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# Employment contracts and psychological contracts in Europe

*Results from a pilot study*

**Med svensk sammanfattning**

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## *Summary of results*

The general aim of the PSYCONES project is the investigation of how changing patterns of employment relations affect well-being and quality of life for European citizens. More specifically we propose to investigate the “psychological contract” as a possible intervening factor affecting the relationship between degree of job permanency and individual well-being. The psychological contract is defined here as the perceptions of the reciprocal expectations and obligations implied in the employment relationship. The project has two phases and this report covers only the first, an exploratory pilot study, made in preparation for a larger comparative study. Six European countries have been involved: Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, the UK and, for comparative purposes, Israel. The purpose of the pilot was exploratory, to test definitions and concepts together with research instruments to be used in all countries. A questionnaire was developed, translated and tested in each country in small samples of employees with a varying degree of contract permanency.

Total sample size obtained was 1573 with varying numbers for the countries. We managed to obtain relatively large samples from health care (31%), retail (23%) and temporary help agencies (25%). Mean age was 35 years and there was a small overrepresentation of women in the whole sample. Overall there was also a variation across educational levels with proportions of academics varying between 19% (Germany) and 76% (Israel).

Results showed that those on permanent contracts were generally older, more often male and had longer weekly working hours. They generally perceived a higher workload but also a higher level of autonomy compared to those employed on various forms of fixed-term contracts. A significantly higher proportion of the permanently employed, compared to other employment forms, reported sickness presence on at least one occasion during the last six months. Further, those who had the most precarious contract (in terms of duration) more often had a second job, but still seemed to have relatively long-term relations with the organisation. On the other hand, those on fixed-term contracts of longer duration reported the highest level of perceived insecurity and the lowest level of voluntary choice of contract form.

As for psychological contracts, the permanently employed more often reported promises to have influencing decisions in the organisation. They also more often reported transactional and career related promises made by their employer compared to those on fixed-term contracts. Finally, results in general supported an interacting effect of country and sector on worker’s attitudes.

Results clearly indicate that our sample for the pilot study consisted of relatively qualified persons employed on an hourly basis and that the samples most probably represented “elite temporaries” more than what we traditionally conceive as casual workers. In order to get a more complete picture we clearly need broader samples for

the main study. Finally, and perhaps most important of all, the pilot study has given us important information about how to refine our methods for the main study. We feel safe to conclude that results support our general ideas about the role of the psychological contract as a relevant factor for the well-being of employees.

## *Introduction*

Employment relationships in Europe and most of the industrialised world are changing as a consequence of fundamental shifts in the work setting and the nature of work. Economic changes, technological innovation and industrial restructuring have proved to be crucial factors influencing labour markets, organisations, the nature of jobs and work activity. Increased global competition is another critical trend demanding a capacity for rapid change, which poses major challenges for co-operation between companies and their employees.

Despite a growth in recent decades, it is still a fact that the proportion of flexible employment contracts is relatively low. The mean proportion for the EU as a whole is 13% with a variation between 3-33% according to a recent report (OECD, 2002). Nevertheless, the level of political, economic and social attention has been remarkable. Probably the most important reason for public concern is that the return of insecurity and precarious employment represents a profound deviation from the development of the welfare state, which was a central goal in most European countries during the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Issues of equal treatment of workers on fixed-term or temporary contracts in terms of wages, access to training as well as health and safety have been the aim of negotiation and regulations in the EU. Companies (employers and employees), the social partners and policy makers in the European Union still have a need for clearer evidence about the benefits and inherent risks associated with increased employment flexibility.

The general aim of this project is the investigation of the changing patterns of employment relations and the relation to well-being and quality of life for European citizens. More specifically we propose to investigate the “psychological contract” as a possible intervening factor affecting the relationship between degree of job permanency and individual well-being. The psychological contract is defined here as the perceptions of reciprocal expectations and obligations implied in the employment relationship.

The study is focused on work-related well-being of employees but data will be collected on several levels to elucidate employment relations and zone of negotiability across sectors and European countries. An effort will be made to identify societal core dimensions affecting the psychological contract. Negotiations about employment relationships take place within a cultural context varying across the European countries, affecting the terms and conditions that society allows either the worker or the firm to negotiate (i. e. the zone of negotiability, see Rousseau & Schalk 2000). Cross-national investigating and mapping of this cultural context seem crucial for the understanding of future development of the European labour market and for the well-being of citizens of the union.

## *Objectives of the pilot study*

The project has two phases and this report covers only the first, an exploratory pilot study, made in preparation for a larger comparative study. Six European countries have been involved: Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, the UK and, for comparative purposes, Israel.

The pilot study had the following objectives:

- Preparation of a conceptual model
- Preparation and testing of a questionnaire to investigate the content and state of the psychological contract among employees and the relation to positive and negative outcomes
- Preparation of an interview schedule about the psychological contract for employers at different levels
- Developing measures for comparing countries

The grant from SALTSA gave us a unique opportunity to develop and test instruments to be used in the main study. Above all, we were able to prepare a proposal to the Fifth Framework Programme of the European Community, which announced its third call during the pilot phase. This resulted in financial support to conduct the main study during the 2.5 years to follow. Results from the pilot phase will thus be analysed and integrated in the main study.

However, for this report from the pilot phase we have chosen a few aspects assumed to be of interest to policy makers and social partners. Although the focus is exploratory and samples for the pilot are far from representative, this initial phase can give indications of critical issues for future research. The focus here, although limited, is on employment contracts in relation to attitudes and health of employees as well as differences between sectors and countries.

## *Research background*

### **The growth of flexible employment contracts**

Flexibility is often seen as the necessary condition for the survival of national labour markets and organisations in a fast-moving world of growing global competition (Reilly, 1998). Labour flexibility has been defined as the ability to vary the quality and the quantity of personnel to suit changes in the market and the organisation's ability to adapt through the use of labour (Goudswaard & deNanteiul, 2000).

Employment in Europe (cited by Nätti, 2000) indicates that in 1998 12.8 per cent of the European workforce were employed on fixed-term contracts, up from 10.3 per cent in 1990. The highest proportions were found in Spain (32.9% of those employed), Finland (17.7%) and Portugal (17.3%). Sweden was found in the middle section among European countries (13.5%). At the lower end we find Luxembourg (2.9%), the United Kingdom (7.1%), Austria, and Belgium (7.8%). One of the more relevant surveys was reported by the European Foundation (Merllié & Paoli, 2000) based on its 1999 survey of working conditions among more than 21,000 workers in the countries of the European Union. Using standard definitions, they reported that 10 per cent were on fixed-term contracts while 2 per cent were temporary workers. However, when they looked at those in jobs for less than a year, 31 per cent were on fixed-term contracts and 9 per cent were classed as temporary workers (working for temporary help agencies), leaving 60% in permanent positions.

This means that alarmist press reports about the end of traditional employment and the proliferation of temporary and insecure jobs have proved wide of the mark. In most countries there has been a modest growth of flexible employment contracts. In Europe we have a variety of sources of data for this development. Health problems and perceived insecurity seem to be a general phenomenon which is present across a variety of employment contracts.

Within the proposed study we plan to cover a range of contract variations divided into a total of seven possible categories by degree of job permanency as well as direct vs. agency hire. In line with the first report from the NUEWO project (Bergström & Storrie, in press) we assume that the division into atypical as opposed to typical employment contract hides more than it reveals in terms of effects at the individual level. Building on the analysis of Marler, Milkovich and Barringer (1998) and the arguments about the growth of the “free” worker, a key issue likely to affect reactions to any form of temporary work is whether or not the worker is on his or her preferred form of employment contract (Krausz, Brandwein & Fox, 1995; Isaksson & Bellaagh, 2002). In the UK survey reported by Tremlett and Collins (1999) 147 out of 607, just under a quarter, did not want a permanent job. The main reasons reported were: not wanting the commitment that goes with permanent employment (21%), the loss of freedom to choose the work they wanted to do (19%), being too old (18%) and not interested in permanent employment (18%). In a US mini-census survey, 30.5 per cent of those in temporary employment expressed a preference for temporary work (Polivka, 1996). Much the most widely cited reason for undertaking temporary work was that it was the only type they could find, although a range of personal reasons linked to family circumstances and education were also quite widely cited. Gender differences could clearly be expected both among antecedents and preferences. It seems clear that we do need to take account of the circumstances that lead to a preference for temporary contracts and to the perceptions of choice, which in some cases may be severely constrained.

## **Perceptions of employment security**

A second general tendency in all European countries during the 1990s was that perceptions of job insecurity became more widespread (OECD 1997). Subjective job security refers to the perception that the job is more or less secure, whether or not there is objective evidence to support this. Perceptions of job insecurity reflect reactions to a potentially wide range of economic and social factors but could also be caused by factors at the organisational level and changing relations between employer and employee. This perception seems to be very common among workers who have witnessed downsizing in their organisation. Both private and public sector organisations continued to use downsizing and reductions of personnel as a means to cut costs. However, the proportion of employees feeling that their job was threatened was clearly higher than what could be expected on the basis of actual job stability. The “insecurity paradox” has become a topic of discussion among researchers (Heery & Salmon, 2000).

Several antecedents to the changing notions of job insecurity reflect common trends affecting the labour market in all European countries. Increasing use of flexible contracts of employment is perhaps the most important. Employment flexibility has become a management mantra and there is evidence that the various forms of employment flexibility have been increasingly applied in advanced industrial societies in recent years (CRANET surveys reported by MacShane & Brewster, 2000). Part of the background is rising global competition in the private sector and budget cuts and privatisation in the public sector.

There has been extensive research showing that job insecurity is associated with a range of negative consequences affecting job satisfaction, psychological well-being and life outside work (see, for example, De Witte, 1999; Nolan, Wichert & Burchell, 2000; Sverke, Hellgren & Näswall, 2002). Indeed, job insecurity, where it is experienced, is one of the most distressing features of the work situation. Only small differences in health and well-being have been reported between insecurely employed individuals and those who are unemployed, whereas generally higher values are reported for those who are in secure employment (De Witte, 1999; Isaksson, Hellgren & Pettersson 1999). Any potentially beneficial aspects of stress-reducing interventions may be counteracted or even destroyed when job insecurity comes onto the scene (Mohr, 2000).

Several authors have described how workers tend to lose faith in their managers and that perceived injustice and distrust is part of the “survivor sickness” (Burke & Cooper, 2000). This research highlights the importance of the relationship between workers and managers. Trust in managers could make workers less vulnerable to these symptoms. With its components (integrity, competence, consistency, openness and loyalty) trust is reflected in the evaluation of the state of the psychological contract.

There is a large body of literature exploring determinants of perceived job security. This ranges from economic and social analyses (see, for example, Burchell, et al, 2000; Guest, 2000) to psychological studies. Recent research confirms the need to view cautiously the conventional wisdom of the relationship between contingent

employment contracts and perceived job security. Guest, Mackenzie Davey and Patch (2000) found that temporary workers reported lower job security but agency workers higher security than permanent employees. Being on a contract of choice was also associated with higher job security. The absence of a clear and consistent association between objective indicators of job security, reflected in temporary versus permanent contracts and the subjective experience of job insecurity, suggests that we need to include subjective job security as an intervening variable in any analysis of the employment contracts and employee well-being.

From a European perspective it is also important to investigate the role of unions in the changing labour market, where a growing individualisation is sometimes described as the most important trend (Allvin & Sverke, 2000). Little is known about how unionisation affects members and non-members with more or less precarious forms of employment. Adapting to the new flexible firms is clearly a challenge for unions, and understanding demands from members in various forms of employment situation could clearly facilitate this process (Gallagher, 2002). Large country differences exist within Europe concerning regulations of employment contracts. Some countries like Sweden still have a high degree of collective agreements while others rely on legal governance. Hopefully our study can shed light on differential effects of these variations.

### **Psychological contract**

In our study, the psychological contracts held by employers and employees in organisations is proposed to be a possible intervening factor between actual degree of job permanency and individual well-being. The concept tries to capture the reciprocal promises and obligations implied in the employment relationship as well as mutual trust and perceived delivery of the deal. By implication, we assume the psychological contract to be part of a mechanism explaining levels of satisfaction and well-being, including health, among workers. A narrow (in terms of scope) and well-defined temporary contract with a trustworthy employer can thus be perceived as more satisfying than an objectively more secure contract with a non-trustworthy employer.

The psychological contract is defined here as the perceptions of the reciprocal expectations and obligations implied in the employment relationship. The *content* refers to what the worker expects to contribute to the organisation (e.g. effort, competencies and loyalty) and what the organisation will provide in return (e.g. pay, job security, career support). The content is assumed to be subjective, implied and dynamic and sensitive to organisational change such as downsizing.

Researchers (e.g. Rousseau, 1989; Rousseau & Parks, 1993) have described the content in terms of transactional and relational aspects, where the former stands for the short-term, well-specified exchange of work for pay, whereas the latter involves more long-term commitments such as career advancement in exchange for loyalty. The relational contract is what we generally describe as the traditional contract while the transactional aspects are more focused on short-term exchange and monetary aspects. In addition to the employment contract, the psychological contract can be important in

understanding job security perceptions, well-being and health. Research has also evaluated the *state* of the psychological contract (Guest, 1998), assessing the extent to which workers perceive that the organisation has *fulfilled its promises and commitments*, provided fairness of treatment and engendered trust.

Debate among researchers has concerned both the definition, the problem of identifying the other party to the deal, and the need to do so in order to give the concept an additional value for research (Guest 1998). Various features of the contract have also been discussed, e.g. time frame and scope, all of which it would be helpful to assess to improve our understanding. Generally, factors assumed to influence the psychological contract are poorly investigated but clearly the actual employment contract held by the individual is likely to be one of them. Other individual features such as age, personal time frame, tenure with the company and availability of other job options seem to be just as important.

### **Degree of job permanency, psychological contracts and employee outcomes**

The idea of a contract also implies that the deal can be breached or, to put it more strongly, violated. Perceived breaches of the psychological contract seem to be the rule rather than the exception, especially during organisational change, downsizing and mergers (Andersson & Schalk, 1998). Perceived breaches, particularly when they are perceived as a serious violation, can result in negative outcomes both for the organisation and the individual. Loyalty as a component of trust, organisational commitment and job satisfaction seem to be affected, and increased turnover has also been reported (Millward & Brewerton 2000). However, outcomes investigated have been largely limited to attitudes such as commitment and job satisfaction, whereas the use of health outcomes has been very rare (Guest, 2001).

Aronsson and Göransson (1999), in their comparison of Swedish workers and whether or not they were on their contract and in their occupation of choice, related these features to a number of indicators of health and well-being. They show that being on the contract or in the occupation of choice was more important than the permanent – temporary dimension. For example, those who reported the highest incidence of headaches and of feelings of fatigue and slight depression were those in permanent employment but not in their occupation of choice. In general, those on permanent contracts in their occupation of choice reported the most positive outcomes but they were often closely followed by those in temporary work in their occupation of choice. This research needs to be replicated elsewhere and it presents a strong case for including the kind of cognitive evaluation contained within the psychological contract in any assessment of the relationship between employment contracts and aspects of well-being.

The only studies that could be identified as having explored the relationship between the psychological contract and job security are the series of annual surveys reported by Guest and Conway. The 1997 survey (Guest and Conway, 1997) of a random sample of 1000 United Kingdom employees paid particular attention to job

security. It was assumed in a regression analysis that the psychological contract was more likely to affect job security than vice versa. Although the data were cross-sectional, the results showed that the factors most strongly associated with higher job security were: not expecting to be made redundant in the next two years, a positive state of the psychological contract, confidence in the availability of satisfactory employment alternatives, working in a high involvement climate and being younger. This suggests that the state of the psychological contract does matter, together with perceptions of the internal and external labour market.

Quinlan, Mayhew and Bohle (2000), in an extensive review of contingent work, including sub-contracting and self-employment, reported a range of studies, several of which were conducted in France, showing a link between temporary employment and both accidents and poorer work-related health. Explanations of these findings include lack of training, lack of supervision and lack of access to information and materials. Therefore, while the weight of the evidence is quite compelling, it is sometimes difficult to identify how much of the cause of poorer outcomes can be attributed to the type of contract and how much to the fact that temporary workers are often newer workers and that accidents may be due to less experience.

In summary, the limited evidence indicates that workers on temporary contracts show either the same or slightly lower commitment to the organisation where they work. It seems possible that where differences between permanent and temporary workers are found, these might be explained in terms of their psychological contracts. At the same time, it should be noted that organisational commitment is an outcome primarily of interest to organisations rather than individuals and the issue of organisational commitment might have rather different salience for permanent and temporary workers.

Although the research base is limited, there is sufficient evidence presented in this review to support the assumption that the psychological contract could be a key variable explaining variations in the relationship between types of employment contract and a range of outcomes of interest to both employers and workers.

### **Definitions and concepts to be tested in the pilot study**

During the pilot phase of the project we developed a conceptual model for the project (see below) and constructed and translated a questionnaire for employees on the basis of this model. During winter 2001-2002 validity and reliability of the questionnaire items and scales were tested across all countries. Furthermore, interview schedules were developed and tested to investigate the employer side of the psychological contract.

For the purpose of this study an effort was made to find the critical dimensions to describe and define employment contracts and construct a useful definition. Earlier studies have suffered from the lack of a common definition hampering theoretical development in the area. The definition should incorporate not only the “atypical” forms of employment (such as temporary or fixed-term) but also apply to the changing

circumstances of permanent employees. *Job security* was chosen as the most decisive dimension. Based on earlier research we also decided that the definition suggested should build on: (1) objective criteria of job security, and *not* individual evaluations, (2) a *time* dimension of the contract, (3) a distinction between being employed *directly* or being employed by an *agency*. The resulting table below shows altogether seven different contract categories. Job security was assumed to vary according to *degree of job permanency as decided by period of notice* entailed in the contract. This leads to four categories of direct and three forms of agency based employment: variable (subject to immediate notice), fixed-term (subject to notice), permanent (subject to notice) and permanent with no notice (life-long). As many of these seven categories as possible will be included in the national samples in the main study.

	Duration of contract				
Employment dimension					
Direct employment	1	2	3	4	
Employment by an agency	5	6	7	-	
	Variable	Fixed	Permanent	Perma- -nent	Degree of contract perma- nency
	Subject to immediate notice	Subject to notice	Subject to notice	-	

*Fig. 1. Definition of employment contract types bases on degree of job permanency and employment*

The model does not cover all aspects that may be relevant from a psychological point of view (i.e. geographical flexibility, variations in working hours and schedules, voluntary choice or not, working for more than one agency, variations of wages and qualifications or task demands, etc.). However these factors will be included in the analysis (see conceptual model below).

### **Conceptual model**

A model by Guest (1998) served as a starting point. The purpose of the new model (shown below) was to evaluate effects of ‘Degree of contract permanency’ (formal contract, agency/direct hire, volition) on well-being of employees (in terms of perceptions, attitudes, behaviour as well as various health outcomes). We are adopting

a broad definition of well-being to include satisfaction at work and in life as a whole, indicators of effective functioning (e.g. self-efficacy, work performance), mental health and work-life balance. We will also collect behavioural indicators such as accidents, sick-leave and work attendance while ill. The psychological contract, defined in terms of content, and state (trust, fairness and delivery of ‘the deal’) is assumed to have the status of an intervening variable. Some relevant features of the psychological contract are also included.

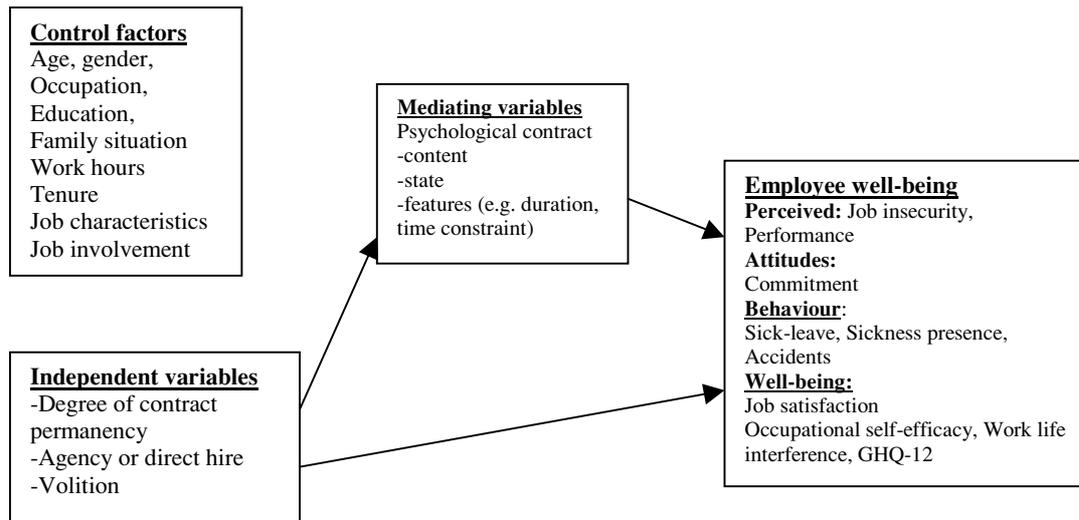


Fig. 2. Conceptual model for analysing employee well-being in PSYCONES

Finally, a number of possible confounding factors are included as *control* variables in this analysis. All variables in the model form the basis for the questionnaire to employees. Although the core of the project concerns individual well-being according to the conceptual model, a final analysis will also incorporate data collected from employers, facts about sectors and indicators of societal dimensions in a multilevel analysis. In this report we can only give a few examples of effects of sector and country differences to illustrate the issue. Looking at overall country and sector effects at this stage, the first hypothesis must be that country and sector differences should have interacting effects on worker’s perceptions and attitudes. In the main study we will give special attention to identifying more precisely *what* aspects of country and sectors create these differences.

The main purpose of the pilot was exploratory, to *test* definitions and concepts together with research *instruments* to be used in all countries. A preliminary questionnaire was developed for use in all countries based on earlier work by all team members, and tested in each country in small samples of employees from the above mentioned contract categories. An employer interview schedule was also constructed during the pilot phase to describe managers’ view of the psychological contract in their company. One of the purposes was to compare the balance between employer and

employee in their views of the content and state of the psychological contract and how this affects the well-being of employees.

## *Method*

### **Overview of samples in all countries**

The time frame for data collection for the pilot study was set at 3-4 months and with this time perspective it was clear from the start that representative samples could not be obtained. Since testing the instruments were the most important goal, we decided to test them in as many types of employment contracts as possible across all countries. Three target sectors were chosen: the temporary help sector, the retail sector and the health care sector. The choice was made on the basis of expected variation of employment contracts. Ideal sample size for the test was estimated at 200 employees in each country. Data would finally be pooled and analysed in Sweden (including construct equivalence and reliability and model testing).

Table 1 gives an overview of the samples of employees obtained in all countries, number of respondents across countries and sectors together with age and gender composition of the samples. Total sample size was 1573 with varying numbers for the countries. We managed to obtain relatively large samples from health care (31%), retail (23%) and temporary help agencies (25%). The time frame made it impossible both to have samples of 200 persons and to cover all three sectors in all countries. All countries got samples from the retail sector and most countries also managed to sample temporary agencies. As for health care we discovered similar problems in several countries (Sweden, Holland, UK and Israel) in gaining access to and co-operation from hospitals. The table also gives an overview of sample composition in terms of mean age, gender distribution and proportion of individuals with an academic degree. The mean age was 35 and there was a small overrepresentation of women in the whole sample. Overall there was also a variation across educational levels with proportions of academics varying between 19% (Germany) and 76% (Israel). Finally, the table shows the number of employer interviews conducted in each country.

Table 1. Overview of samples from all countries, respondents, sectors, contracts and some characteristics

Country	Company, sector	Respondents n Total	Type of contracts	Age Mean	Gender % females	Education (% acad.)	Employer interviews
Sweden	1. Agency “temps” in health care 2. Retail	n = 109 n = 44 153	1. Permanently employed by agency 62%, hourly basis 32%, probation 6% 2. 84% permanent, 16% hourly basis	41	87%	71%	2 senior, 2 line managers 2. 2 senior, 2 line
Germany	1. Health care 2. Retail 3. Agency “temps”	n = 71 n = 65 n = 65 201	1. Permanent (69%) Fixed-term (5%) apprenticeship (25%) 2. Permanent (50%) + fixed-term, hourly, probation, apprentice 3. Agency “temp” contract (perm, fixed t)	34	72%	19%	1. 1 senior, 4 line managers, 1 union rep 2.1 senior, 4 line managers 3. 1 senior manager
Netherlands	1. Health care, agency 2. Retail 3. Agency “temps” 4. University	n = 14 n = 24 n = 7 n = 20 54	1. – 2. Permanent 60% temporary 40% 3. Agency contr. permanent 4. Permanent 60%, temporary 40%	33	43%	43%	-
Belgium	1. Health care 2. Retail 3. Agency “temps” 4. Manufact. industry 5. R & D	n = 316 n = 38 n = 39 n = 144 n = 102 639	1. Permanent 88% Other 12% 2. Permanent 100% 3. Agency contract Permanent 50%, 4. Permanent 53% Fixed-term 44% 5. Permanent 49%, fixed-term 42%	36	62%	52%	Senior, line managers + union reps from all companies
UK	1. Retail 2. Inland Revenue 3. Utility 4. Service	n = 59 n = 100 n = 25 n = 13 197	1. 75% permanent 2. 59% permanent 3. 67% permanent 4. 85% permanent	35	44%	66%	-
Spain	1. Health care 2. Retail 3. Agency temps	n = 86 n = 99 n = 88 273	1. 69% permanent 2. 76% permanent 3. 64% permanent	32	75%	46%	2 managers
Israel	1. Agency temps	n = 55	1 100 agency employed	27	89%	76%	2 managers
Total	1. Health care 2. Retail 3. Agency temps 4. Others	n = 487, 31% n = 331, 21% n = 359, 23% n = 396, 25% Total: 1573	70% permanent 19% fixed-term 4% day/hourly contract 4% agency “temp” contract 4% other type	35	66%	51%	

## Instruments

The conceptual model served as the basis for the choice of variables to be included in the *questionnaire to employees*. In this version, the questionnaire came to consist of 42 questions mostly consisting of questions and scales previously used by researchers in the team. As for translations to the different languages, we first of all tried to find earlier translations. When these were not available each team was responsible for translation and using assisting consultants to ensure that translations were correct.

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of an effort to define employment contracts in terms of duration and period of notice. Furthermore, other relevant information affecting employment situation (working hours, second job, tenure on present job/company etc.) and individual information (family situation, education etc.) was collected. The largest part of the questionnaire consisted of scales aiming to measure perceptions of the job, attitudes towards job and employer and individual health and well-being. Three aspects of the psychological contract were investigated: content, perceived fulfilment of the contract and an evaluation of the state of the contract using items specially designed for the purpose of this study.

Scales and measures were evaluated by exploratory factor analysis and reliability test (internal consistency, Chronbach's alpha). Results concerning reliability are shown in table 2 below. Generally, the scales were acceptable in terms of internal consistency if we accept alphas above .70 as a limit. Most of the well-known attitude scales (job satisfaction, job involvement, organisational commitment, job insecurity, employability and work-related self-efficacy) reached acceptable levels of reliability.

Problems in terms of low reliability and unclear factor structure concerned scales measuring job characteristics, family-work interference and some health indicators. Factor analyses gave some indications of possible improvements. Nevertheless, for the purpose of the main study some scales have to be either improved, substituted or even removed. Most important of these is the volition scale, which is critical in our model. Job characteristics are other examples. We can use them but improvements should be made. Likewise, some of the health indicators should be substituted or modified (e.g. sleep, use of medicine).

Table 2. Overview of scales used and reliability tests (n=1573)

Index and dimensions	Reliability, Chronbach's alpha (original scale + modifications)	Reference in literature
Turnover intention, 5 items	.70	Price (1997)
Volition, 6 items	.61 or .65 with minor changes	Items from Krausz (personal communication, 2002) Ellingson, (1998)
QPS Nordic, total of 18 items, 5 dim. Work load (=quantitative dem.) Complexity (decision dem.) Skill utilisation (learning dem.) Autonomy Role clarity	.72 .64 no factor .52 no factor .69 (improved to .73 by adding q14j) .65	Aronsson, Gustafsson & Dallner (2000)
Perceived performance, 10 items	.80	Abramis (1994)
Organisational commitment, 6 items	.75	Cook & Wall (1980)
Job insecurity, 4 items	.84	De Witte (1999)
Employability, 5 items	.78	De Witte (personal communication, 2000)
Job involvement, 6 items	.75	Kanungo (1982)
Organisational climate, Friendly, 7 items Dynamic, 4 items Bureaucratic, 3 items	.70 or .85 if q21g is removed .82 .77	Guest (personal communication, 2002)
Work-related self-efficacy, 6 items	.86	Schyns & Collani (2002)
Job satisfaction, 5 items	.87	Price (1997)
Work-home interference 16 items Positive work-home Positive home-work Negative work-home Negative home-work	.74 (.78 if q31j is removed) .60 - no clear factor structure .77 .73	Wagena & Geurts (2000)
Distress, 12 items	.77 (SE, D, NL, BE) .82 for UK and Spain	GHQ-12, Goldberg (1979)
Sleep, 3 items	.59	Åkerstedt (1990)
Use of medicines, 5 items	.48	Johansson (personal communication, 2002)

As for the different measures of psychological contract, we developed and tested five different indicators:

- Employer obligations, 14 items, answered yes/no (e.g. “Has your organisation promised or committed itself to provide – interesting work, a reasonably secure job, etc.”)

- Perceived fulfilment/breach of employer obligations (“If yes, to what extent has this promise or commitment been kept?”, answered on a scale from 1-7 “not at all” to “totally”)
- Worker obligations, 10 items answered yes/no (“Have you promised or committed yourself to be punctual, be a good team player, etc.”)
- Perceived fulfilment/breach of worker obligations (“If yes, to what extent has this promise or commitment been kept?”, answered on a scale from 1-7 “not at all” to “totally”)
- Evaluation of the state of the psychological contract in the employing company in terms of justice and trust (8 items answered on a scale from 1-7 “not at all” to “totally”)

Factor analyses revealed three dimensions of the *content* of employer obligations. First, a general factor including transactional aspects (pay and job security) but also career prospects (challenging job, advance and grow, career), secondly a relational factor (e.g. a friendly climate and co-operation), and finally a dimension concerning the chance to have an influence on important decisions. As for the state items factor analyses revealed two independent factors, one concerning trust in management (e.g. trust in senior managers and line managers) and the other concerning justice (e.g. fair pay, fair implementation of organisational changes). The table below reports results concerning factor structure and internal consistency in terms of Chronbach’s alpha.

*Table 3. Evaluation of questionnaire measures of the psychological contract*

Variables	Factor structure	Reliability
Psychological contract		
1. Employer content	Three dimension	scale as a whole .87
General	q18a,b,c,d,f,h,n	.82
Relational	q18g,i,j,l	.72
Decision making	q18e,k,m,	.75
2. Workers content	One dimension	.84
3. State	Two dimension	Scale as a whole .87
Trust	q20a,b,c,h	.84
Justice	q20e,f,g	.82

### *Employer interviews*

The aim was to obtain a measure of the employer’s side of the psychological contract. Three open-ended questions were tested at this first exploratory stage. General information about the company (size, structure, etc.) was collected first, followed by questions about policies concerning the use of employment contracts. Secondly, promises and obligations from the company to its employees were probed together with differences between individuals related to their formal contract. Finally, we asked

company representatives to complete some of the questionnaire items, i.e. content and state of psychological contracts, organisational climate. The time frame for the pilot study and the open-ended nature of the questions made this part both difficult and very time consuming to complete. Countries having extra resources for data collection were clearly the ones most successful but nevertheless we had difficulties in coding and processing the open-ended answers. These reasons made it impossible to report any general conclusion about the employer side of the psychological contract at this stage. The general conclusion was that we need to develop a standardised interview and avoid open ended questions for the main study.

### **Statistical analyses**

Generally when talking about statistically “significant” in this report, this means that the differences showed significant results at the .05 level.

A simple test of our conceptual model (fig 1) was made using regression analyses. Job satisfaction, organisational commitment and distress symptoms were regressed on three steps of factors. Only some of the control factors were used and only a simple division of employment contract into permanent and “other”. Effects of psychological contract are evaluated using three indicators, the content (number of promises/responsibilities the present employer has), perceived contract fulfilment and finally the state of the contract in the organisation (trust and perception of justice).

## *Results*

### **Contract differences**

Results will be given for the three largest forms of employment arrangements, namely permanent open-ended employment (including probationary employment, n = 1103, 72%), fixed-term employment (i.e. employment during a limited duration, 285 = 18%) and employment on day/hourly basis (on call, paid per hour/day, n = 57, 4%). A large majority in the last category were employed on hourly contracts with immediate notice. This division does not clearly distinguish between direct and agency employment, here the duration of the contract is the focus. Individuals employed by temporary agencies were excluded at this stage due to varying conditions regarding contract permanency across countries.

The first table shows how the most common contract forms divide into the different sectors chosen across all countries.

*Table 4. The three most common contracts across sectors*

Contract form	Health care	Retail	Agency	Other
Permanent	84%	85%	79%	76%
Fixed-term	15%	12%	8%	20%
Day/hourly basis	1%	3%	13%	4%

Both health care and the retail sector employ a large majority on permanent contracts. Fixed-term contracts are most common in “other” sectors whereas day/hourly contracts are clearly most common in temporary help agencies.

The following table shows age, education and gender composition for those employed on the three contract forms across all countries. Employment on day/hourly basis is clearly the most precarious form of employment but contrary to expectations this sub-group in our study has the largest proportion of individuals with university education. This indicates that our sample of this contract category consisted of a large proportion of “elite temporaries”, i.e. with high qualifications and not generally assumed to have casual work. Furthermore, this category also has the highest proportion of union members.

*Table 5. Characteristics of the three most common contracts groups*

Contract form	Mean age	Men	University education	Union members
Permanent	37	33%	51%	50%
Fixed-term	29	39%	47%	47%
Day/hourly basis	35	26%	61%	57%

Next table shows weekly work hours, frequency of a second job, and tenure on the present job and in the company. Again, results are reported across countries and sectors.

*Table 6. Some job features for the three most common contract types*

Contract form	Weekly work hours	Second job	Tenure of job (years)
Permanent	37	7%	8.5
Fixed-term	34	11%	2.4
Day/hourly basis	31	33%	3.7

Results are in line with expectations for the permanently employed. They generally have longer weekly work hours and tenure on the job, and the lowest proportion with a second job. Somewhat unexpected results occur for those on day/hourly contracts. Although employed on a more precarious contract these individuals seem to have a relatively long-term relationship with their present employer leading to longer mean tenure than those on fixed-term contract.

Perceptions of work characteristics in terms of work load and autonomy are shown in the first figure below, followed by reported sickness absence, sickness presence and accidents on the job.

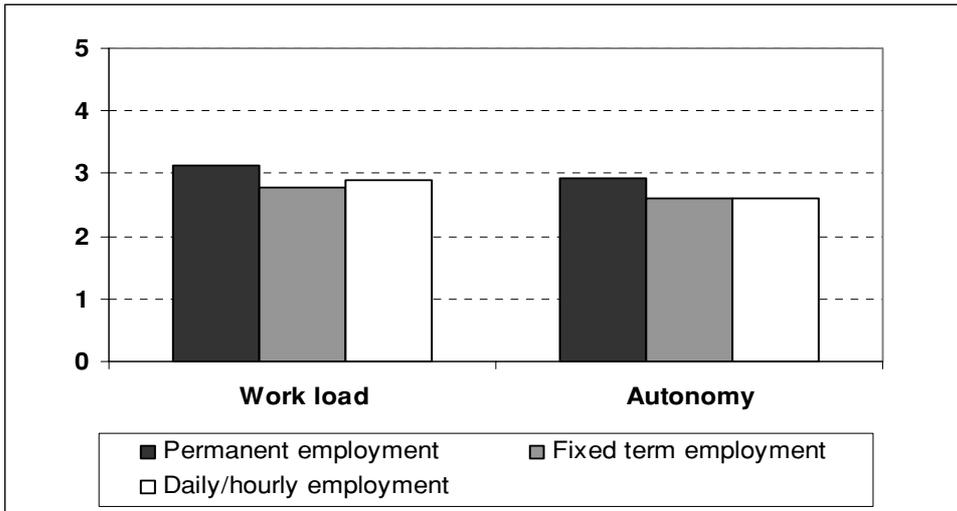


Figure 3: Perceived job characteristics in different employment groups

The figures show significantly higher values of perceived work load among the permanently employed but also generally higher levels of perceived autonomy in this contract category compared to the other groups. As for sickness absence, there were no significant differences between contract forms. However, sickness presence appears to be more common among the permanently employed compared to the other groups. As for accidents, again no significant difference.

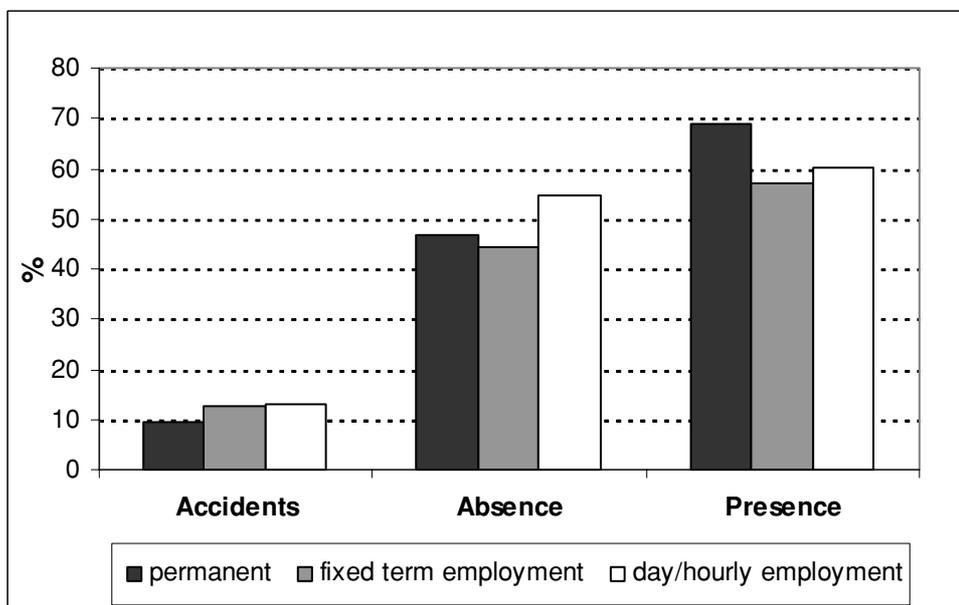


Figure 4: Percentage of workers reporting no accidents, no sick absence and no sickness presence over the last 6 months

Next figure shows a few more results concerning attitudes towards the job and the contract. In this case it is perceptions of volition, job insecurity, employability and finally overall job satisfaction.

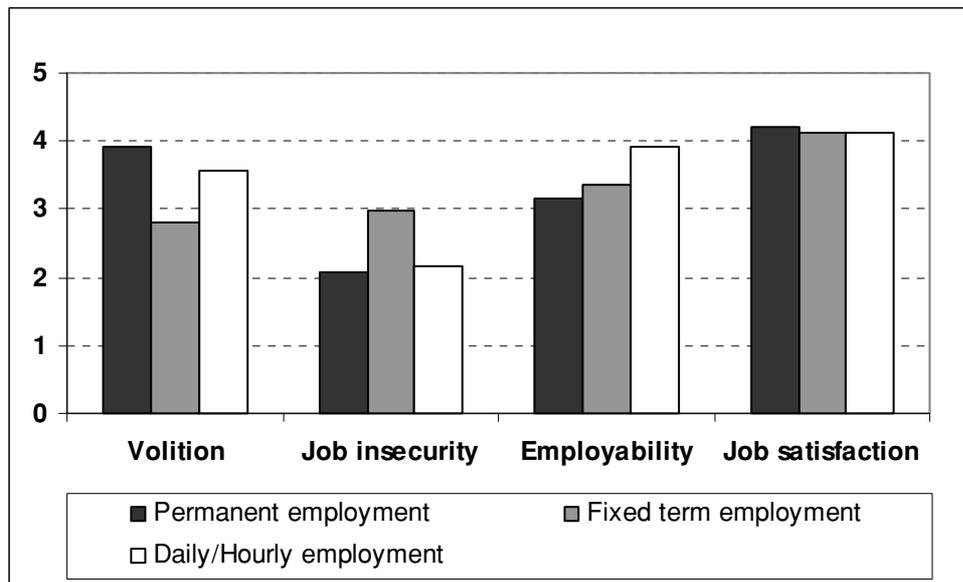


Figure 5: Attitudes towards job and contract in different employment arrangements

Again results indicate a more unfavourable situation for those on fixed-term contracts with lower levels of volition and higher perceptions of job insecurity than the other contract forms. Employability is perceived as highest among those on day/hourly contracts whereas job satisfaction is on a similar and relatively high level for all employment forms.

### Employment stability and psychological contracts

Turning to the relationship between employment form and psychological contracts, the next few figures show five different measures of the psychological contract

First of all we look at the *content* of the psychological contract and how employees on different contract forms perceive employer and worker obligations. Overall, the number of promises reported as employer obligations were generally higher compared to the corresponding figure reported as worker's obligations. Permanent employees report significantly higher values of mutual expectations compared to the other groups. As for the dimensions of content, the figure below reveals interesting results with generally similar (non-significant) values on relational aspects. However, permanent employees more often report that they expect to have an influence on important decisions compared to the other contract forms. The general broad dimension covering both transactional and career promises is most often reported both by those who share day/hourly contracts and the permanently employed compared to those in fixed-term employment.

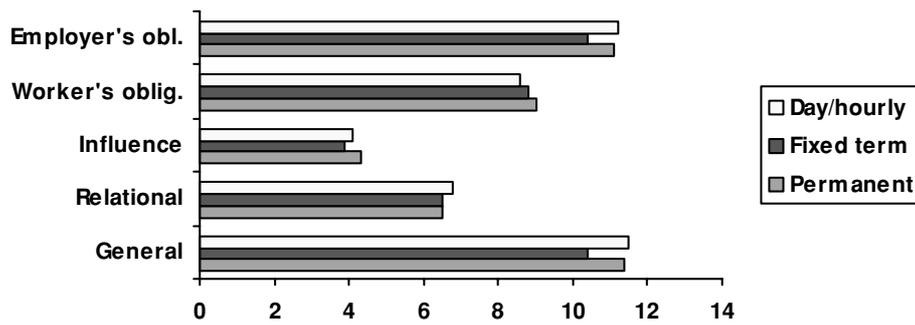


Figure 6. Psychological contract content dimensions

As for the evaluation of justice and trust aspects and degree of perceived fulfilment of the psychological contract, results are shown in the next figure.

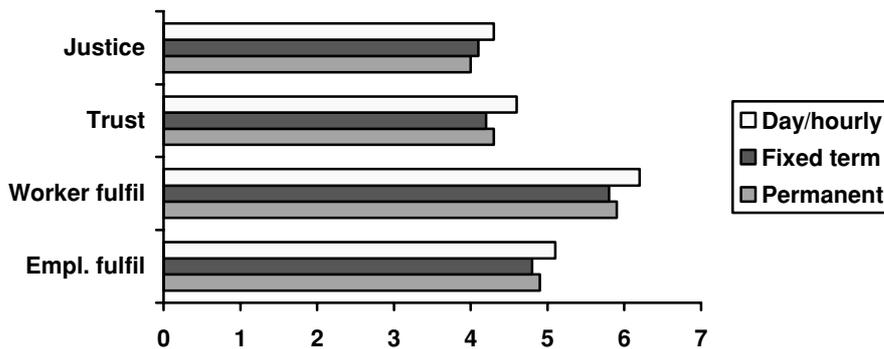


Figure 7. Perceived fulfilment of psychological contract and state in terms of trust and justice

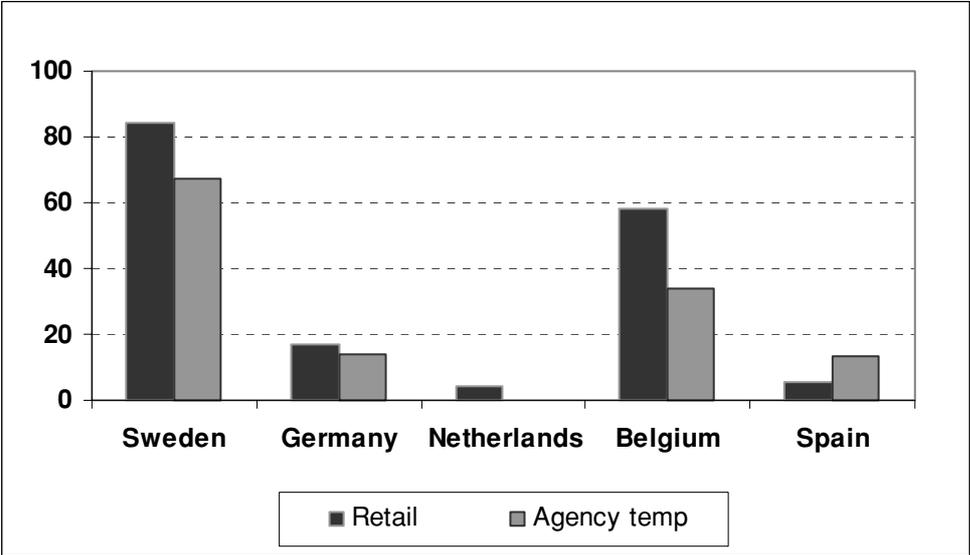
We note significant differences between contract groups only on worker's fulfilment where those on day/hourly contract perceive that they have fulfilled the contract to a higher degree compared to the other contract groups. As for measures of trust and justice in relation to the employer, there were no significant differences between the three groups.

### Country and sector differences

Results will generally be reported only for the retail and temporary help sectors, since these two sectors were sampled in most of the countries. Two countries will be

excluded from the following comparative international evaluations due to differences in samples. In Israel, only employees from one sector could be recruited and in the UK most of the samples came from other sectors. Generally it's important to remind the reader that samples from all countries are small and not representative.

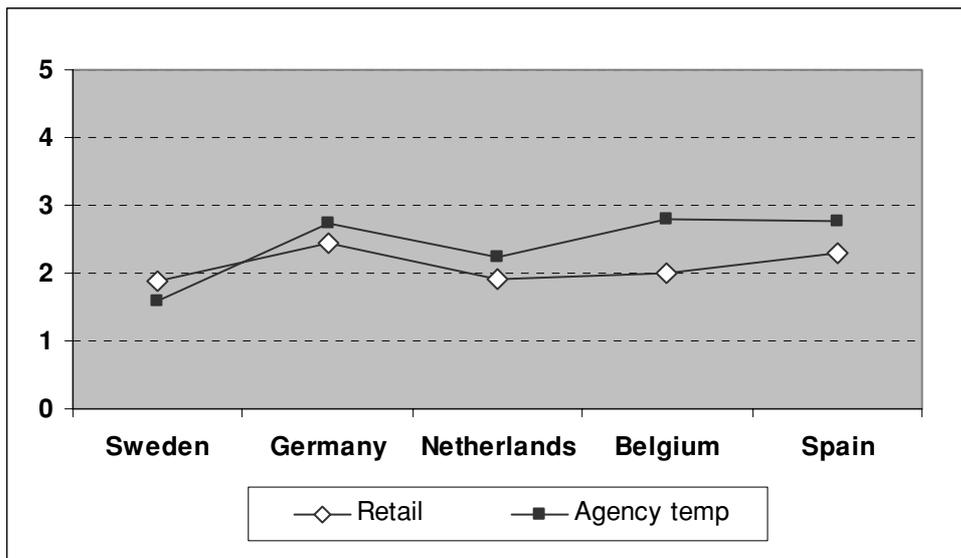
Almost every analysis revealed strong effects of both country and sector on workers' attitudes and perceptions and, as we expected, also significant interaction effects. This simply indicates that working conditions and composition of the workforce vary across sectors and countries and that these factors should be controlled for in some way in order to properly understand effects of contract differences. Results at this stage could only be interpreted as tendencies which will be further investigated in the main study. The first illustration shows union membership across countries and sectors.



*Figure 8: Union membership in retail sector and temporary agencies of different European countries*

Union density together with the degree of collective agreements in various sectors is clearly one of the factors that could possibly explain part of the variation that we see. Figure 8 illustrates these differences. Sweden generally has higher proportions of union membership than the other countries in our sample and the Netherlands the lowest. The retail sector has higher proportions of members than the temporary help sector except in Spain.

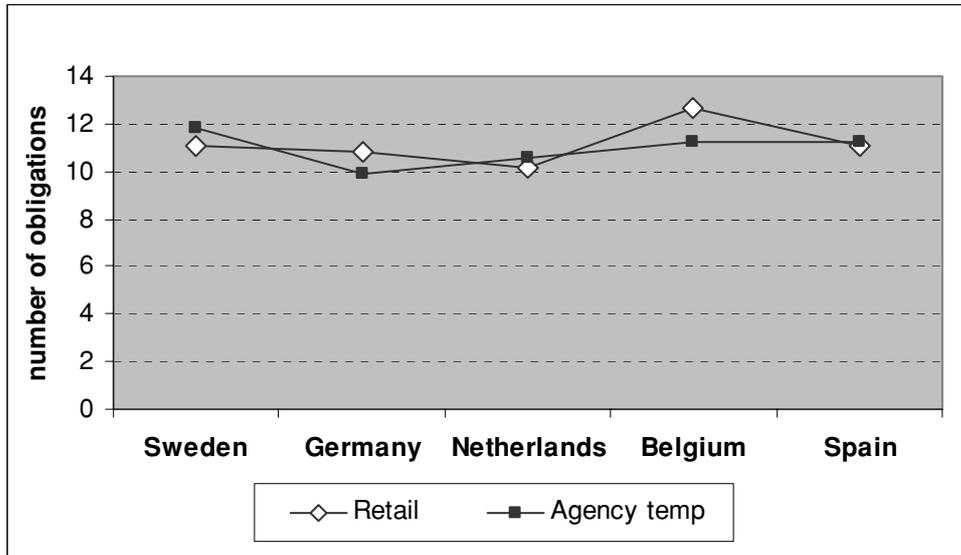
The next figure shows perceptions of job insecurity in the current assignment across sectors and countries.



*Figure 9: Job insecurity in retail sector and temporary agencies of different European countries*

Figure 9 reveals some rather unexpected results. Sweden is the only country in which workers employed in a temporary agency perceive lower job insecurity than retail sector employees. Due to Swedish legislation, temporary agency work offers ongoing employment and a predictable income. In the other countries we find an opposite pattern with generally higher values of job insecurity for agency employed. Thus, it can be illustrated how different legislation and regulations across European countries are related to workers' reactions. In consequence, neither the effect of country or sector alone, but their interaction is important to consider, before results become understandable.

European employees in different sectors also differ with respect to their perception of the psychological contract.



*Figure 10: Employers obligations in retail sector and temporary agencies from different European countries*

As can be seen in the figures above, the number of obligations employers are perceived to have is high in both sectors in all countries. In Sweden, and slightly even in the Netherlands and Spain, temporary agency workers perceive the employer to have more obligations compared to the retail sector. In Belgium and Germany, this relationship is turned around: here employers in the retail sector are perceived to have more obligations.

Perceived fulfilment of obligations follows a similar pattern (fig 11). Countries and sectors with high levels of expectations generally appear to perceive that these expectations are fulfilled. The biggest sector differences occur in Belgium and Sweden. In Belgium, workers in the retail sector perceive the employer obligation fulfilment to be much better than in the temporary agencies, whereas Swedish temporary agency workers report their employer to fulfil obligations better than in the retail sector.

For illustration, we analysed employers' obligation fulfilment also in the health care sector. This analysis could be conducted for Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Spain only, as no data for the health care sector could be collected in Sweden. However, the results (see figure 12) show relatively small sector differences within countries, with Belgium as an exception. Across countries, the perceptions of health care workers with respect to obligation fulfilment of employers are similar to temporary agency workers' perceptions in Germany and Belgium. In Spain, health care workers generally report the lowest level of employers' fulfilment of obligations.

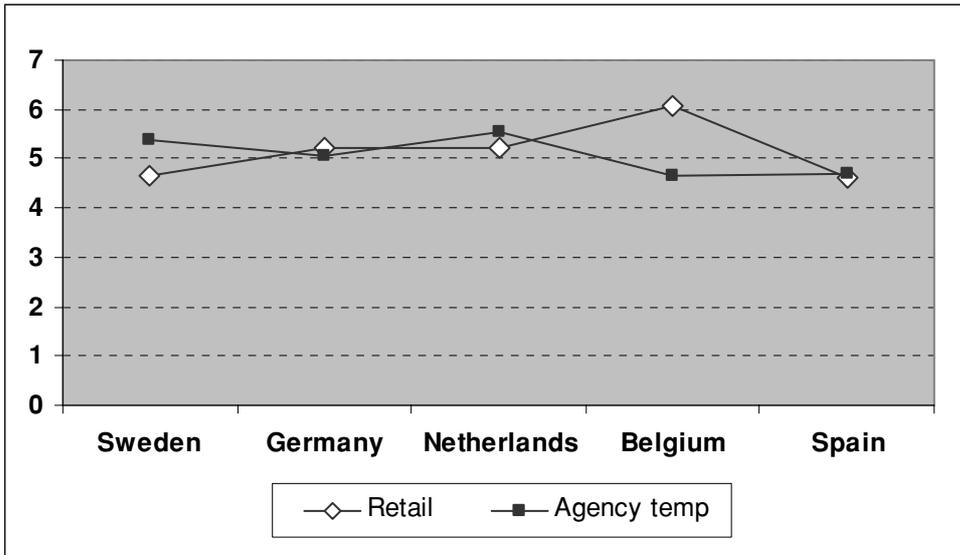


Figure 11: Fulfilment of employers' obligations in retail sector and temporary agencies from different European countries

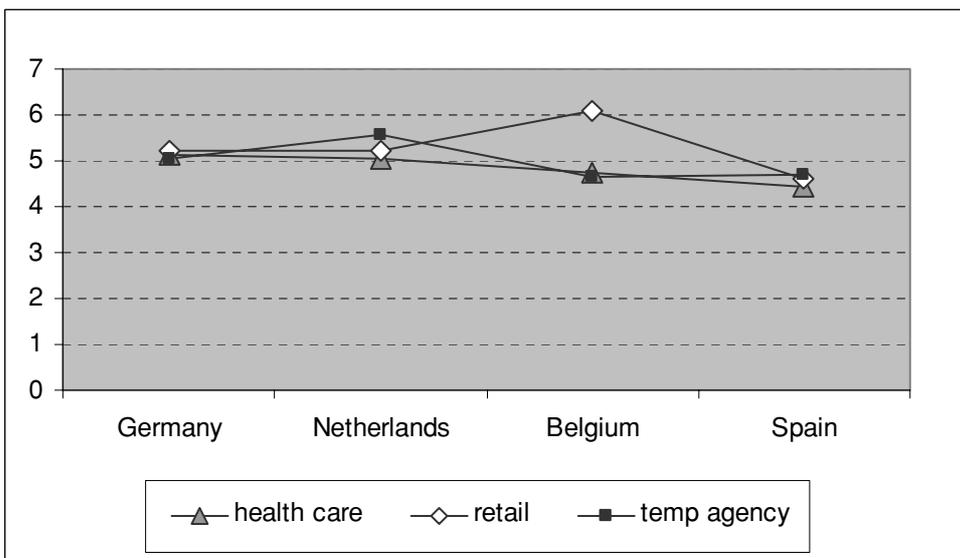
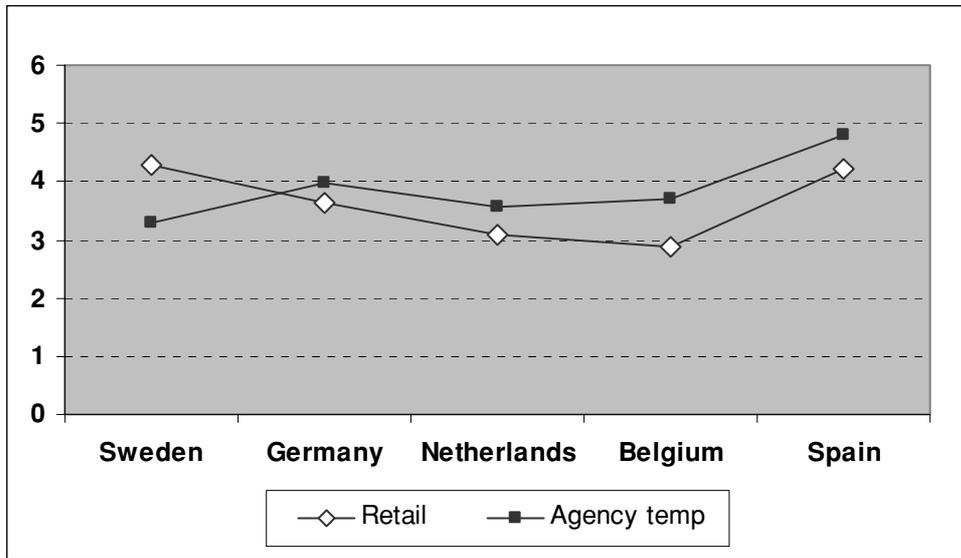


Figure 12: Fulfilment of employers' obligations in health care sector, retail sector and temporary agencies from different European countries

With respect to the *state* of the psychological contract, we generally see a larger variation across both countries and sectors. Swedish temporary agency employees are found to trust their employer less than their European colleagues. In contrast, Swedish retail workers show a relatively high perception of fairness and trust in their employment relationship. This picture is different from all the other countries, where workers in the retail sector report lower levels of perceived trust and fairness than temporary agency workers.



*Figure 13: State of the psychological contract in retail sector and temporary agencies from different European countries*

### **Health effects related to employment contracts**

To our surprise we found relatively few differences in our outcome measures related to the formal employment contract. Across countries and samples respondents reported similar values of distress symptoms, job satisfaction and organisational commitment. As for occupational self-efficacy, however, we saw higher values for those permanently employed. On the other hand there were higher levels of negative interference from work to home and a higher level of general sleeping problems among those employed on permanent contracts compared to those on other forms of contracts. Further, those who had permanent contracts reported generally higher levels of involvement in the job and were less inclined to quit compared to those who had other forms of contracts.

The sample composition with generally well-educated “temps” on hourly contracts makes it likely that the overall effects of fixed-term employment could vary across sectors. Separate analyses of sectors confirmed this, e.g. with higher distress levels among the permanently employed in the health care sector compared to those on fixed-term contracts.

Finally, a simple test of our conceptual model was made using data from the pilot sample across countries and sectors. Following the model in figure 1 we tested the effects of the employment contract on some of the outcome variables and the possible mediating role of the psychological contract. In order to test a mediating effect, we had to choose outcome variables which were clearly related to employment contract. The table below shows results of regression analyses of turnover intention and perceived

job insecurity. As for health outcomes, we used data from the health care sector where results had revealed significantly higher levels of distress symptoms for those on permanent contracts. Regression analyses were conducted for this sector only and results of this test are also shown in the table below.

Table 7 Regression analyses, explaining variance in perceived job insecurity and job satisfaction

Variable	<u>Turnover intention (n=1027)</u>			<u>Job insecurity (n=1031)</u>			<u>Distress symptoms (GHQ) (n=455)</u>		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta
<u>Step 1:</u> -Age	-.16***	-.09**	-.09***	-.21***	-.05	-.06*	.06	.00	.01
- Gender	-.06*	-.03	-.04	.11**	.06*	-.06*	.01	.03	.04
- Education	-.03	-.01	-.00	-.17	-.15	-.14	-.04	-.06	.06
- Union member (no/yes)	-.17***	-.19***	-.17***	.09**	.07*	.08**	.01	.01	.03
<u>Step 2</u>									
- Formal contract (permanent/not)		-.03	.01		.22***	.22***		-.14*	-.15*
- Volition		-.29***	-.20***		-.33***	-.30***		.03	.06
<u>Step 3:</u> -Content: sum									
- Empl. obligation fulfilled			-.09**			-.08**		-.16**	
- State:			-.12***			-.06*		-.04	
			-.09**			-.04***		-.07	
R <sup>2</sup>	.07	.14	.23	.08	.28	.29	.01	.03	.06
Change	.07***	.07***	.09***	.08***	.20***	.01***	.01*	.02*	.03***

\* p ≤ .05; \*\* p ≤ .01; \*\*\* p ≤ .001

Results for the three outcome variables chosen revealed a dissimilar pattern of explaining factors and only partly in line with our expectations as outlined in the model (figure 1). First of all, results revealed a strong relationship between contract form and two of the outcomes when individual and work-related factors were controlled for. Thus, contract form appears to be related to perceived job insecurity and distress level in the health care sector. Those who have a non-permanent contract generally report higher levels of job insecurity but nevertheless report *lower* levels of distress than those permanently employed. These are examples of unexpected results and in need of further clarification in the main study. However, for turnover intention there was no significant effect of contract differences when the other factors were controlled for. Age was probably an important confounding factor in this case.

Further, for volition, there were strong associations both to turnover intention and perceived job insecurity. In both cases relationship was negative indicating that a low level of volition was related to a higher intention to leave the job and to a higher level of perceived job insecurity.

Secondly, and again contrary to expectations, there appear to be no clear indications of a mediating effect by the psychological contract, at least not for turnover intention and distress symptoms. Effects remain largely unaltered by the introduction of measures of the psychological contract. Instead results indicate direct effects of psychological contracts and the outcomes chosen. The table shows that a more extensive psychological contract in terms of content and a high level of reported fulfilment is negatively related both to job insecurity, turnover intention and distress in the health care sector. Having a narrow contract, a low level of fulfilment and a low evaluation of the state of the contract seems to have direct effects rather than mediated as we expected. Further, the characteristics of the psychological contract (content and state) added significant proportions of explained variance to all outcomes. It is also interesting to note that union membership appears to have an effect on job insecurity. Union members report a higher perception of job insecurity than non-members. The most likely interpretation of this result is that a feeling of insecurity is a reason to join the union. Support for this conclusion comes from the fact that higher proportions of individuals in the more precarious contract forms were union members (see table 5).

Finally, the regression of distress symptoms in the health care sector reveals a slightly different pattern. Generally the proportion of variance explained is lower than for the other outcomes. Effects of the formal contract on distress symptoms remain significant even when controlling for other indicators among health care personnel. However, the negative effect indicates that individuals on permanent contracts report higher levels of distress compared to those who have fixed-term contracts. Effects seem to be direct and no mediating effect of the psychological contract is indicated by the results. Again the table indicates a direct effect of a narrow psychological contract, meaning a low level of perceived promises is related to negative health effects.

## *Summary and concluding remarks*

The aim of the pilot study was exploratory, to develop a model and research instruments to be integrated in a larger study. This aim has clearly been reached and we have gained a lot of knowledge to be used in the project. The testing of our questionnaire was satisfactory in the sense that we managed to test it in many different occupations, in varying ages and for both men and women. As for employer interviews, however, it became obvious that we need a better structure and that open-ended questions were too difficult to handle. Again, with this knowledge, we can certainly avoid many mistakes in the future.

Models and instruments have some shortcomings and results give us indications of areas where we need to make improvements. One critical example concerns the definition of employment contracts. A second example concerns our difficulties in comparing the agency employed across countries. We have learnt a lot about country and sector differences that we need to address in the main study.

Leaving these issues aside for the moment, and again reminding the reader that the samples are non-representative, we can still draw some conclusions from the results. Much in line with previous research in the area, we conclude:

Permanent employment is the most common form in our sample across sectors and countries. Those on permanent contracts are generally older, more often male and work longer working hours. They generally perceive a higher workload but also a higher level of autonomy than those employed on various forms of fixed-term contracts. A significantly higher proportion of the permanently employed report sickness presence on at least one occasion during the last six month compared to other employment forms.

Those who have the most precarious contract (in terms of duration) are more often members of a union, have a second job, but still seem to have relatively long-term relations with the organisation (mean 3.7 years).

Those on fixed-term contracts report the highest level of perceived insecurity and the lowest level of voluntarily taking on the contract that they have.

As for psychological contracts, we find as expected that the permanently employed report higher expectations of influencing decisions in the organisation. They also more often report transactional and career-related promises from their employers compared to those on fixed-term contracts.

However, and again somewhat unexpected, individuals on the most precarious contract form (day/hourly employed) report relatively high levels of content and contract fulfilment clearly higher than those on fixed-term contracts of longer duration.

As for country and sector differences, results in general support an interaction effect. Perceived job insecurity is obviously affected both by country and sector differences and by employment contract, but how the mechanisms work clearly needs further exploration.

Results clearly indicate that our sample consisted of relatively qualified workers employed on an hourly basis and that this part of the sample most probably represents

“elite temporaries” more than traditional casual workers. In order to get a more complete picture we clearly need broader samples for the main study. This is clearly indicated by factors such as a high level of education, long tenure on the present assignment and relatively high perceptions of voluntary choice of the present contract. Instead we find higher levels of dissatisfaction and perceived job insecurity among those on a fixed-term contract.

Finally, and perhaps most important of all, we feel safe to conclude that results support our general ideas about the role of the psychological contract as a relevant factor for the well-being of employees. However, we clearly need to refine both our theoretical model and our measurements in order to increase our knowledge about the exact role of the psychological contract. We find a lot of unanswered questions but still feel certain that we are on the right track trying to investigate the relationship between employment form, psychological contracts and employee well-being both in more detail and across countries in the main study.

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# *Psykologiska kontrakt i olika anställningssituationer - PSYCONES*

## **Sammanfattning av en förstudie**

Denna forskningsrapport handlar om det uttalade, det underförstådda.

I all kommunikation mellan människor förekommer något som inte formuleras i ord, vare sig muntligt eller skriftligt. Vi förutsätter att vi menar samma saker med de ord vi använder. Vi antar att vi drar samma slutsatser av det vi säger. Vi förutsätter att överenskommelser som vi har träffat uppfattas lika av alla inblandade. Men erfarenheten säger att det inte nödvändigtvis är så.

När det gäller anställningsförhållanden kan man säga att det handlar om att läsa mellan raderna. Olika slags anställningar kan formuleras i skriftliga avtal som reglerar mer eller mindre av parternas rättigheter och skyldigheter, men både arbetstagare och arbetsgivare har förväntningar som inte är formulerade i texten. Kanske har man gjort muntliga löften och uttalanden, kanske tar man bara vissa saker för givna. Under 1900-talet har arbetsrätten efter hand utvecklats och reglerats så att vissa förhållanden, t ex tillsvidareanställning på heltid, kommit att uppfattas som norm. Som bekant förekommer förstås många variationer och önskemål om andra former av kontraktsarrangemang. Möjligheten att själv välja vilken form av kontrakt man vill ha tycks vara en mycket viktig faktor i sammanhanget som får konsekvenser för anställdas inställning och trivsel i arbetet.

Anställningsmönstren håller på att förändras och PSYCONES-projektet syftar till att undersöka hur detta påverkar européernas välbefinnande och livskvalitet. Mera precist vill forskarna undersöka hur såkallade ”psykologiska kontrakt” kan fungera som buffert för den enskildes känsla av välbefinnande i anställningar med olika varaktighet. Med psykologiska kontrakt menas hur arbetstagaren och arbetsgivaren *uppfattar* de förväntningar och skyldigheter som följer av anställningsförhållandet. Subjektiv anställningstrygghet betyder att man uppfattar att arbetet är mer eller mindre säkert, oavsett om det finns objektiva skäl för det eller inte. Att jobbet däremot känns osäkert kan bero på mycket, inklusive organisatoriska omständigheter och föränderliga relationer mellan arbetsgivare och arbetstagare. Inte minst har de senaste decenniernas omorganisationer och förändringar påverkat tilliten till motparten och många har en känsla av att arbetsgivare svikit löften och åtaganden.

## **Flexibilisering**

Under senare delen av 1900-talet och särskilt på 90-talet blev det vanligare att tillämpa okonventionella anställningsformer. Förhållandet till den gemensamma arbetsplatsen och de fasta arbetstiderna blev mindre strikt. Flexitid infördes på många arbetsplatser.

Framför allt IT- och teleteknik gjorde det lättare att arbeta hemma men ändå ha nära kontakt med kontoret.

Tidsbegränsade anställningar – inte bara på vikariat, utan också på projekt och uppdrag – blev vanligare. Job rotation, just-in time, outsourcing, down-sizing, mager produktion, multi-skilling är några uttryck för olika sätt att luckra upp den konventionella arbetsorganisationen och anpassa den till nya omständigheter, såsom hårdnande konkurrens, internationalisering, teknisk och ekonomisk utveckling som kräver omställningsförmåga och snabbhet. Flexibilisering blev ett samlingsbegrepp för olika sätt att anpassa arbetsinsatsen till behovet genom att variera arbetstider, personalstyrka och kompetens.

Effekterna för arbetstagarna är inte entydiga. Många gånger kan flexibiliteten naturligtvis vara en fördel, om man kan utnyttja den för sina egna behov. Å andra sidan kan den medföra osäkerhet om arbetstider, arbetsmängd, anställningstrygghet och framtidsutsikter i arbetet.

Flexibel anställning har blivit något av ett ”management-mantra” och det finns belegg för att olika temporära anställningskontrakt har blivit vanligare. Enligt tillgängliga uppgifter arbetar knappt 13 procent av alla arbetstagare i Europa på tidsbegränsade kontrakt, men skillnaderna är stora mellan länderna. Tidsbegränsade anställningar är vanligast i Spanien (32,9 %), Finland (17,7 %) och Portugal (17,3 %). De är ganska ovanliga i Luxemburg (2,9 %), Storbritannien (7,1 %) och Österrike och Belgien. Sverige är genomsnittlig med 12,8 procent.

De ”psykologiska kontrakten” skiljer sig förmodligen för anställda med tillsvidare- respektive tidsbegränsade anställningar vilket kan förklara skillnader i trivsel. Har man låga förväntningar kanske man känner sig mer nöjd än om man haft höga förväntningar och blivit besviken.

## Modellen

I projektet har man utgått från en modell med sju olika typer av anställningar som man kan särskilja om man dels skiljer mellan direktanställning och anställning via en personalförmedling, dels beaktar anställningens varaktighet:

1. Direktanställning: variabel anställningstid, omedelbar uppsägning möjlig
2. Direktanställning: tidsbestämd, uppsägning möjlig
3. Direktanställning: tillsvidare, uppsägning möjlig
4. Direktanställning: tillsvidare
5. Anställning via personalförmedling: variabel anställningstid, omedelbar uppsägning möjlig
6. Anställning via personalförmedling: tidsbestämd, uppsägning möjlig
7. Anställning via personalförmedling: tillsvidare, uppsägning möjlig

Möjligheten att själv välja anställningsform antas ha en avgörande betydelse. Man kan utgå ifrån att dessa anställningsvillkor påverkar de anställdas välbefinnande. Hur de faktiskt mår kan man mäta på flera sätt:

- Känslan av otrygghet i anställningen

- Prestation
- Engagemang
- Sjukfrånvaro, sjuknärvaro
- Olyckor
- Arbetstillfredsställelse
- Yrkesmässig effektivitet
- Störningar i förhållandet arbete-privatliv
- Allmänna hälsoindikatorer

Det psykologiska kontraktet kan fungera som en buffert mellan de formella villkoren och välbefinnandet. Man kan må bättre eller sämre i en viss anställningsform beroende på hur man uppfattar *innehållet* i sitt avtal (vad man räknar med att kunna tillföra arbetet och vad man skall få i utbyte), *utfallet*, dvs i vad mån man känner att arbetsgivaren har levt upp till sina löften och åtaganden samt hur man värderar kontraktets *status* t ex känslan av tillit och rättvisa i arbetsgivarens agerande gentemot anställda. Mycket tyder på att ”psykologiska kontrakt” har stor betydelse för de anställdas välbefinnande – att den subjektiva uppfattningen av villkoren är en realitet att räkna med.

### **Förstudiens resultat**

Observera, att de resultat som här redovisas bygger på en begränsad förstudie. Man skall alltså inte uppfatta dem som vetenskapligt säkra sanningar. Forskarna arbetar nu vidare med en mycket större studie och räknar med att resultatet av den skall vara färdigt år 2005.

#### *Tillvägagångssätt*

Projektet har två faser och den här rapporten omfattar endast den första som är en förstudie, en förberedelse för en större jämförande studie. Studien har gått ut på att pröva definitioner och begrepp samt att utveckla och testa frågeformulär. Förstudien har sålunda gett erfarenheter som gör det möjligt att förbättra metodiken inför den kommande stora undersökningen.

#### *Urval*

Sex europeiska länder har deltagit: Belgien, Nederländerna, Spanien, Storbritannien, Sverige och Tyskland. Dessutom har Israel deltagit.

I undersökningen svarade 1573 personer i de sju länderna på frågorna i formuläret. De tillfrågade arbetar i sjukvård, detaljhandel och bemanningsföretag (temporary help agencies). Genomsnittsåldern var 35 år. Kvinnor är något överrepresenterade i urvalet. Utbildningsnivån varierar – andelen med akademisk utbildning varierar från 19 % (Tyskland) och 76 % (Israel). Såttillvida har urvalet blivit något skevt och inte helt representativt för genomsnittliga tillfälligt anställda. I den kommande huvudstudien skall detta rättas till.

### *Preliminära resultat*

I stora drag kan man säga, att de som har tillsvidareanställningar är äldre, de är företrädesvis män och de har längre arbetsveckor. De tycker att arbetsbördan är stor, men de tycker också att de har större frihet i arbetet än de som är anställda på tidsbegränsade kontrakt. Dessutom räknar de med att de i större utsträckning kan påverka beslutsfattandet på sina arbetsplatser.

De som är anställda på begränsad tid har ofta ett andra jobb men tycks ändå ha ganska långvarig relation med sin arbetsplats. De som har långvariga men tidsbegränsade anställningskontrakt är emellertid de som känner störst osäkerhet i anställningen och anser sig ha minst möjlighet att välja anställningsform. ”Sjuknärvaro” var betydligt vanligare bland tillsvidare anställda än bland andra. (Räknat som minst en gång under det senaste halvåret.)

Beträffande de psykologiska kontrakten så visade det sig att de tillsvidare anställda har högre förväntningar på att kunna påverka besluten i sin organisation. De uppgav också oftare än tidsbegränsat anställda att de fått såväl ekonomiska som långsiktiga karriärrelaterade löften av sina arbetsgivare. Slutligen pekar dessa preliminära resultat på att arbetstagarnas attityder skiljer sig åt mellan länder och sektorer.

Ett oväntat resultat är att Sverige är det enda land där de som är anställda i bemanningsfirmor känner mindre otrygghet än de anställda i detaljhandeln. Tack vare den svenska lagstiftningen har de som arbetar för sådana firmor varaktig anställning och säker inkomst.

I Sverige uppfattar anställda i bemanningsföretag att deras arbetsgivare har mera skyldigheter och uppfyller sina åtaganden bättre än vad anställda i detaljhandeln tycker om sina arbetsgivare. Däremot känner svenska anställda i bemanningsföretag mindre tilltro till sina arbetsgivare än kollegor i andra länder gör. Däremot har de anställda i svensk detaljhandel ganska hög tillit till sina arbetsgivare. Det svenska mönstret avviker därmed från det vidare europeiska mönstret.

Vad välbefinnandet beträffar så visade sig genomgående ungefär samma mönster. Tillsvidareanställda förefaller mera tillfreds med sina arbetsinsatser. De känner större engagemang i arbetet och är mindre benägna än andra att sluta. Däremot känner de i större utsträckning än de som har andra anställningsformer att arbetet stör privatlivet.

Generellt anser de som har tidsbegränsade anställningar att de har sämre anställningstrygghet, men de känner mindre oro än tillsvidareanställda.

En intressant omständighet är det finns ett samband mellan fackligt medlemskap och trygghetskänslan. Fackligt anslutna uppger starkare känsla av otrygghet än de som står utanför facket. Det tycks vara så att ett osäkert anställningskontrakt är en anledning att gå med i facket.

*Sammanfattning: Anders Schærström*