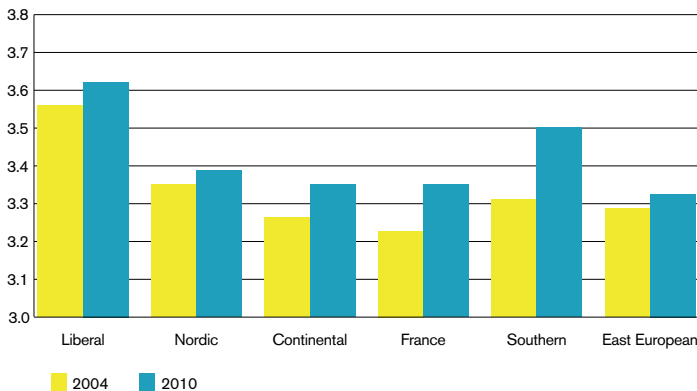
Previous research has indicated that work intensity is most likely to be damaging for employees' psychological and physical health where it is associated with low levels of control at work. Such jobs are known as 'high strain' jobs. In contrast to the very general nature of the rise in work intensity, there was an increase in such high strain jobs only in a more limited set of countries – the Anglo-Saxon countries (Ireland and the UK), the East European countries and above all in France.

Job Insecurity

A high level of job insecurity has been shown to have as serious an effect on psychological health as unemployment. Economic crisis could be expected in general to lead to much greater anxiety about job loss. However, while this was true for the European countries as a whole, it can be seen in Figure 4 that there were important exceptions. In the Nordic and the Continental countries, job insecurity was no greater in 2010 than it had been in 2004. In contrast, insecurity rose sharply in the Liberal Anglo-Saxon countries and in the Southern and East European countries.

A long-term trend over the decade and a half preceding the crisis was an increase in the number of employees who were working on non-standard contracts, that is to say temporary or part-time contracts. This has been seen as reflecting a concern to increase flexibility in dealing with more volatile markets, but it had the consequence of increasing structural insecurity, in the sense of jobs that had lower levels of employment protection than traditional jobs. Important issues are whether the economic crisis led employers to change the

Figure 3 Work Intensity Scores (0-5) 2004-2010



structure of their workforces by increasing the proportion of employees in less secure jobs and whether the employment conditions of those in such jobs have grown worse.

The evidence suggests that there were no major shifts in the structure of the workforce over the period, although the proportion of part-timers increased in most countries. Moreover, there was no increase in the insecurity experienced by those in temporary and part-time work compared to those in regular jobs (Figure 4). But there was one important way in which those on non-standard contracts bore disproportionately the costs of the economic crisis. They were significantly more likely to have experienced pay cuts than those in standard-contract jobs.

Work-Family Conflict

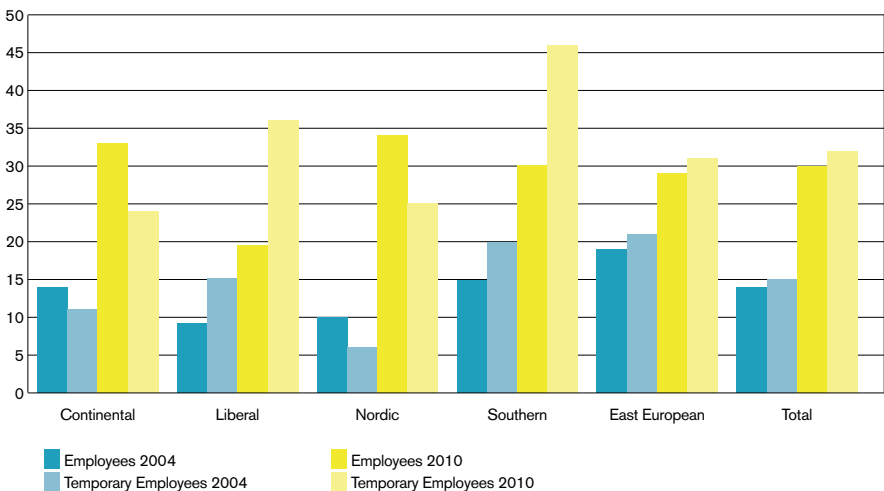
With the growth of women's labour market participation, the issue of work-family conflict has

become increasingly central to discussions about the quality of work. The effect of economic crisis on the pressures work imposes on family life was not easy to anticipate. Reduced working hours may have alleviated it, but other factors such as greater work intensity, job insecurity and financial strain might have exacerbated it.

The evidence from the European Social Survey shows that there was in fact a small but significant increase in work-family conflict between 2004 and 2010³. Moreover this was true in most countries. A number of changes in working conditions over the period contributed to it, including an increase in unsocial hours, an increase in working overtime at short notice and the growth in job insecurity. But by far the most important factor was the rise in work pressure.

As can be seen in Figure 5, there was a general tendency for work-family conflict to be higher

Figure 4 Job Insecurity among All Employees and Temporary Workers 2004-2010



among married and cohabiting couples the greater the increase in the unemployment rate (see EU Labour Force Survey) over the period. Moreover, retrospective information in the 2010 ESS on changes in people's work and family situation made it possible to examine the impact of economic change more directly. Those who had experienced a deterioration in their family budget had a significantly higher level of work-family conflict. Those who had experienced negative changes at work, such as a reduction in their job security or a reduction in the intrinsic interest of their job, also reported greater difficulties in reconciling work and family life. Moreover, the impact of the crisis on the organization for which people worked also took its toll. Those who worked in firms that had experienced financial difficulty in the past three years experienced higher levels of work-family conflict, even when account

was taken of potential differences in personal and other job characteristics.

Economic Crisis and Social Integration

Did the economic crisis affect subjective social integration, as reflected in people's satisfaction with, and commitment to, the structures and institutions of their societies? The European Social Survey allows us to look in particular at three key issues: people's attachment to employment, their degree of satisfaction with their personal life conditions and their attitude to the legitimacy of the existing institutions of political governance.

Employment Commitment

For those of working age, commitment to employment has come to be seen as a core aspect of social integration. This is not just because of its implications for national growth strategies, but also

Figure 5 Change in Work Family Conflict and Change in the Unemployment Rate 2004-2010*



* Note: Figures are based on those who are married/cohabiting and aged 20-64.

because it has increasingly been seen as the key to reducing levels of poverty and preventing social marginalization. Indeed, many of the changes in welfare policy across Europe since the 1990s have been motivated by the perceived need to ensure high levels of employment commitment.

Economic crisis has been seen as a potential threat to employment commitment because unemployment is thought to lead over time to an erosion of the work ethic. However, the evidence from the European Social Survey casts considerable doubt on this assumption. It provides an indicator of non-financial (or intrinsic) employment commitment, capturing whether or not people would wish to work even if there were no financial need. As can be seen from Figure 6 there is no evidence that the unemployed are less committed to employment than the employed. This was the case even for those with relatively long spells of unemployment. In fact the unemployed tend to show higher commitment in some

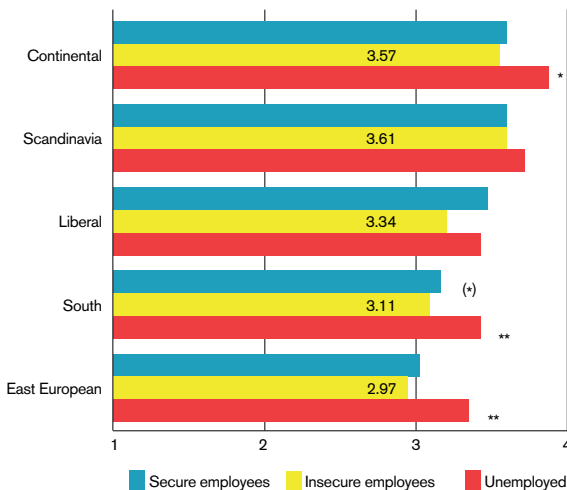
countries than those in paid work, especially in the countries that had experienced persistently high unemployment in the 2000s.

The experience that does appear to have negative effects on employment commitment is job insecurity among those in work. Indeed, in Southern and Eastern Europe, the higher commitment of the unemployed when compared to employees is mainly due to the very low commitment levels among the insecure employed. This is particularly problematic in that those experiencing job insecurity constitute a considerably larger share of the labour force than the unemployed. Moreover, given the importance of early attitude formation for longer-term orientations, it is notable that these effects are found to be particularly marked among young adults under the age of 30.

Subjective Well-Being

There is now consistent evidence that unemployment has a severe effect in reducing life

Figure 6 Effects of job insecurity and unemployment on employment commitment



Note: Statistically significant differences are indicated by stars: ** $p=0.01$; * $p<0.05$; (+) $p<0.10$

satisfaction and that its scarring can persist over long periods of time. It also has a spill-over effect, reducing the life satisfaction of other members of the household. But there has been considerable disagreement about the factors that account for this. Moreover, relatively little is known about whether the effects of job loss vary depending on the general level of unemployment.

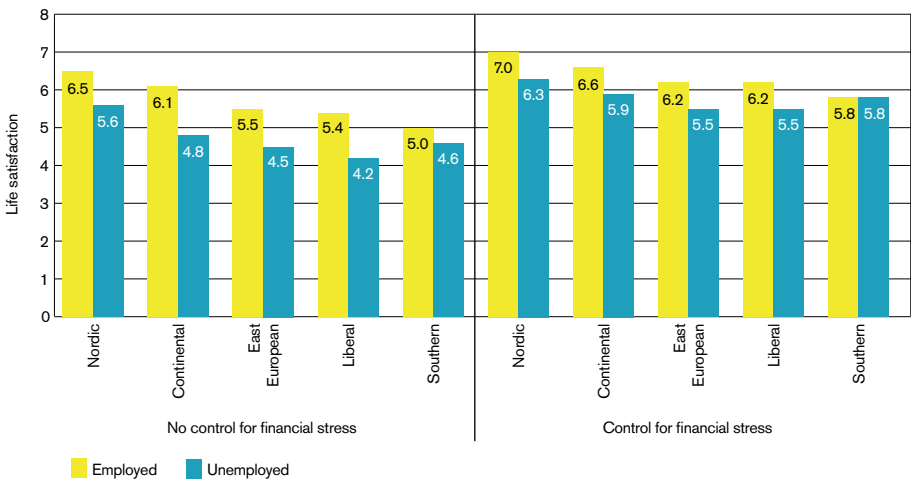
Some explanations of why unemployment is so damaging for life satisfaction have emphasised its implications for financial deprivation, whereas others have pointed to the way in which it disrupts social networks and creates social isolation. The evidence from the European Social Survey shows that, while both factors matter, it is above all financial deprivation that affects satisfaction with life. It accounted for over half of the effect for the person who experiences unemployment and all of the effect for their partner. It is for this reason

that, as can be seen in Figure 7, the impact of unemployment is weaker in the Nordic countries than in the Anglo-Saxon countries, the Continental and the East European countries. The Nordic countries have welfare systems that provide much more generous financial support to unemployed people and this sharply reduces the financial deprivation brought by unemployment.

Unemployment in the Southern European countries also appears to be a very different experience from in other parts of Europe, with the unemployed differing little from the employed in their life satisfaction. This partly reflects exceptionally low levels of satisfaction among the employed in these countries.

Finally, the overall level of unemployment in a country did not seem to increase or decrease the damaging effects of unemployment for

Figure 7 Life Satisfaction of the Employed and Unemployed (0-10), with and without controls for financial stress



Note: Scores estimated from models controlling for a range of personal and social characteristics. All differences between the employed and unemployed are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) with the exception of the Southern regime in the model which controls for financial stress.

the individual. It is personal experience of economic crisis such as unemployment, partner's unemployment, financial strain and insecurity that is critical for life satisfaction rather than the person's relative position compared to others in the wider society.

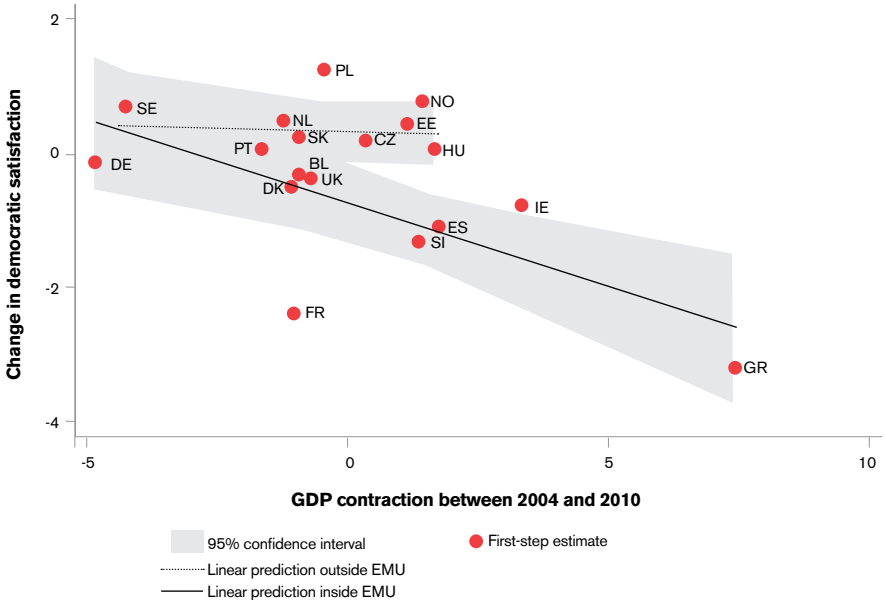
Political Legitimacy

The historical experience of the 1930s, which provides the nearest comparison to the current economic crisis in terms of severity, raises the issue of the impact of sharply rising rates of unemployment and heightened job insecurity on people's belief in the legitimacy of their political institutions – in particular through their level of political trust and satisfaction with existing democratic institutions. Is there a risk that prolonged economic crisis is undermining the foundations of popular support for democracy?

There was indeed a decline between 2004 and 2010 in overall levels of political trust and satisfaction with democracy quite widely across much of Europe, but the extent to which this was the case varied considerably by country. It was significant in Britain, Belgium, Denmark and Finland; particularly notable in France, Ireland, Slovenia and Spain and reached truly alarming proportions in the case of Greece. Further, changes in political trust and satisfaction with democracy are significantly correlated with changes in GDP growth over the period.

There were two ways in which economic crisis undercut political legitimacy. The evidence clearly confirmed that personal economic vulnerability to the crisis – whether in terms of class position, unemployment experience or financial distress – was associated with lower levels of political trust

Figure 8 Economic Contraction and Change in Satisfaction with Democracy 2004 - 2010: Results from Two-Step Regression



and greater dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy. But the effects of the crisis were felt more widely than just by those who had experienced its costs personally. It not only eroded the objective economic conditions of many citizens, but also created widespread anxiety about a country's future even among those who did not experience hardship directly. This wider growth of dissatisfaction with the economic situation of the country was strongly related to the decline in political legitimacy.

As well as the severity of the crisis per se, there was an institutional factor that contributed to perceptions of the adequacy of economic management and the legitimacy of the political institutions – namely whether or not a country was a member of the European Monetary Union. As can be seen in Figure 8, the effect of economic contraction on satisfaction with democracy primarily characterised the Eurozone countries. This could be seen as reflecting the fact that governments in these countries were in a weaker position to find policy solutions to the crisis at national level.

Conclusions

The findings from the European Social Survey provide evidence that the economic crisis had significant effects for the quality of work. It led to a reduction in the level of training provided by employers, to changes in patterns of work organization in several of the East European countries, to higher levels of work intensity and to greater job insecurity. At the same time it undermined social integration through the negative effects of job insecurity on young people's commitment to employment and by undermining people's trust in politics and their satisfaction with democracy.

But there was also a marked stability over time in many of the differences between countries and country groups. Most notably the Nordic countries

continued to stand out as providing by far the highest quality of work and the greatest protection against the psychological distress caused by unemployment. It is clear that the institutional framework of countries – in particular their patterns of employment regulation and the nature of their welfare states – plays an important role in determining the quality of people's everyday lives.

The two ESS modules enable us to study the effects of the economic crisis up to 2010. But this is clearly far from the end of the story. From 2011, Europe entered into a new phase of the crisis – the Sovereign Debt crisis. This is likely to have led to an even greater disruption of people's work and family lives, particularly in Southern Europe. It could well have led to a much greater polarization between different European regions. It was also a phase of the crisis that was characterized in many countries by a particularly severe restructuring of the public sector, which is likely to have led to particularly harsh consequences for women. It will be vital to ensure that the ESS continues to monitor the changing patterns of work life in Europe and their implications for both the family and the wider community.

Further Reading

Gallie D. ed. (2013, forthcoming) *Economic Crisis, Quality of Work and Social Integration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gallie, D. ed. (2007) *Employment Regimes and the Quality of Work*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gallie, D. & Russell, H. (2009) Work-family conflict and working conditions in Western Europe. *Social Indicators Research*, 93(3):445-467.

McGinnity, F. & Whelan, C.T. (2009) Reconciling work and family life. Evidence from the European Social Survey. *Social Indicators Research*, 93(3):433-445.

Steiber, N. (2009) Reported levels of time-based and strain-based conflict between work and family roles in Europe: a multi-level approach. *Social Indicators Research*, 93(3):469-488.

Endnotes

Further details of the ESS can be found at www.europeansocialsurvey.org, including details of participating countries, sample sizes, questionnaires and response rates.

¹ Findings from the first module of 2004 have been widely published, see for instance Gallie, 2007; Gallie and Russell, 2009; McGinnity and Whelan (2009) and Steiber (2009).

² For most analyses France was treated separately from the other Continental West European countries because of its distinctive institutional framework.

³ The work-family conflict measure is derived from four ESS questions: 'How often do you keep worrying about work problems when you are not working?'; 'How often do you feel too tired after work to enjoy the things you would like to do at home?'; 'How often do you find that your job prevents you from giving the time you want to your partner or family?'; 'How often do you find that your partner or family gets fed up with the pressure of your job?'. The index varies from 1 (never) to 5 (always).



Notes

About the ESS

The ESS is a biennial survey of social attitudes and behaviour which has been carried out in up to 36 European countries since 2001. Its dataset contains the results of over 200,000 completed interviews which are freely accessible. All survey and related documentation produced by the ESS is freely available to all.

ESS topics:

- Trust in institutions
- Political engagement
- Socio-political values
- Moral and social values
- Social capital
- Social exclusion
- National, ethnic and religious identity
- Well-being, health and security
- Demographic composition
- Education and occupation
- Financial circumstances
- Household circumstances
- Attitudes to welfare
- Trust in criminal justice
- Expressions and experiences of ageism
- Citizenship, involvement and democracy
- Immigration
- Family, work and well-being
- Economic morality
- The organisation of the life-course

The ESS has applied to become a European Research Infrastructure Consortium, hosted by the UK.

Current governance arrangements

Supported up by a formidable array of multinational advisory groups (a Scientific Advisory Board, a Methods Group, Question Design Teams and National

Coordinators) the ESS is designed and coordinated

by seven institutions

(its Core Scientific Team):

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GESIS, Mannheim

NSD, Bergen

University Pompeu Fabra,

Barcelona

The Netherlands Institute

for Social Research/SCP,

The Hague

Catholic University of Leuven

University of Ljubljana

Find out more about the ESS and access its data at www.europeansocialsurvey.org



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