

Challenges and prospects in the EU

Working conditions and sustainable work: An analysis using the job quality framework



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When citing this report, please use the following wording:

Eurofound (2021), *Working conditions and sustainable work: An analysis using the job quality framework*, Challenges and prospects in the EU series, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

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Eurofound project: Working conditions and sustainable work flagship report 2019 (190109)

Acknowledgements: The authors would like to thank Eurofound colleagues Pierre Baussand, Irene Mandl and Mathijn Wilkens for their peer review.

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

Print: ISBN 978-92-897-2151-6 doi:10.2806/987423 TJ-03-21-030-EN-C

PDF: ISBN 978-92-897-2150-9 doi:10.2806/938302 TJ-03-21-030-EN-N

This report and any associated materials are available online at <http://eurofound.link/ef20021>

It is part of Eurofound's Challenges and prospects in the EU series. See the full series at <http://eurofound.link/efs011>

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Research carried out prior to the UK's withdrawal from the European Union on 31 January 2020, and published subsequently, may include data relating to the 28 EU Member States. Following this date, research only takes into account the 27 EU Member States (EU28 minus the UK), unless specified otherwise.

This report presents the results of research conducted largely prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 in Europe in February 2020. For this reason, the results do not fully take account of the outbreak.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency established in 1975. Its role is to provide knowledge in the area of social, employment and work-related policies according to Regulation (EU) 2019/127.

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Country codes

AT	Austria	FI	Finland	NL	Netherlands
BE	Belgium	FR	France	PL	Poland
BG	Bulgaria	HR	Croatia	PT	Portugal
CY	Cyprus	HU	Hungary	RO	Romania
CZ	Czechia	IE	Ireland	SE	Sweden
DE	Germany	IT	Italy	SI	Slovenia
DK	Denmark	LT	Lithuania	SK	Slovakia
EE	Estonia	LU	Luxembourg		
EL	Greece	LV	Latvia	UK	United Kingdom
ES	Spain	MT	Malta		

Flagship perspectives

Eurofound's work consistently seeks to document and analyse the past with a view to helping to better shape and improve the future. Drawing on its wide-ranging analysis of working conditions in the European Union over many years, Eurofound aims to use this information, data and analysis to assist policymakers in understanding the progress made, defining the challenges that have emerged and outlining the steps that could be taken to further improve job quality and make work more sustainable over the life course.

This flagship report addresses trends in the development of working conditions since 2000 and identifies the groups of workers and issues that require continued policy attention if the goal of fair working conditions for all is to be achieved. The report focuses on conditions prior to the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), but many of the findings and issues raised in the report have gained in significance during the crisis.

The starting point is the European Working Conditions Survey, which, since it was first conducted in 1991, has allowed Eurofound to monitor working conditions in the EU and analyse their link to outcomes such as work–life balance, engagement, and health and well-being at work. The many facets of working conditions that contribute to overall job quality are reflected in the job quality model developed by Eurofound, which identifies seven dimensions of job quality. This model is applied to interpret trends and analyse the factors that make work more sustainable.

The analysis of trends in working conditions shows that, overall, job quality in the EU is improving, if slowly. The main concern is that not all workers are benefiting to the same extent. Gender equality in working conditions has not yet been achieved. Age is an important factor too: workers struggle more with different aspects of working conditions depending on where they are in the life course. The type of employment relationship also remains a strong predictor of poorer or better working conditions. Changes in the world of work brought about by technological advancements further add to the complexity of ensuring fair working conditions for all. Digitalisation helps to address some job quality issues but also creates new challenges.

Progress

- Working time quality has improved in the EU, most notably between 2000 and 2010, while differences in working time quality between workers have simultaneously decreased. This improvement was driven especially by a decrease in the proportion of workers reporting long working hours and long working days.

- Skill levels and autonomy at work have increased substantially since 2005 across most Member States, mostly driven by an increase in the use of information and communications technologies and the provision of paid training by employers.
- Good career prospects were reported by a growing share of employees between 2010 and 2015. The improvement was accompanied by a reduction in the gap between men and women, although the difference is still unfavourable to women.
- Continuing improvements to the physical environment of European workplaces and particularly in occupations more exposed to physical risks (for example, plant and machine operators) represent an essential and important step towards achieving sustainable work.
- The proportion of workers in mixed occupations (with shares of men and women between 40% and 60%) has increased. Mixed occupations show better job quality in most dimensions.

Challenges

- Gender segregation in labour markets persists. Despite an increase in the proportion of workers in mixed occupations, most workers continue to hold occupations performed by people of the same gender and are managed by supervisors or bosses of the same gender. The working conditions and job quality that men and women experience differ in many aspects, even in similar occupations or the same occupation.
- Gender pay gaps could be widening rather than closing as a result of the more widespread use of variable forms of pay, such as company shares and payments based on company or individual performance, which women receive less frequently than men.
- Career prospects are worse for women than for men, probably linked to the effects of women's career breaks and working time arrangements to care for children or other dependants. Since 2005, the share of male employees reporting that their job offers good prospects for career advancement has persistently been larger than that of female employees.
- The increase in psychosocial risks linked to emotional demands and exposure to adverse social behaviour is cause for concern. Women are more exposed than men because of the sectors and occupations they predominantly work in.

- Prospects for career advancement diminish with age. The very low prospects reported by workers aged over 50, particularly women, is of some concern, given that the extension of working lives is a policy goal in most Member States.
- Older workers participate less in work-related training. Given changing skills requirements, this makes it more difficult to maintain employability and keep these workers in the labour market.
- There is a growing gap in access to paid training between employees with different contractual statuses (full-time versus part-time and permanent versus fixed-term contracts), indicating that directives addressing discrimination between contractual statuses have not fully delivered their goals.
- While remaining stable overall, work intensity has increased in some sectors and specific occupations, with the hotels and restaurants subsector being particularly affected. Developments are particularly concerning for service and sales workers and other medium- to low-skilled occupations.
- The possibility to work at any time from anywhere entails the risk of blurred boundaries between work and non-work life. A high level of flexibility in the time and place of work combined with high levels of demands increases work intensity. Autonomy can thus turn from an asset into a liability.
- Address the gender pay gap by considering the gender differences resulting from the use of different forms of pay, including basic and variable pay, as part of pay transparency measures, as set out in the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 and included in the Commission Work Programme 2020.
- Encourage employers to be more flexible about employees taking time off work to deal with personal or family issues; this element of working time quality has a very strong and positive effect on work–life balance and is usually cost-neutral for the employer.
- Adapt working conditions to workers’ professional needs to enable them to stay in employment longer, as set out in Principle 10 of the European Pillar of Social Rights. This will require improving working conditions over the life course and particularly before the age of 55, when workers start leaving the labour market. Increasing employability and career prospects for older workers, through training, workplace health and safety measures, and overall health promotion, as well as through flexible working time arrangements, is likely to have a positive impact.
- Reduce exposure to excessive job demands while increasing workers’ access to job resources in the workplace to tackle psychosocial risks at work. Policies and practices should cover work organisation, work environment and job design.
- Support the development of high-involvement workplaces, allowing workers to influence and shape their work and working conditions.
- Ensure the enforcement of EU law addressing non-discrimination in relation to workers with different contractual and time arrangements, particularly regarding the provision of employer-paid training.

What next?

- Address the differences in working conditions and job quality between men and women as part of the implementation of Principle 2 of the European Pillar of Social Rights as well as European and national strategies aimed at achieving job quality for all while mainstreaming gender equality, to help resolve persistent inequalities between men and women.

Introduction

Good working conditions lead to win-win outcomes that benefit workers, employers and society. They are associated with better health and well-being for the individual and with higher levels of motivation, engagement, learning and performance, which is in the interest of employers and companies. A healthier workforce will have a smaller impact in terms of public health services and the associated expenditure. In addition, the demographic challenge Europe is facing requires a larger share of the working age population to participate in the labour market. This can be achieved only if workers are in good health and are able and motivated to stay in work for longer. This is, according to Eurofound's definition, what is meant by sustainable work: achieving living and working conditions that support people in engaging and remaining in work throughout an extended working life. Job quality, thus, contributes to economic development through its link with economic and social improvements that go well beyond economic growth.

The report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, the so-called Stiglitz Report, argued that 'paid work matters for quality of life partly because it provides identity to people and opportunities to socialise with others'. However, not all jobs are equally valuable in this respect. This underscores the importance of collecting more systematic information on the quality of paid work.

The improvement of working conditions has been a declared goal of European integration since the Treaty of Rome. Good working conditions have been recognised as a prerequisite for the development of a competitive knowledge-based economy (the Lisbon Strategy) and a successful move towards smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (Europe 2020). The European Pillar of Social Rights, which aims to advance positive employment and social outcomes in times of change, dedicates 6 of its 20 principles to the achievement of fair working conditions. The need for a renewed focus on working conditions and job quality was also reflected in the Assessment of the Europe 2020 Strategy by the Employment Committee (EMCO) and the Social Protection Committee (SPC), published in November 2019.

The Committees consider that the EU employment rate target focused on the age group 20–64 has proved to be a useful, realistic and achievable target for the current decade. However, its appropriateness as a basis for a future target could be questioned, as it fails to grasp the reality of the changing workplace, in which the quality of jobs matters as much as their availability.

(EMCO and SPC, 2019)

Aims of the report

The aims of this report are to map the progress achieved since 2000 in improving working conditions and to examine whether all workers have benefited equally from positive change. It identifies persisting challenges and highlights which groups are the most at risk of experiencing poor conditions and being left behind. Given the changes in the world of work, emerging challenges for working conditions and good job quality are identified. The report also provides evidence for measures that could lead to the further improvement of work and the achievement of fair working conditions for all in the EU. It relies mainly on data collected before the onset of COVID-19. A section has been added examining first findings on the impact of the pandemic on employment and working conditions; however, a full analysis cannot yet be provided.

Drivers of change

Behind 'the reality of the changing workplace' – as highlighted by the EMCO and the SPC in their joint assessment of the Europe 2020 strategy – are the megatrends of globalisation, technological change, climate change and demographic developments, which are transforming the way we live and work, each individually but also in combination. The structures of the economy and of the labour market are changing, new business models are emerging, production and work are being reorganised, and the expectations of workers and their employers are changing. The impact of these changes on working conditions and job quality cannot be underestimated.

Demographic change, for example, manifests itself in the shrinking and ageing of Europe's workforce. This raises concerns about labour supply, economic growth and the sustainability of pension schemes. Policies that support people in engaging and remaining in work over an extended working life have consequently come into focus. Principle 10 of the European Pillar of Social Rights acknowledges the link between a working environment well adapted to workers' needs and prolonged participation in the labour market. The European Council conclusions on enhancing well-being at work from June 2020 reiterate that well-being at work can lead to higher participation in the labour market and greater productivity. Factors that discourage or hinder workers from entering or staying in the workforce, for example due to care responsibilities, need to be tackled. Likewise, policies that facilitate the lifelong development of skills and learning or that facilitate transitions between jobs can assist men and women during their working lives. Making work sustainable

depends, to a large degree, on improving the quality of jobs.

The consequences of technological change for working conditions and job quality are also becoming clearer. The impact of technological advances needs to be seen in conjunction with the changes in work organisation that such advances trigger. The effect on job quality can be positive, for example when machines and robots take over dull, dangerous or dirty tasks or when digital technologies are used to introduce flexibility to working time arrangements or place of work. However, there are also challenges associated with technological change, including the possibility that not all workers benefit equally, creating winners and losers. In addition, while new risks are emerging, many of the hazards traditionally associated with working life continue.

Measures to ensure high-quality jobs

Measures to protect workers against risks and to promote good working conditions are taken at different levels within society and by different actors, but, when looking for ways to improve working conditions and job quality, the company level is certainly key. As for all social policy issues, the EU does not have exclusive competence and ‘shall act only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States’ (Article 5 (3), Treaty on European Union). The subsidiarity principle applies.

Measures involve regulation through legislation or collective agreements but also include soft measures such as campaigns and codes of conduct. At EU level, the protection of workers is ensured through a set of individual and collective rights. EU rules guarantee workers’ right to occupational health and safety. The Working Time Directive lays down minimum health and safety requirements for the organisation of working time, and a set of directives ensures equal treatment regardless of type of contract and addresses discrimination based on gender, race or ethnic origin. Reconciliation of family and professional life is supported through directives giving the right to maternity and parental leave, and the Work–Life Balance Directive improves families’ access to family leave and flexible work arrangements. The 2019 Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions ensures that workers are aware of their working conditions from the start of the employment relationship and that some minimum conditions are met, especially for precarious jobs.

This European-level legislative framework is transposed and complemented through national-level legislation and a wide range of agreements between social partner

organisations, covering the whole economy or specific sectors or companies. Collective bargaining is, indeed, a powerful tool to agree upon measures that regulate and improve working conditions. It is often at the level of the workplace in companies that the most pragmatic and effective, but also innovative, solutions can be found for work organisation, job design and human resources policies.

Eurofound’s job quality framework

High employment levels are a fundamental goal of the EU, embedded in the Europe 2020 strategy. The assessment of job quality can complement the measurement of job quantity to provide a more holistic assessment of the outcomes of employment policies. Eurofound has been monitoring progress on the improvement of working conditions in Europe since 1991 through its European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS). To ensure a coherent approach to measuring and analysing job quality, the Agency has developed a job quality framework. The framework defines job quality as a multidimensional concept and distinguishes seven dimensions of job quality. These are shown in Figure 1 along with the indicators that compose each. The dimensions have common features: job quality is measured at the level of the job and includes objective, observable job features that relate to meeting people’s needs from work. The concept includes those characteristics of work and employment that have been proven to have a causal relationship with health and well-being. Positive and negative features of the job are included, thus capturing the demands of the job but also the resources it provides to cope with demands.

Figure 1: The seven dimensions of job quality and the indicators composing each dimension



Structure of the report

The analysis and discussion are presented in three chapters.

Chapter 1 looks at trends in working conditions based on the four most recent waves of the EWCS (2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015). The chapter also explores inequalities in working conditions, the drivers of inequality, and differences between economic sectors, occupational categories, country clusters, employment and contractual statuses, and sociodemographic groups.

Chapter 2 describes the current situation regarding working conditions in the EU. It presents a set of job quality profiles based on the way certain job quality features cluster together. It also examines whether there is a gender gap in job quality and whether older workers experience different conditions from the average worker. The chapter includes examples of measures designed to tackle the issues outlined and to

improve job quality, available through links to an online resource. Specific emphasis is given to measures addressing the need for reconciliation of work and family life and those that help to make work more sustainable by allowing more workers to stay in the labour force for longer.

Chapter 3 turns to emerging challenges regarding job quality. The drivers of change described above are linked to increases in exposure to psychosocial risks at work and the blurring of boundaries between work and non-working life. They are also associated with the fragmentation of the employment relationship between employees and their employer and the increase in multiple-job holding. These challenges are discussed, along with the challenges recently presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The final chapter presents conclusions, bringing together the main points and suggesting future policy directions on job quality.

1 | Trends in working conditions

Working conditions are the significant features of workers' experience in performing their jobs. A working condition is a characteristic or a combination of characteristics of work that can be modified and improved. Working conditions surveys aim to capture the 'real' work that individuals carry out rather than what is stated in their job descriptions (such as the work to be performed, objectives to reach, materials available, methods, operating rules and the organisation of the work). This 'real' work is influenced not just by how the work is organised and what is to be done but also by the skills and characteristics of the worker, their interpretation of the tasks, their method of working and their ability to adapt or respond to unforeseen circumstances. As such, the performance of work as an activity depends on both the work situation and the individual worker.

Importance of job quality

In the last two decades, job quality has gained importance as a central policy objective at EU level. With the introduction of the European Employment Strategy in 1997 and the subsequent launch of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, the concept of 'more and better jobs' reached the core of the policy debate.

This chapter considers differences in job quality across the working population and assesses how these differences have developed over time. More specifically, it investigates trends in the seven dimensions of job quality between 2000 and 2015 in the EU as a whole and highlights where there are differences between country groups, economic sectors, occupational categories, employment and contractual statuses, and sociodemographic groups (distinguished by gender, age and educational attainment). It also looks at inequalities within these subdivisions; for instance, if the physical environment improves for craft workers as a whole, does it improve for all workers in that category? Where inequality is found, the drivers behind it are explored.

Why is it important to monitor inequalities in working conditions? Inequality is core to many social policy and research agendas, but often the focus is on income, wage or wealth inequalities (see, for example, OECD, 2011; Eurofound, 2017a). Less has been said about developments in non-monetary aspects of job quality (see, for example, Green et al, 2013; Felstead et al, 2015). While some might argue that differences in job quality reflect differences in occupations or sectors and are therefore warranted, it is still essential to monitor

how inequalities within and between countries, occupations and sectors are evolving over time, and what the background is.

Policymakers need to be aware of whether job quality develops uniformly across Member States or whether countries individually or in groups are lagging behind and, if so, what are the reasons. Have EU directives sufficiently improved the situation in the Member States? What can be done to eliminate the growing differences between different contractual and employment arrangements as regards the provision of training, flexible working time arrangements and career prospects? Do specific sectors or occupational groups diverge from overall positive trends and what are the underlying reasons for this? While answers to these questions are not straightforward, this chapter helps to catalogue the most important developments and hypothesises about potential impact factors, which in turn need to be followed up by policymakers at EU, national and company levels.

Employment developments since 2000

Since 2000, employment in the EU has increased from 66.6% to 73.9% in 2019, with a slight drop during the years of the economic and financial crisis between 2008 and 2013. The lion's share of employment growth has been based on increased female labour market participation.

The composition of the workforce has also changed over the years (Table 1). The proportions of women and older workers have increased substantially. Self-employment has decreased, while the proportion of employees with temporary contracts has grown. With an increase in skills levels and a shift toward the service sectors, occupations have also shifted, with a higher proportion of professionals in 2019 than in 2002 and a decrease in agricultural workers, craft workers, and plant and machine operators.

In summary, employment in the EU has increased and was at an all-time high in 2019 (up to the first quarter of 2020) but has fluctuated since 2000, mostly because of the Great Recession. The supply of jobs may affect job quality and could be of relevance when assessing trends. Structurally, the composition of employment has also transformed, which means that job-holders were different in 2019 from those in 2000 (for a detailed labour market analysis, see Eurofound, 2020a).

Table 1: Change in the composition of the workforce, EU27 and the UK, 2002–2019

Title	2002 %	2005 %	2010 %	2015 %	2019 %
Under 25 years	11.1	10.5	9.3	8.5	8.5
25–49 years	67.5	66.8	65.1	62.5	60.4
50+ years	21.4	22.7	25.6	29.0	31.2
Women	43.8	44.4	45.5	46.1	46.3
Men	56.2	55.6	54.5	53.9	53.7
Managers	7.5	8.2	8.3	5.9	6.0
Professionals	12.2	13.3	14.6	18.8	20.2
Technicians	15.3	15.9	16.6	16.0	16.2
Clerks	11.8	11.1	10.7	9.7	9.5
Service and sales workers	13.5	13.3	14.2	16.9	16.7
Agricultural workers	5.2	4.5	4.0	3.5	3.0
Craft workers	15.1	14.3	12.9	11.8	11.4
Plant and machine operators	9.1	8.8	8.1	7.4	7.4
Elementary occupations	9.1	9.6	9.6	9.2	8.8
Self-employed with employees	4.9	4.6	4.4	4.0	3.8
Solo self-employed	9.5	10.3	10.2	10.1	9.7
Permanent employees	74.0 ^a	71.9 ^a	72.3 ^b	72.7	73.8
Temporary employees	10.3	11.6	11.7	12.0	11.6
Other (no response/unknown)	1.3	1.6	1.4	1.2	1.1

^a Based on EU-LFS estimate using the International Standard Classification of Occupations 2008 (ISCO-08).

^b Value for 2011.

Notes: Figures in the table refer to the percentage of employed people aged 15–64 years.

Source: Eurostat, European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS)

Approach to trend analysis

Against this backdrop, the analysis of trends in this chapter starts by presenting a snapshot of changes over a period of 15 years (2000–2015) in the average levels of the non-monetary dimensions of job quality and, for Earnings, of an indicator of fair pay. For each of the dimensions, an index has been constructed from the indicators that comprise the dimension, enabling developments to be quantified. Each index is measured on a scale from 0 to 100. The higher the index score, the better the job quality, with the exception of Work intensity, for which a lower score indicates better job quality.

We examine the mean score and the standard deviation on each index over time. The mean enables the direction of the trend to be established: improving, static or declining. The standard deviation is a measure of inequality, indicating the variation within each group. An increase in the standard deviation (an upward slope in the charts) indicates growing inequality across workers, while a decrease signals fewer inequalities.

The 27 EU Member States and the United Kingdom (UK) are taken as a whole to obtain a picture of the extent

and overall direction of change, treating these countries as a single labour market. Because such an aggregate approach bears the risk of hiding considerable heterogeneity across the various employment and labour market regimes, some of the results will be broken down by country clusters. Countries are subdivided into six clusters, reflecting the production regimes typology of Gallie (2011), who classifies European countries into five groups based on how they differ in terms of key institutional dimensions, namely the skill formation system, employment policies and institutions, and traditions of socioeconomic coordination. The country clusters are as follows:

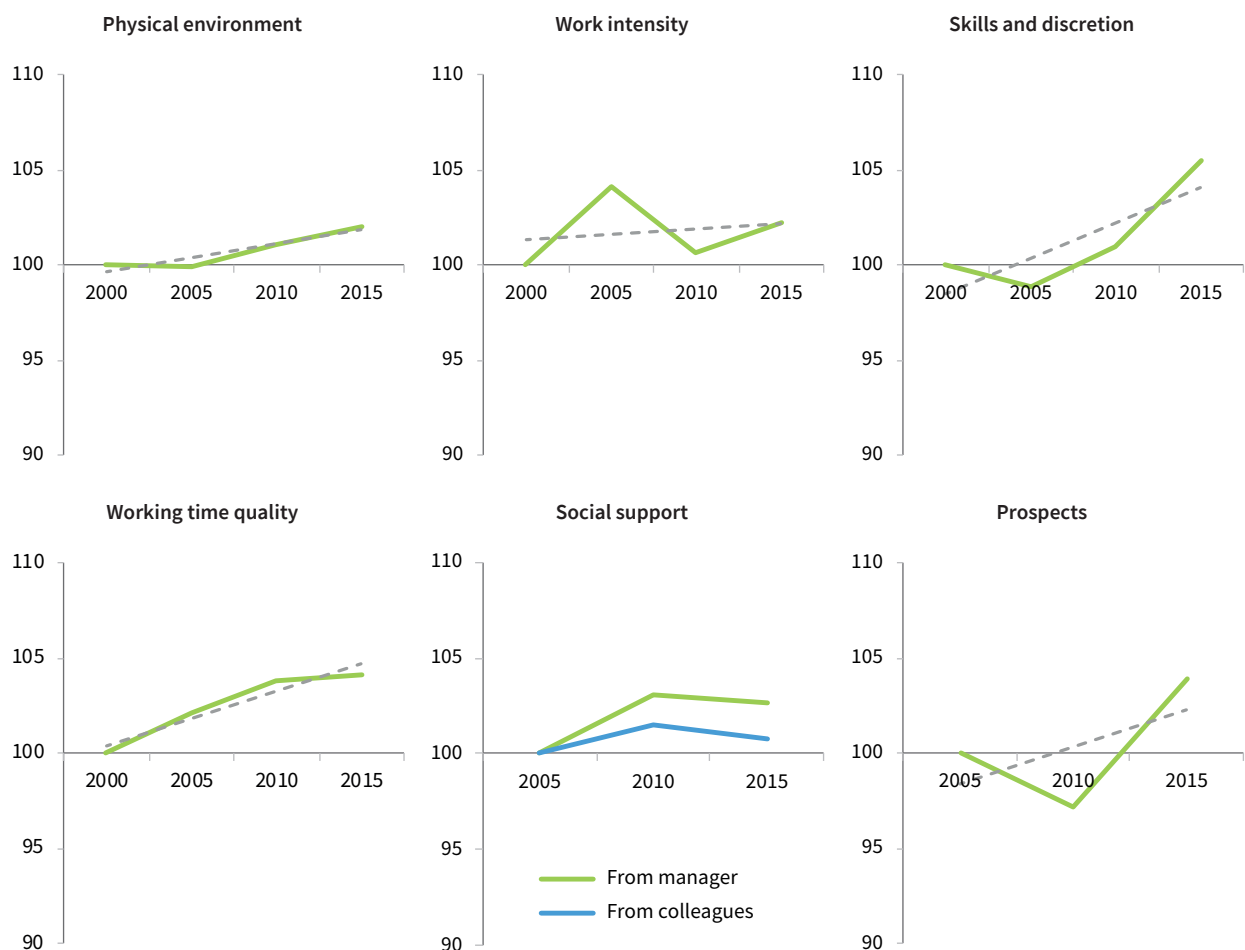
- Anglophone (UK, Ireland)
- Baltic (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania)
- Central-Eastern (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia)
- Continental (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands)
- Northern (Denmark, Finland, Sweden)
- Southern (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain)

Developments in job quality over time

Overall, the dimensions of job quality have not changed drastically since 2000 (or 2005, in the case of Social support¹ and Prospects) across the Member States, as shown in Figure 2. The most pronounced, though still modest, increases were observed in the Skills and discretion (+6%) and Working time quality (+4%) dimensions.² The improvement of these indices shows that jobs today require more skills and offer more autonomy than in the past and that workers – on average – have benefited from improved working time arrangements.

The quality of the physical environment has improved only marginally over time, with a slight reduction of physical risks at the workplace. Social support (from both managers and colleagues) improved modestly. Work intensity (the number of quantitative demands, pace of work and emotional demands), on the other hand, worsened slightly, increasing in the period 2000–2015, with a peak in 2005. Prospects – a dimension that combines opportunities for career advancement and job security – developed along a cyclical pattern, with a deterioration in 2010 and a recovery thereafter, most likely reflecting the trajectory of the economic and financial crisis. In 2015, the average score for Prospects was above the 2005 level (+4%) and had increased by 7% compared to 2010.

Figure 2: Indexed change in job quality indices, EU27 and the UK, 2000–2015



Notes: 2000/2005 = 100. 2000 data do not include Croatia. The Prospects and Social support indices start at 2005. All charts except Social support include a green line plotting the data and dashed grey trendline.

Source: EWCS 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015

1 The Social environment dimension comprises adverse social behaviour and social support indicators; however, trend data are available only for the social support indicators.

2 The percentage growth rates are based on computations of developments in the job quality indices.

Inequalities in the indices of job quality can mostly be explained by occupation and sector, closely followed by country and contractual status (for details, see Eurofound, 2021). This is not surprising, as the job quality indices measure characteristics of the job that are often strongly linked to occupations, especially with regard to physical risks, skills use and autonomy. To give an example, it is obvious that a construction worker faces more physical risks at work than an office clerk. Knowledge workers, traditionally, are more often granted autonomy in the performance of their work than workers involved in set industrial production processes. The country of residence of the worker generally does not explain as much of the difference in job quality as sector and occupation but still contributes to it. This is an indication that national institutional arrangements such as labour market or social policies at Member State level have a role to play. Other indices are less strongly related to the occupation or skills level, such as Working time quality and Prospects. Differences in these dimensions are largely explained by differences in country and employment status.

Although sociodemographic factors such as age, gender and household composition do not explain much variance statistically – as they are mediated through the work-related aspects – they still play a key role in driving working conditions. There are still male- and female-dominated sectors, and this has implications for, for example, pay, working hours and prestige. Uneven burdens for men and women when it comes to domestic work, childcare and elder care also play a crucial role. The significant results relating to age in the statistical analysis further highlight the importance of life-course and age-specific effects (see also Eurofound, 2020b).

Trends in the seven job quality dimensions

Having looked at overall developments in the job quality indices, this chapter next investigates trends and inequalities dimension by dimension and highlights the main drivers of these inequalities between various groups of workers. Country, sector, occupation and contractual arrangements are the main factors under scrutiny.

Physical environment

The monitoring of the physical hazards and physical conditions under which work is performed has been included in working conditions surveys for many years, acknowledging the long-standing interest in this topic. Eliminating or minimising physical risks is at the core of occupational health and safety, and numerous actions have been undertaken over the past decades to minimise

these risks in a wide range of sectors. When compared with the past, today's workplaces have progressed in this area, aided no doubt by the founding of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) in 1995. Nonetheless, physical and occupational safety at work remains a continuing policy interest. Ambient risks (such as vibrations from machinery, loud noise and high temperatures), posture-related risks and biochemical risks make up this index.

Overview

Overall, the quality of the physical working environment in the EU27 and the UK increased slightly between 2000 and 2015, and differences between workers have diminished. However, a closer look at the different types of risks reveals that conditions have not developed uniformly. For example, on the one hand, the share of workers exposed to tobacco smoke from other people dropped from 20% to 9% (most likely due to legislation preventing tobacco use at the workplace), and the percentage of workers breathing in smoke, fumes, powder or dust decreased from 19% to 15%, while the share exposed to vibrations from hand tools or machinery fell from 24% to 20%. More workers, on the other hand, had to handle or had skin contact with chemical substances (an increase from 14% to 17%) or infectious materials (an increase from 9% to 13%) one-quarter of the time or more at work. These figures are particularly of interest as regards occupational cancers and other related diseases. In recent years, studies have looked more closely at the work link to cancer (see, for example, Musu and Vogel, 2018). Most studies, however, have focused on male-dominated occupations, while women's exposure to chemical hazards in the workplace has often been ignored (see ETUI, 2014).

Sectors

The improvement in the Physical environment dimension is shared fairly equally across many sectors. Physical working conditions are particularly demanding in construction, agriculture and industry, and not all have made improvements. Agriculture has seen a reduction in posture-related risks, most likely due to improved machinery and generally better workplace design, while improvements in industry are associated with reduced ambient risks. In the construction sector, the physical environment deteriorated in 2005, mainly because of increased ambient risks, and then remained stable in the period that followed. The degree of inequality in physical working conditions decreased across many sectors but was stable in commerce and hospitality, financial services and construction. In the transport sector and, to a lesser extent, in industry, the improvements benefited the types of workers who previously had scored very poorly on the Physical environment index.

Occupations

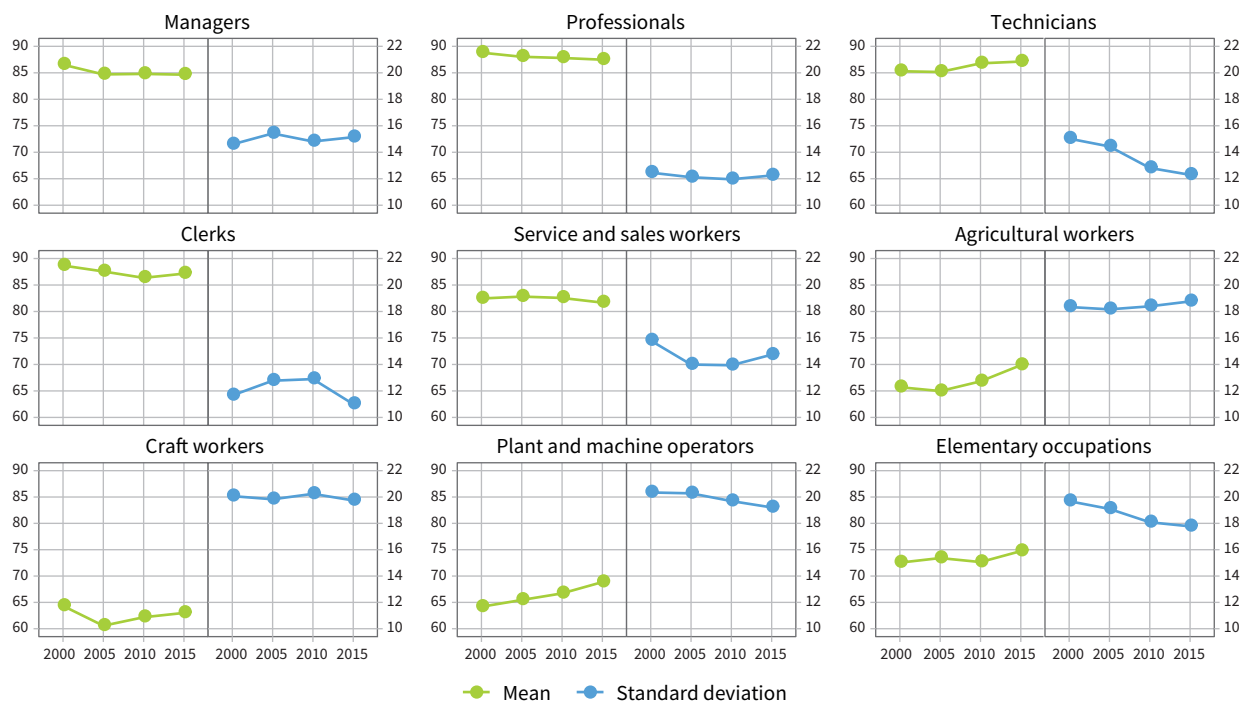
Craft workers, plant and machine operators, and agricultural workers – all occupations with higher physical risks – reported the lowest scores on the Physical environment index in 2015, well below the average (Figure 3). However, since 2000, this dimension has improved strongly for plant and machine operators (+6%, due to reduced ergonomic and ambient risks) and agricultural workers (+7%, due to a reduction in posture-related risks) as well as elementary occupations to a lesser extent (+3%). Craft workers, on the other hand, experienced a substantial drop between 2000 and 2005 (-6%). Even though conditions improved slightly subsequently, craft workers still recorded by far the lowest score in 2015. Improvements for low-skilled workers as regards physical working conditions have been associated with the ongoing automation of work processes (see, for example, James et al, 2013; Pham et al, 2018), notwithstanding the negative effects on employment levels. Among the higher-skilled occupations, minor deteriorations were observed for managers, professionals and clerks.

Within occupational groups, there are now fewer differences in physical environmental risks among technicians, elementary occupations, and plant and machine operators. All workers within these groups benefited from the positive development. However, differences among agricultural workers increased, as the rise in the standard deviation indicates, meaning that only some benefited from the increase in the index.

Country clusters

Differences between country groups on the Physical environment index were not striking in 2015. The Southern country group scored worst, after controlling for the differences that arise from countries having a different mix of economic sectors. This performance was driven by Cyprus, France, Greece and Spain; Italy, on the other hand, was among the countries with the highest scores. However, it was also the Southern cluster that showed most improvement, mostly driven by Cyprus and Greece (which had very low levels in 2000). The best Physical environment scores were observed in the Anglophone cluster, particularly in Ireland. Improvements since 2000 were most pronounced in Greece, Hungary and Portugal. For several countries, particularly France and the UK, a deteriorating tendency was observed.

Figure 3: Physical environment index: mean and standard deviation, by occupational category, EU27 and the UK, 2000–2015



Source: EWCS 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015

Sociodemographic factors

Inequalities persisted between the genders, age groups and educational groups over time. Women, on average, had better physical working environments than men over all of the years observed. Older workers, aged 55 years and over, had a better physical environment than their younger fellow workers (most likely reflecting older workers moving out of physically challenging jobs by either leaving the labour market or transitioning to less-demanding tasks (Eurofound, 2008)). The gradient across educational groups, however, shrank over the years, even after controlling for occupation and sector, with workers with only a primary-level education experiencing the poorest physical working conditions.

Takeaways

- There was only a moderate improvement in the Physical environment dimension in the EU27 and the UK between 2000 and 2015.
- Improvements were most pronounced in the Southern country cluster, as many of the countries in this cluster were catching up from very low levels.
- Agriculture, industry and construction are the sectors with the most challenging physical conditions. While both agriculture and industry significantly improved over time, the Physical environment score for the construction sector dropped.
- Craft workers saw improvements between 2005 and 2015, but this remained the occupation with the lowest scores in 2015 (lower than in 2000). The most pronounced improvements were observed for agricultural workers and plant and machine operators.

Policy pointer

Despite progress, physical safety at work remains a policy concern and deservedly so, as there is still room for improvement. It is important for policymakers and social partners to focus on those sectors that still report comparably low scores, particularly industry, agriculture and construction. An eye must also be kept on the occupational category of craft workers in particular. However, there are also more hidden physical risks for female than for male workers, which need to be recognised when looking into subsectors: women are highly exposed to noise in the textile and food production sectors. Moreover, sudden and disturbing noise can be considerably more common for female workers in the education, health, hotel, restaurant and catering, and social care sectors, as well as in call centres or other offices (EU-OSHA, 2005).

Work intensity

Intense work is a key component of most models of work-related stress. If the workload is very high, if the job absorbs too much energy or if the job requires juggling various demands, it becomes difficult to perform tasks effectively and maintain one's health. Research has found that excessively demanding work is associated with an increased risk of serious ill health. In both the demand-control model of occupational stress (Karasek and Theorell, 1992) and the effort-reward imbalance model (Siegrist, 1996), the level of demands is examined in conjunction with other important dimensions of work. The Work intensity index used here to measure trends covers quantitative demands and pace determinants and interdependency but does not take account of emotional demands.³

Overview

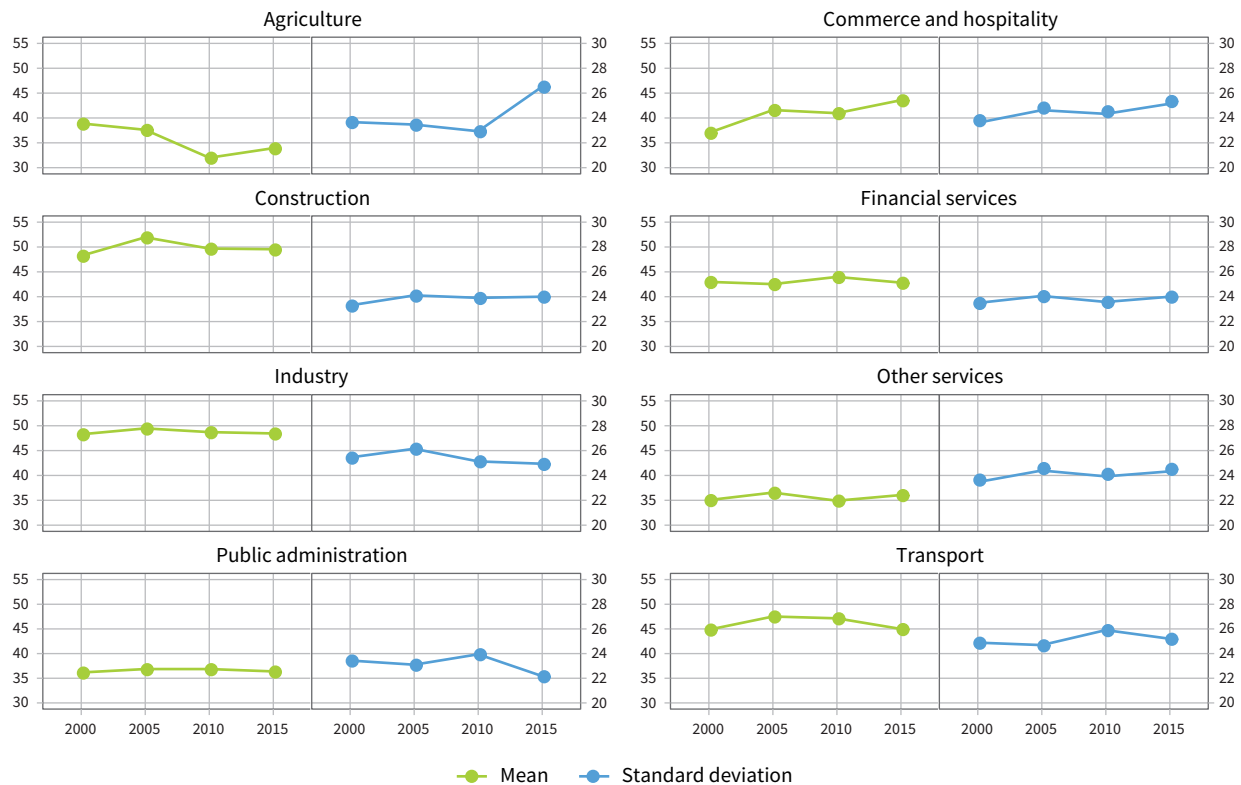
Work intensity in the EU27 and the UK has remained stable overall (with a minor increase), and inequality in work intensity has also remained constant. This stability also holds true for both quantitative demands and pace determinants and interdependency. Sector and country factors explain most of the differences between workers, but to a much lower degree than for other dimensions.

Sectors

The overall stable trend appears to apply across most sectors (Figure 4). The exceptions are agriculture, in which work intensity decreased, and commerce and hospitality, where there was a pronounced intensification (mainly due to the hotels and restaurants subsector), driven mainly by working at high speed and working to tight deadlines. For instance, the proportion of workers working at high speed for at least three-quarters of their working time increased in the commerce and hospitality sector by 10 percentage points from 29% to 39%. The reduction in work intensity in agriculture may relate to the shrinking relative employment rate as a result of fewer younger workers employed in this sector during the period observed and increasing automation, with digital technologies taking over the more labour-intensive tasks (see, for example, Herlitzius, 2017). However, the reduction in work intensity was experienced only by a subgroup of agricultural workers. Inequality also increased in commerce and hospitality, although this sector was associated with a general intensification of work.

³ Quantitative demands include working at high speed and to tight deadlines, not having enough time to do the job, and frequent disruptive interruptions. Pace determinants are factors that determine the pace of work, such as performance targets and the speed of automated machines; interdependency refers to the dependency of these factors on each other.

Figure 4: Work intensity index: mean and standard deviation, by sector, EU27 and the UK, 2000–2015



Source: EWCS 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015

Occupations

Most of the factors that drive inequalities in work intensity cannot be explained by the information captured in the EWCS. However, it is well known that organisational choices, job design, work organisation and other factors play a significant role (see, for example, Piasna, 2018). The impact of work intensity on health and well-being depends not least on social support at the workplace and other job resources. Occupations, on the other hand, contribute little to explaining the differences in this index. However, craft workers, workers in elementary occupations, and plant and machine operators in the Southern country cluster experience significantly higher intensity than all other occupations, while there are no significant occupational differences in other country groups. While plant and machine operators have had constant high scores over the years, intensity significantly and continuously increased for craft workers and elementary occupations in the Southern cluster.

In 2015, work intensity was by far the lowest for agricultural workers, who experienced a substantial drop between 2000 and 2010 and remained at that level in the final year of observation. Overall, work intensity increased most for professionals, especially health professionals (+10%), as well as for service and sales workers (+12%) from 2000 onwards.

Country clusters

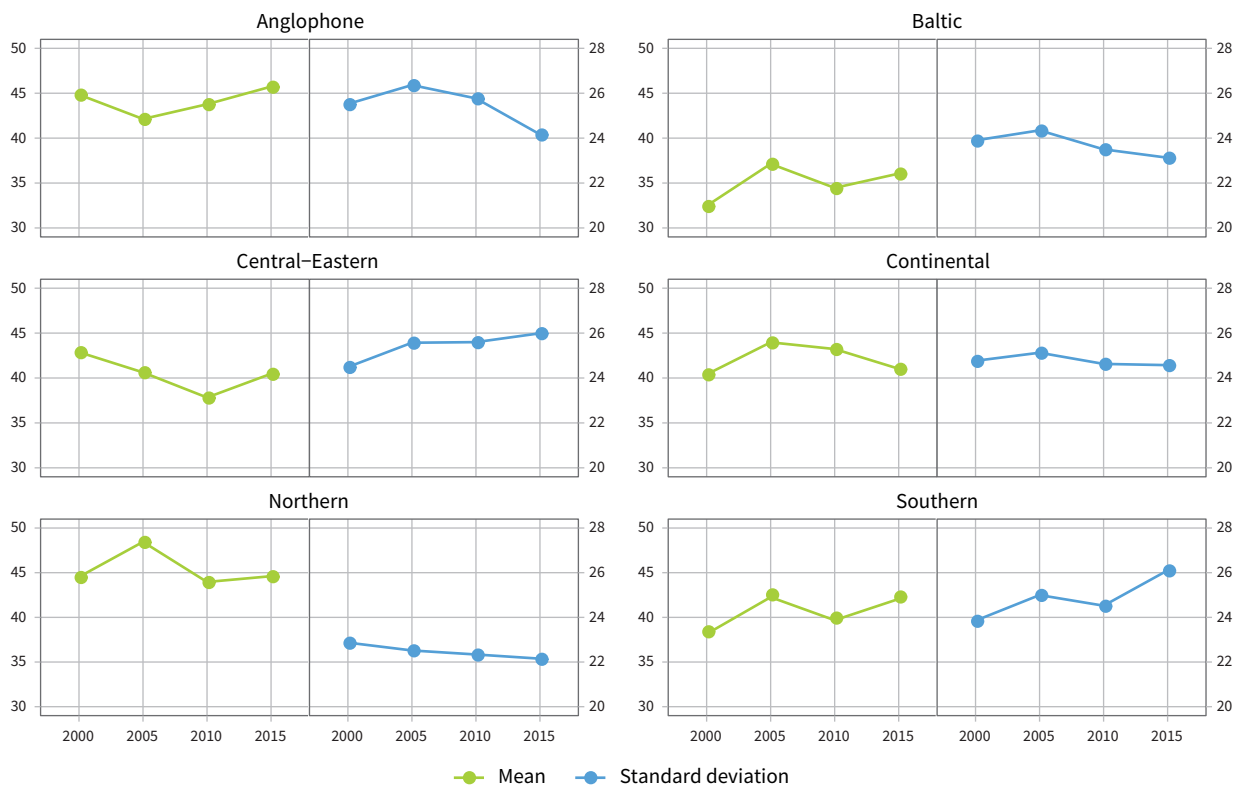
There are pronounced differences in work intensity across country groups (Figure 5). High levels are seen in the Anglophone countries, where, after a pronounced drop in 2005, work became more intense, mainly driven by rising quantitative demands.

Work was, on average, most intense in the Northern group over the period observed but it did remain overall stable with an outlier in 2005. The lowest, but also increasing, scores were recorded in the Baltic cluster. In the Central-Eastern countries, it decreased moderately. A general upward trend among most country clusters in the average level implies that work has become more intense on average. In the Southern cluster this is coupled with an increase in the standard deviation implying that intensity is increasing more for some than for others.

Sociodemographic factors

Women, on average, report higher work intensity than men, while work intensity is highest for the youngest age groups and for those with secondary or tertiary educational attainment. Migrants, both first and second generation, report significantly higher work intensity than natives; work intensity is lower in low-income groups. These differences remain after controlling for other impact factors (such as occupation and sector) and are stable over time.

Figure 5: Work intensity index: mean and standard deviation, by country cluster, EU27 and the UK, 2000–2015



Source: EWCS 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015

Takeaways

- Work intensity, overall, remained stable in the EU27 and the UK, taking account of quantitative demands, pace determinants and interdependency.
- There are pronounced differences in work intensity across country groups, with increasingly high levels since 2005 in the Anglophone countries and the lowest, but also increasing, levels in the Baltic countries.
- The overall stable trend applies across most sectors, but work intensity shrank in agriculture, and a pronounced upward trend was observed in commerce and hospitality.
- Service and sales workers experienced the biggest increases in work intensity.

Policy pointer

Policymakers need to be aware of increasing demands in some sectors (especially commerce and hospitality) and occupations (such as service and sales workers, craft workers, machine operators and elementary occupations). There is no information available about trends in emotional demands, but it is well known that such demands are particularly high in service-related occupations dealing directly with service recipients.

Skills and discretion

Skills and discretion is the dimension of job quality dealing with whether or not work allows workers to use their skills and to develop and grow through their experience of work. It includes the skills content of the job (the cognitive dimension of work), workers' development through training, the latitude of workers to make decisions and worker participation in organisational decision-making. Access to and take-up of training is a particularly relevant subcategory of this dimension. Training benefits workers, as it improves employability and career prospects (see, for example, De Grip and Zwick, 2005; Laguador, 2015). Businesses also benefit from training, as it improves workers' skills and encourages them to engage with their work, increasing performance, adaptability and the standard of the work performed.

Avoiding discrimination and inequality in access to training between different contractual statuses (see Eurofound, 2018a) has been a key recommendation of European institutions and the social partners. It has been built into EU law by the directives on fixed-term work (1999) and part-time work (1997), which state that employers should facilitate the access of fixed-term and part-time workers to training to enhance their career opportunities and occupational mobility. The European Pillar of Social Rights restates the principle of access for all to education and training for labour market inclusion.

Figure 6: Skills and discretion index: mean and standard deviation, by occupational category, EU27 and the UK, 2000–2015



Source: EWCS 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015

Overview

The Skills and discretion index increased substantially between 2005 and 2015. This advance is mostly associated with the enhanced use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) and the provision of paid training. Differences between workers are mainly driven by occupation and country. The most concerning issue is the widening gap between different contractual statuses in the provisions of training paid by the employer.

Occupations

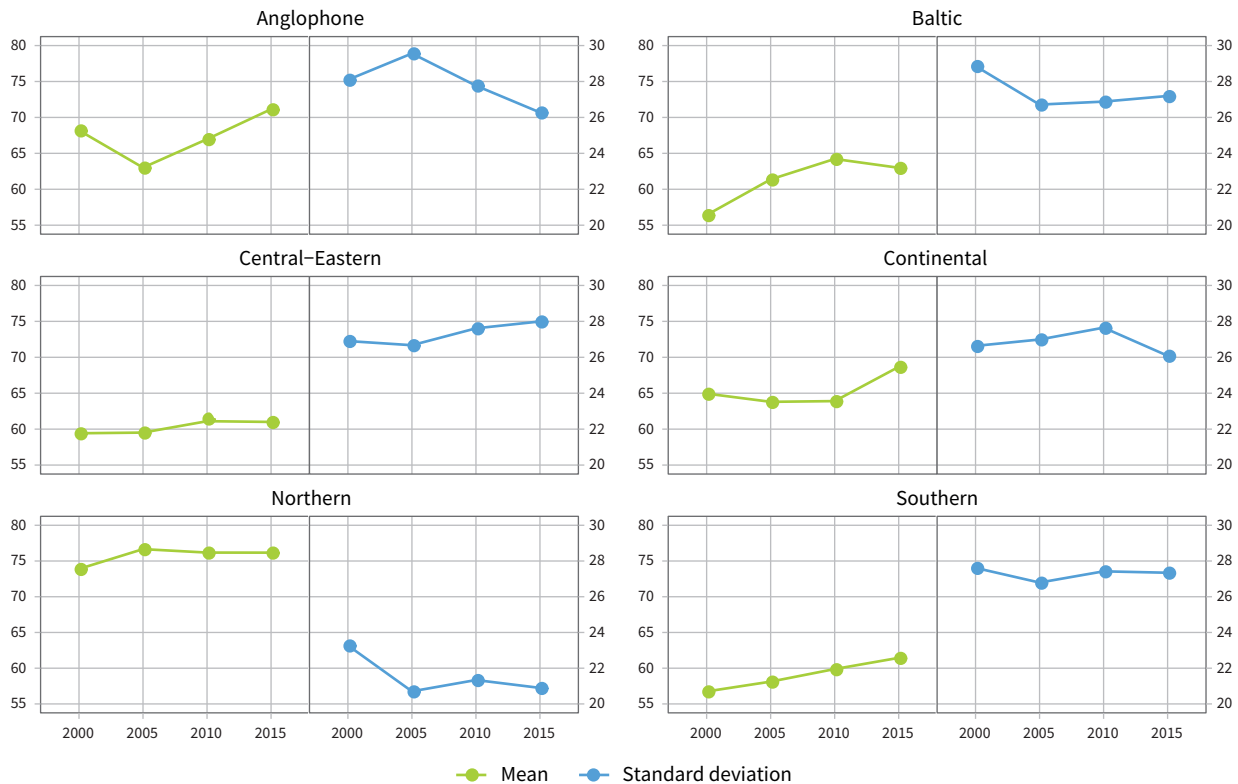
Figure 6 shows workers' scores on the Skills and discretion index by occupational category. If we group the categories by score, there are three main clusters (low-, medium- and high-scoring), giving the following picture. The low-scoring cluster includes elementary occupations and plant and machine operators. The medium-scoring category is composed of clerks, service and sales workers, agricultural workers and craft workers, with craft workers showing a particularly favourable development since 2005. At the top of the ranking in the high-scoring cluster are technicians, professionals and managers.

The most pronounced improvements were observed for craft workers, elementary occupations, and service and sales workers (all +10%), whereas agricultural workers experienced a moderate deterioration. Plant and machine operators are closing the gap with other occupations.

A look at differences between occupations within country clusters reveals a few interesting aspects. Overall, the divide in this dimension between high- and low-skilled occupations exists across country clusters. However, in the Northern countries, for instance, the low-skilled occupations are not significantly different from office clerks (after controlling for other potential influential factors). One of the reasons for this is the higher rates of paid training in the Northern countries, even for workers in lower-skilled professions, but inequalities are also less pronounced as regards autonomy and the use of cognitive skills (such as solving unforeseen problems, performing complex tasks and working with computers). In the Anglophone countries, on the other hand, there is less inequality reported between medium- and high-skilled workers. In the Central-Eastern group, a stronger polarisation is evident between higher-skilled and low-skilled professions.

What can we learn from this? Investment in staff is crucial for sustainable employability. This is particularly the case for low- to medium-skilled occupations. High-skilled occupations most often receive paid training; this is much less the case for elementary occupations, trade workers, plant and machine operators, and agricultural workers. Good country examples such as Finland, Ireland, Sweden and the UK, where around 30% of workers in elementary occupations reported having received paid training (well above the EU average of 15%), could serve as role

Figure 7: Skills and discretion index: mean and standard deviation, by country cluster, EU27 and the UK, 2000–2015



Source: EWCS 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015

models to further narrow this gap, which has been closing very slowly over the years.

Country clusters

The strongest advances on improving workers’ skills and enhancing their autonomy over the period 2000–2015 took place in the Baltic (+12%) and Southern (+8%) countries (Figure 7). While inequality dropped substantially in the former, it remained almost stable in the latter group. The Anglophone group witnessed significant improvements between 2005 and 2015 (+13%). In Central-Eastern countries, improvement on this dimension was marginal, and differences between workers increased. Scores were by far, and constantly, highest in the Northern group over the years.

Country group differences remained highly significant over the years (after controlling for individual and workplace-related factors), although, conversely, the differences between the Northern cluster and all of the other country groups, except for the Central-Eastern group, decreased between 2000 and 2015, especially as regards the differences with the Anglophone and Southern clusters. The Southern cluster, however, remained the group with the lowest average scores.

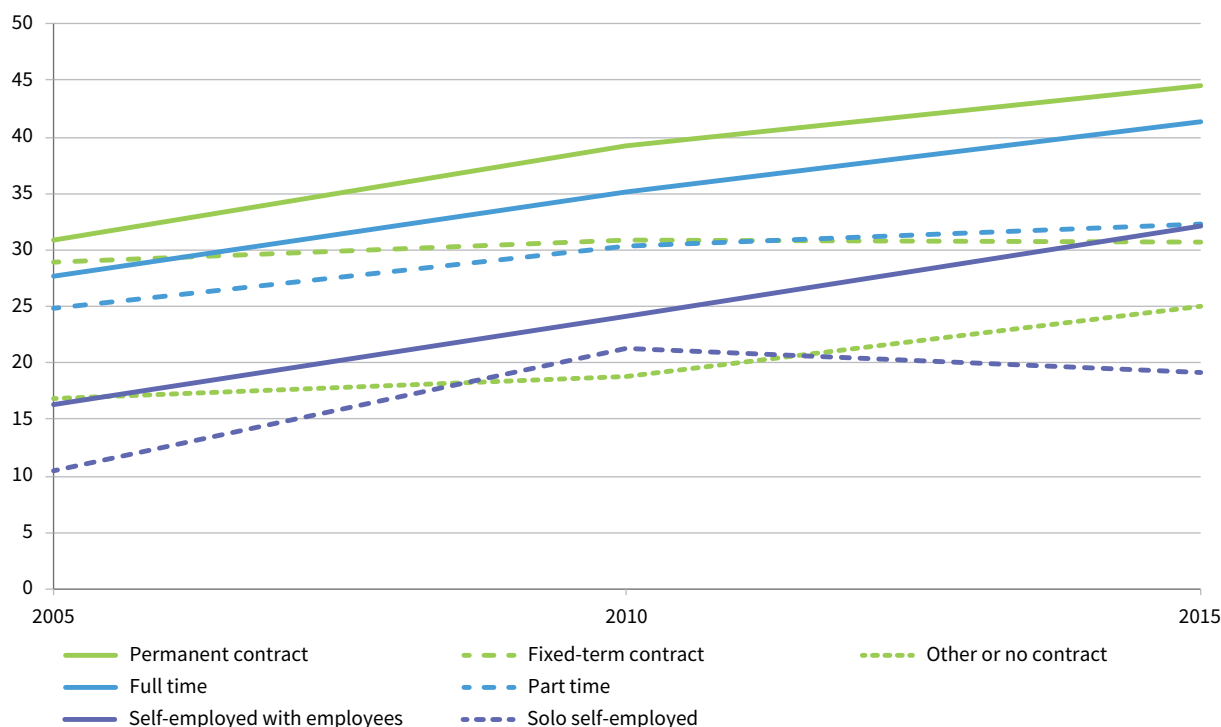
In 2015, workers in the Southern cluster scored, on average, 13 percentage points lower than those in the Northern cluster. For instance, only 29% of workers in the Southern cluster received paid training in 2015 (the lowest proportion of all country clusters) compared with an average of 38% across the EU and with 50% in the Anglophone group.

Differences between the Continental and Northern clusters increased between 2000 and 2010, associated with a steep increase in the cognitive aspect in the latter and a drop in the discretion aspect (capturing autonomy at work and decision latitude) in the former. The good news is that, by 2015, the gap had narrowed due to the catch-up of the Continental cluster.

Employment and contractual status

Scores on the Skills and discretion dimension vary significantly across different employment statuses, with the self-employed scoring highest, followed by permanent employees; the differences between these two groups are stable. Differences between permanent employees and temporary employees and those with other types of contracts or no contracts are statistically significant, with growing gaps over the years.

Figure 8: Participation in paid training (%), by employment and contractual status, EU27 and the UK, 2005–2015



Note: The percentage of employees who participated in training paid by their employer in the 12 months preceding the interview.

Source: EWCS 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015

Training participation: Contractual status and sociodemographic factors

Trends in the Skills and discretion index overall may hide specific and more problematic developments linked to access to and take-up of training (Figure 8). While the overall provision of paid training has grown, differences across contract types and working time statuses increased substantially. The gap between the proportions of permanent and fixed-term employees who attended a training course in the 12 months prior to being surveyed amounted to 14 percentage points in 2015, a 12-percentage-point increase since 2005. Similarly, the gap between working time contractual patterns has increased: 41% of full-time workers and 32% of part-time workers attended a training course in 2015, compared to 28% of full-time employees and 25% of part-time workers in 2005.

Cumulative effects can be seen when employment status, working hours patterns and worker characteristics are considered together. An earlier Eurofound analysis demonstrated that (after controlling for other factors) younger age groups are more likely to receive training than older workers; however, younger age groups are also more likely to hold fixed-term contracts than older workers (Eurofound, 2018b). Women are far more likely to work part-time than men, and therefore the lack of access to training for part-time workers is also a gender equality issue. Formal

education and qualifications also play a significant role – workers with lower attainment are less likely to attend training courses. Migration background is another factor that, on average, reduces the take-up of paid training (see also Eurofound, 2019a). It is also worth noting that workers living in households with partners and children are more likely to attend training courses than workers living alone or with older partners. Other factors that were found to be positively correlated with training were seniority, income, high-skilled occupations, permanent contracts and working in the health or public administration sector (compared with other economic sectors).

Takeaways

- In the EU27 and the UK, the Skills and discretion score substantially increased after 2005, mostly driven by an increase in the use of ICTs and the provision of paid training by employers.
- While in 2015 scores were higher than the 2000 score across all country clusters, trajectories differed significantly. There was a continuous increase in the Southern cluster (which was catching up from a very low level), an increase in the Baltic cluster between 2000 and 2010 and a drop thereafter, flat development in the Northern cluster (which was high-scoring from the outset) and a steep increase in the Anglophone cluster after

a massive drop in 2005. The Continental cluster improved only in 2015 after flat development before that.

- The growing gap in the provision of paid training between various contractual statuses (full-time versus part-time and permanent versus fixed-term contracts) is of concern, indicating that EU directives addressing inequalities in contractual statuses are yet to fully achieve their aims. The underlying reasons for this are manifold, including the composition of the labour force, the different priorities of workers with part-time contracts and a lack of incentives for employers to invest in temporary and part-time staff. However, since female workers and workers with a migration background are overrepresented in part-time and fixed-term jobs, differences in contractual status include a gender and ethnic equality dimension that should be taken into consideration.

Policy pointer

The directives on fixed-term and part-time work, dating back to 1999 and 1997, respectively, aimed to eliminate discrimination based on contractual status by requiring employers to facilitate access by part-time and fixed-term workers to training. The continuous widening of the training gap shows that the aims of these directives require further work to be fully achieved.

Working time quality

The balanced allocation of time for work, caring, leisure, volunteering and personal development is central to workers' well-being and to the development of society. Social policies, working time regimes and gender norms regarding domestic work define the interactions between households and the labour market. At the same time, the social organisation of households is changing. With more workers in the labour force, especially women, increasing numbers of people must juggle employment and caring responsibilities. Working time is 'gendered' in the sense that men's and women's circumstances – and preferences – for working hours are shaped and framed differently. The Working time quality index includes long working hours (48+ hours per week), long working days (10+ hours per day) and atypical working hours; the current analysis was unable to follow developments in flexible work arrangements over time.

Overview

Working time quality has improved, most notably between 2000 and 2010. Differences between workers in the quality of their working time have simultaneously decreased. This improvement was driven in particular by a decrease in the proportion of workers reporting long working hours (from 19% to 16%) and long working days (from 36% to 32%). On the other hand, the proportion of workers reporting that they work on

Sundays or do shift work increased moderately between 2010 and 2015 (+2 percentage points and +3 percentage points, respectively).

Sector, occupation, employment status and country explain most of the differences between workers in the quality of their working time.

Occupations

Minor improvements are apparent in the working time quality of most occupations over the years. Agricultural workers are the exception, for whom the gap with the average narrowed to 12 points in 2015 from 22 points in 2000. This steep improvement for agricultural workers was driven particularly by a drop in the percentage working long hours from 53% to 35%.

Figure 9 shows the association between occupational category and working time quality across the country clusters. Managers, the occupational category with the highest proportions of workers working long hours and long days, have low scores for Working time quality consistently across most country groups, with the only exception being the Baltic countries (mainly due to the low proportion of managers reporting long working hours there).

Service and sales workers are particularly disadvantaged in the Central-Eastern and Southern countries, where there is a high prevalence of long working hours and, in the Central-Eastern cluster, above-average prevalence of shift work. In the Southern cluster, there is a higher proportion of waiters, cooks and bartenders among service and sales workers, with these occupations typically working overtime and on shifts. However, the working time quality of service and sales workers is significantly worse than all other occupations across all clusters, although they are better off in the Continental and Northern clusters than in the others. This is not least because of the high number of childcare workers and healthcare assistants (over 20% among the service workforce), as these workers are less likely to report long working hours or shift work than others in this category.

Plant and machine operators score low across the EU. The Continental, Northern and Southern clusters perform better in comparison to the Anglophone cluster. However, high proportions of workers in this occupational category in the Anglophone, Baltic and Central-Eastern clusters report atypical working hours. EU wide, this occupational category therefore has the strongest negative association with working time quality.

Elementary occupations fare better in the Northern and Continental clusters, but workers in the Southern cluster report particularly poor working time quality, as do those in the Anglophone cluster (again due to high proportions of shift work or weekend work).

Figure 9: Associations between working time quality and occupational category, by country cluster

	Managers	Professionals	Technicians	Service and sales workers	Elementary occupations	Plant and machine operators	Agricultural workers
Anglophone	Reference						
Baltic	Blue bar	Blue bar					
Central-Eastern			Red bar	Red bar			Red bar
Continental		Blue bar		Blue bar	Blue bar	Blue bar	Blue bar
Northern		Blue bar			Blue bar	Blue bar	
Southern		Blue bar	Red bar	Red bar		Blue bar	Red bar

Notes: The bars represent the relative associations between each occupational category and country cluster, showing only significant coefficients ($p < 0.01$). The blue bars represent associations favourable to workers compared to the reference cluster (Anglophone) and the red bars represent unfavourable associations. For example, service and sales workers score significantly worse in the Southern and Central-Eastern clusters than in the Anglophone cluster, while they score significantly better than in the Anglophone cluster in the Continental cluster

Source: EWCS

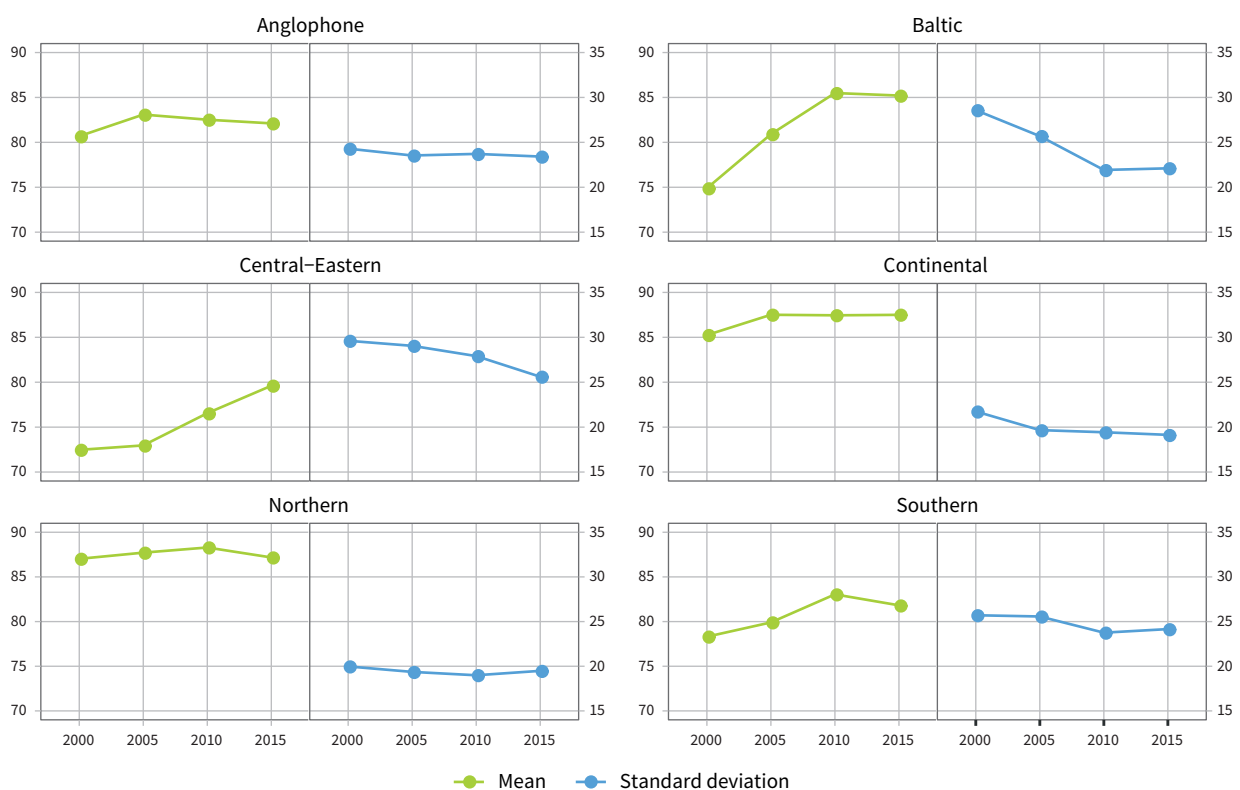
Countries and country clusters

Since 2000, working time quality has improved in most Member States. In particular, some of the eastern European countries managed to catch up with the pre-2004 Member States in terms of their working time quality, for example Latvia (+17%), Romania (+16%), Lithuania (+14%), Poland (+13%) and Estonia (+8%). The only country where working time quality substantially deteriorated was Greece, with the main drop between

2000 and 2005 due to a massive increase in long working hours. These developments are reflected in the trajectories of country groups (Figure 10).

The closing of the working time quality gap between Central-Eastern cluster and the Northern and Continental countries was confirmed in the in-depth statistical analysis. While in 2000 the average score of workers in the Baltic and Central-Eastern clusters was 9 and 6 points, respectively, lower than their fellow

Figure 10: Working time quality index: mean and standard deviation, by country cluster, EU27 and the UK, 2000–2015



Source: EWCS 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015

workers in the Northern cluster (after controlling for other confounders), in 2015 differences between these clusters were no longer statistically significant. A steep reduction of atypical and long working hours in the Central-Eastern cluster was identified as the main driver, while the proportion of workers reporting long working days increased in the Northern countries. The eastern European countries that joined the EU in 2004 adapted their working time models to EU standards (as, for instance, outlined in the Working Time Directive). This is an important reason for this catching up process during the period observed. Working time quality also increased in the Southern cluster, despite the deterioration in Greece.

Employment status

Working time quality differs considerably between employees and the self-employed. Over the years, this dimension has changed little for both employees and those who are self-employed with employees. But it has improved substantially for the solo self-employed, mainly driven by a steep decrease in the proportion working long hours. In 2015, around 40% of all self-employed workers usually worked 48 hours or more a week, while the same was true for only 11% of employees. However, since 2000, the gap between the two groups has narrowed continuously and shrank by 10 percentage points over the period. As Figure 11 shows, this development was driven by a reduction in the proportion of the solo self-employed reporting long weekly working hours, from 50% to 34%, while the proportion of self-employed workers with employees who reported long working hours remained steady.

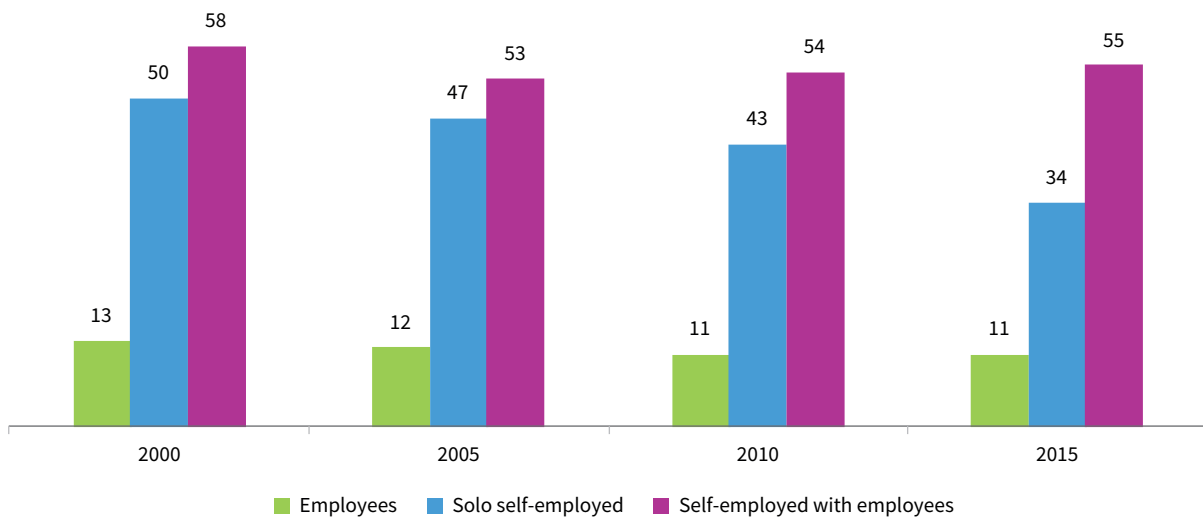
This improvement for solo self-employed may, however, come with a caveat, as the boundaries between them and employees are becoming increasingly blurred (see, for example, Eurofound, 2017b). Consequently, the working time quality of the solo self-employed may resemble that of employees, although the solo self-employed remain dependent on their principal client as regards work organisation and continue to lack the social protection rights given to employees.

Sociodemographic factors

Women generally report better working time quality than men (Eurofound, 2018c), and these differences remained significant and stable over time. However, it must be kept in mind that this may be a result of women continuing to be the primary carers, organising their working life around their caring commitments, while often the focus of their (on average) better-paid male partners is on career progress and professional development.

There are no strong significant statistical effects of age (the only exception being workers aged 55+ years having higher scores) or formal education, nor is migration background significantly associated with working time quality. Income is negatively correlated with working time quality, indicating that higher income groups have poorer working time quality, on average, than workers with lower incomes.

Figure 11: Long working hours (%), by employment status, EU27 and the UK, 2000–2015



Note: Percentage of workers who usually work 48 hours or more per week.
Source: EWCS 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015

Takeaways

- Overall, working time quality improved across the EU27 and the UK in the period observed but particularly so between 2000 and 2010, mostly driven by a catch-up to EU standards of eastern European and Baltic Member States after the enlargement in 2004.
- While working time quality moderately improved for most occupations, there was a huge gain for agricultural workers due to a steep reduction in the proportion who work long hours, in part due to technological changes and better equipment.
- Service and sales workers are among those with the poorest scores on the Working time quality dimension, due to high proportions working atypical hours in this occupational category. This is particularly the case in the Southern and the Central-Eastern clusters. Plant and machine operators score low across the EU, but particularly in the Anglophone, Baltic and Central-Eastern groups.
- While the Working time quality dimension has remained stable over time for both employees and self-employed workers with employees, it has substantially improved for the solo self-employed due to a lower prevalence of long working hours in this group. This finding, however, requires deeper investigation into the figures and for the caveats to be explored in terms of the blurring boundaries between employment statuses.

Policy pointer

Universal and individual rights to quality working time should be complemented by collective agreements at sectoral, branch or company level. The regulation of maximum weekly working hours, rest periods, leave, family-related leave and protection during atypical work should consider the specificities of the country, sector or branch of activity, while supporting the adaptation of working time to individuals' changing needs and preferences across the various life stages.

Prospects

Job prospects relate to those aspects of the job that contribute to a person's need for stable employment – both the material necessity of an income and the psychological need associated with a person's self-esteem and identity (Eurofound, 2017d). The labour market developments of recent decades, especially the growth of non-standard work, including fixed-term contracts, temporary agency work, more casual work and dependent self-employment, have heightened workers'

concerns over employment security and career progression in many Member States. For the analysis of trends, the Prospects index consists of measurements of perceived job security and career prospects.

Overview

The Prospects index in the EU27 and the UK overall was higher in 2015 than in 2005, bouncing back from the 2010 drop due to the financial and economic crisis, when unemployment rose and more workers perceived their jobs to be insecure. The situation in 2015 was mostly due to an improvement in career prospects as a result of economic recovery following the Great Recession.

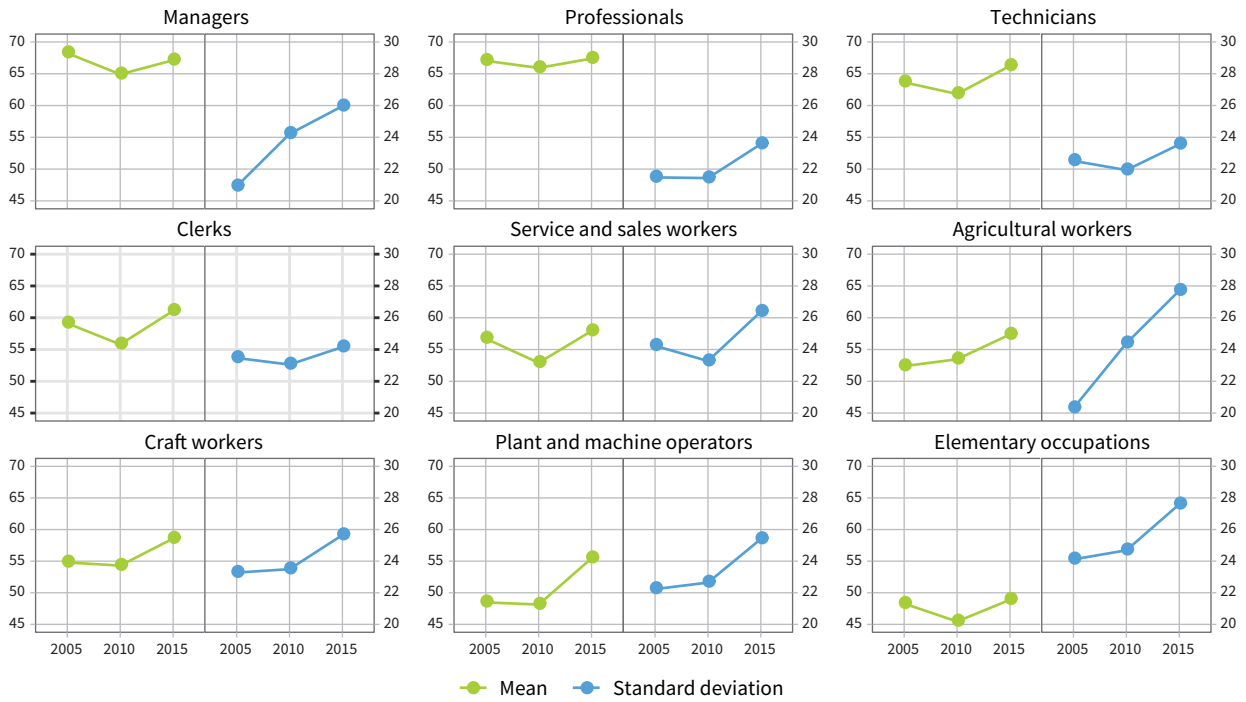
The Prospects index decreased between 2005 and 2010 for most groups against the backdrop of the financial and economic crisis, with rising rates of unemployment and an increased perception of insecurity among EU workers. However, in 2015, the recovery kicked in, and job security and career prospects for many workers exceeded the levels of 2005. Nonetheless, some groups of workers need special policy attention, such as low-skilled workers and those with fixed-term or other types of contracts.

Occupations

For most occupational groups, scores on the Prospects dimension decreased from 2005 to 2010 and increased between 2010 and 2015, reflecting the overall trend of the labour market. Agricultural workers, who reported continuous improvements over the period observed, and plant and machine operators, who experienced an overall increase of 14%, were the exceptions. Figure 12 also shows that the standard deviation in the dimension went up for all occupational groups over this period. An overall increase in Prospects coupled with an increase in the difference within the dimension means that only some subgroups have benefited from the economic recovery as regards their prospects, whereas that of others stayed at the same level or deteriorated.

For most occupational groups, job insecurity was higher in 2015 than in 2005, but this was particularly so for managers (+8 percentage points), agricultural workers (+6 percentage points) and professionals (+5 percentage points). Other occupations had higher job insecurity in 2010 than in 2005, but this decreased again in 2015 (these include elementary occupations, plant and machine operators, and craft workers). Interestingly, career prospects substantially increased during the period observed for all occupations and particularly so for agricultural workers (+20 percentage points), plant and machine operators (+16 percentage points), and craft workers (+10 percentage points).

Figure 12: Prospects index: mean and standard deviation, by occupational category, EU27 and the UK, 2005–2015



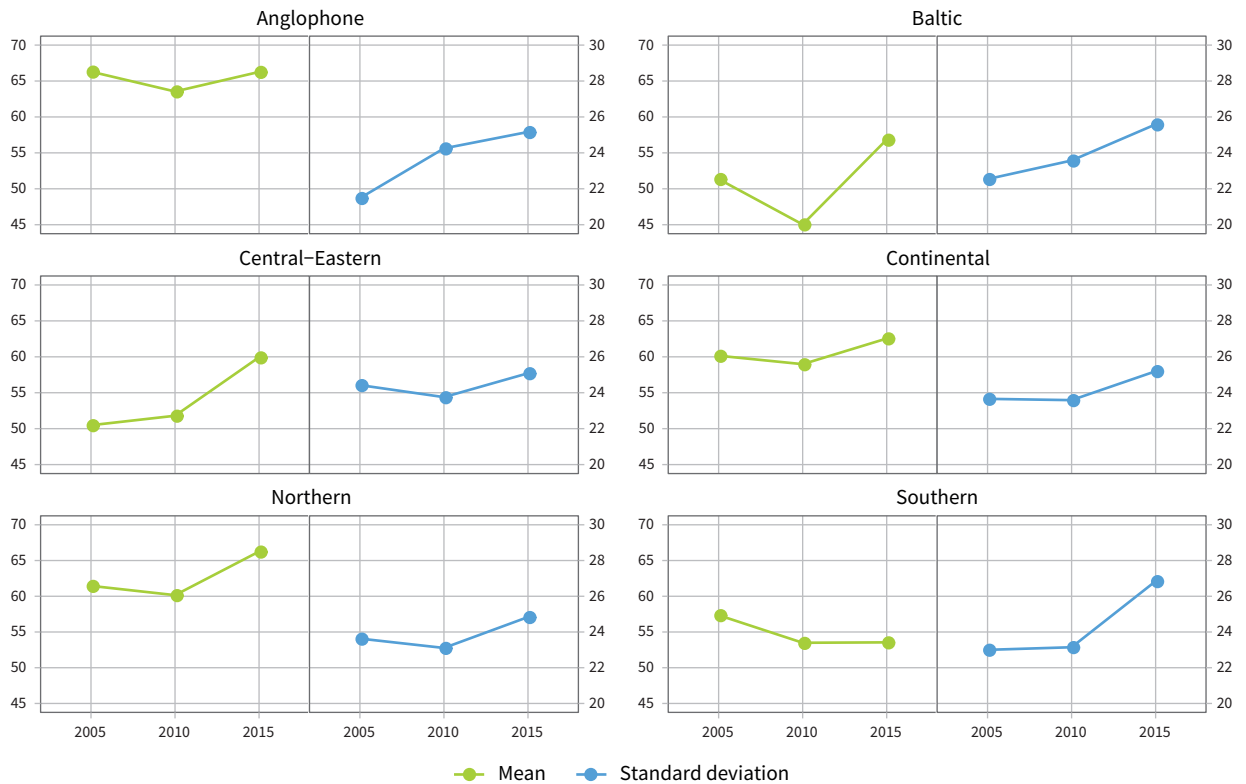
Source: EWCS 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015

Country clusters

The highest Prospects scores were observed in the Anglophone and Northern clusters, closely followed by

the Continental cluster. Prospects scores were lowest in the Southern cluster (Figure 13). Over time, this dimension has not followed the same trajectory in all

Figure 13: Prospects index: mean and standard deviation, by country cluster, EU27 and the UK, 2005–2015



Source: EWCS 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015

countries and has reflected the diverse trajectory of the economic crisis across countries. In the Southern cluster, scores, on average, decreased between 2005 and 2010 and remained at the 2010 level in 2015. These developments were mainly associated with a decrease in job security (particularly in Italy, Portugal and Spain), while overall career prospects remained stable. In all other country clusters, the trajectory was U-shaped; this was particularly pronounced in the Baltic cluster. The Central-Eastern country cluster showed a particularly substantial improvement (Czechia +28%, Hungary +26%, Romania +25%, and Slovakia +22%).

Inequality remained almost stable in the Central-Eastern cluster but increased in all other country clusters, particularly in the Baltic, Anglophone and Southern groups. This implies that different groups of workers were affected to different extents by developments, with above-average increases in job insecurity for lower-skilled workers.

Employment and contractual status

There are huge differences between employment statuses on this dimension, with the highest scores for the self-employed and – unsurprisingly – the lowest scores for workers with fixed-term contracts (Figure 14).

For the latter group, job prospects have decreased over time, widening the gap with other groups of workers. This may be a consequence of a general increase in shorter fixed-term contracts (see Eurofound, 2020a).

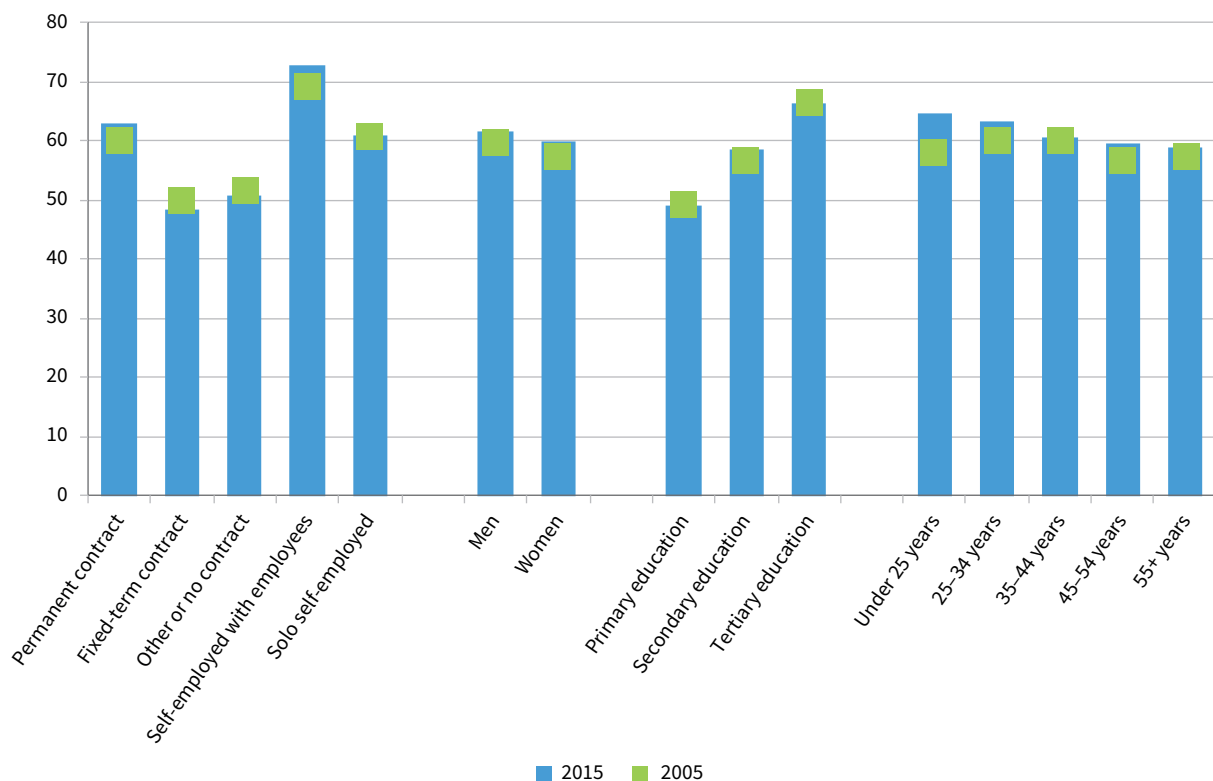
Within self-employment, large disparities are evident between the solo self-employed and those who are self-employed with employees. For the latter group, the Prospects index increased by 4 percentage points over the period observed but remained at the same level for the former.

Sociodemographic factors

The Prospects dimension also varies across educational groups, especially, and age groups too, as is shown in Figure 14 (see also Eurofound, 2020a). The gap between workers with primary and tertiary education was 17 percentage points in 2015, and this had not changed since 2005.

Prospects rose particularly for younger age groups but also for workers aged 45–54 years. This was, however, not the case in the Southern cluster, where prospects decreased for the young age group along with the other age groups. One of the most likely reasons for this is the widespread use of temporary employment, especially

Figure 14: Scores on Prospects index, by employment and sociodemographic characteristics, EU27 and the UK, 2005 and 2015



Source: EWCS 2005 and 2015

among labour market entrants in southern European regions, particularly in Spain (67%), Portugal (61%) and Italy (57%).⁴

Takeaways

- Overall, the Prospects dimension improved in the EU27 and the UK in 2015 due to the economic recovery after a drop in 2010 in the course of the financial and economic crisis. This development was mostly driven by better career prospects for workers, while job security remained lower than in 2005.
- Inequality in this dimension increased, indicating that not all groups benefited equally from the improvements after the crisis.
- Prospects scores increased particularly in the Central-Eastern, Baltic and Northern country clusters but decreased in the Southern cluster, which did not fully recover from the impact of the economic downturn.
- Agricultural workers, craft workers, and plant and machine operators were among the occupational categories to make the greatest advances, while elementary occupations remained at low levels. Inequality increased in all of these occupational groups.
- The self-employed with employees and permanent employees experienced the biggest increases in Prospects, while scores moderately declined for fixed-term employees, most likely following an increase in shorter-term contracts.
- Young age groups were among the workers who made the largest gains in their Prospects scores. This was, however, not the case in the Southern cluster, where Prospects decreased for the young age groups as well as for the other age groups, most likely due to a very high proportion of fixed-term contracts but also to high unemployment rates among young workers.

Policy pointer

Policymakers need to be aware that job security and career prospects are unequally distributed across the workforce. Improvements after the economic downturn were not shared by all workers, and scores remained at the lower end for low-skilled occupations. In addition to country differences, inequality in this dimension of working conditions also needs to be addressed, particularly for workers on more precarious contracts, highlighting the need to ensure that such work is a stepping stone into better jobs. Policymakers should also be aware that job security and prospects for advancement have decreased for young people in some Member States, particularly in the Southern cluster,

which has experienced high unemployment among young workers. Further efforts should be taken to combat youth unemployment.

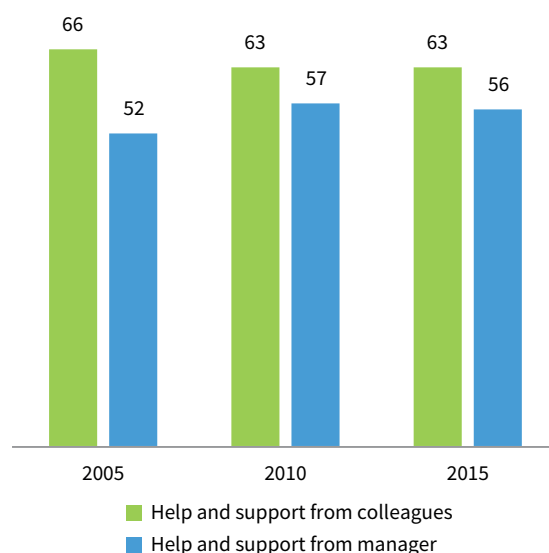
Social environment

Work provides considerable opportunities for interacting with other people. These interactions are crucial for an individual's feeling of integration, for learning and for developing a positive organisational culture that can enhance an enterprise's performance. The quality of the social environment is therefore an important aspect of job quality and, as was shown in previous research (Eurofound, 2019b), an essential job resource that can balance the negative impact of high job demands (such as emotional or quantitative demands – see Chapter 3). Workplaces that provide workers with support and help uncover the best of their skills and talent are not only those where workers feel more motivated and less stressed but also those where workers are more productive. While EWCS data on the social environment at work includes a range of items covering adverse social behaviour and social support, trend information since 2005 is available only for the latter. Box 1 summarises EWCS findings on adverse social behaviour.

Overview

Figure 15 shows developments in social support at work from 2005 to 2015; overall, social support moderately increased in the period observed. The proportion of

Figure 15: Receipt of support from colleagues and managers (%), EU27 and the UK, 2005–2015

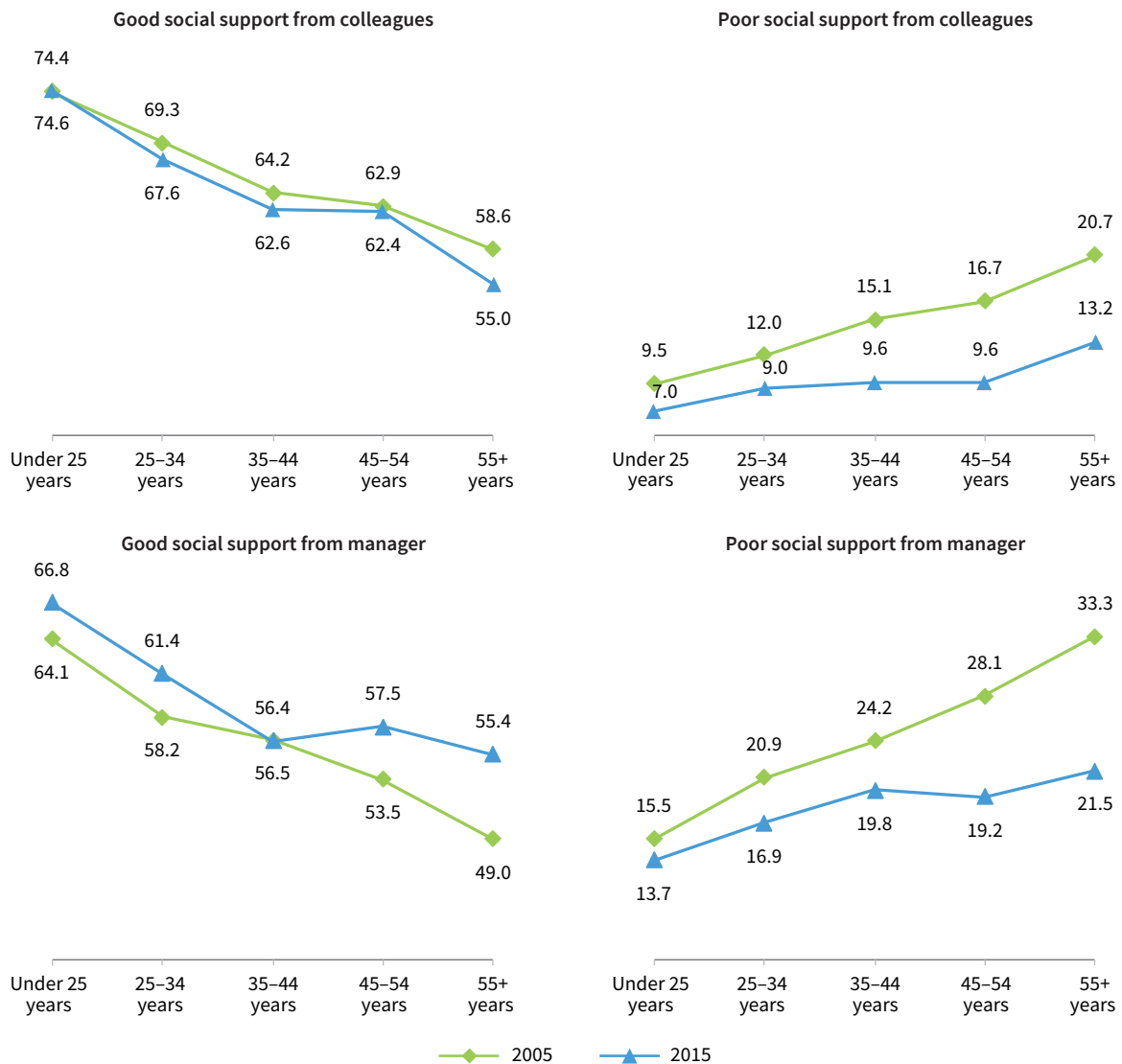


Note: Percentage of workers who receive help and support always or most of the time.

Source: EWCS 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015

⁴ These figures are from EU-LFS data from 2018 on the proportion of temporary contracts in the 15–24 years age group as a percentage of total employment.

Figure 16: Receipt of support from colleagues and managers (%), by age group, EU27 and the UK, 2005 and 2015



Source: EWCS 2005 and 2015

workers who reported having support from colleagues always or most of the time decreased moderately between 2005 and 2010 and remained stable over the period 2010–2015, where 63% of EU workers reported such support from colleagues. Good support from managers increased in 2010 and remained stable thereafter, with 56% of workers reporting such support in 2015.

Sociodemographic factors: Age

Social support is clearly associated with age, as Figure 16 illustrates; more of the youngest age group (74.6%) report receiving very good or good social support from colleagues than any other age group, while the proportion of workers aged 55 and over who receive such support is the lowest, and decreasing (55% in 2015 and 58.6% in 2005). It is good news,

nevertheless, that the gap between age groups in terms of poor social support shrank between 2005 and 2015 from 11 to 6 percentage points.

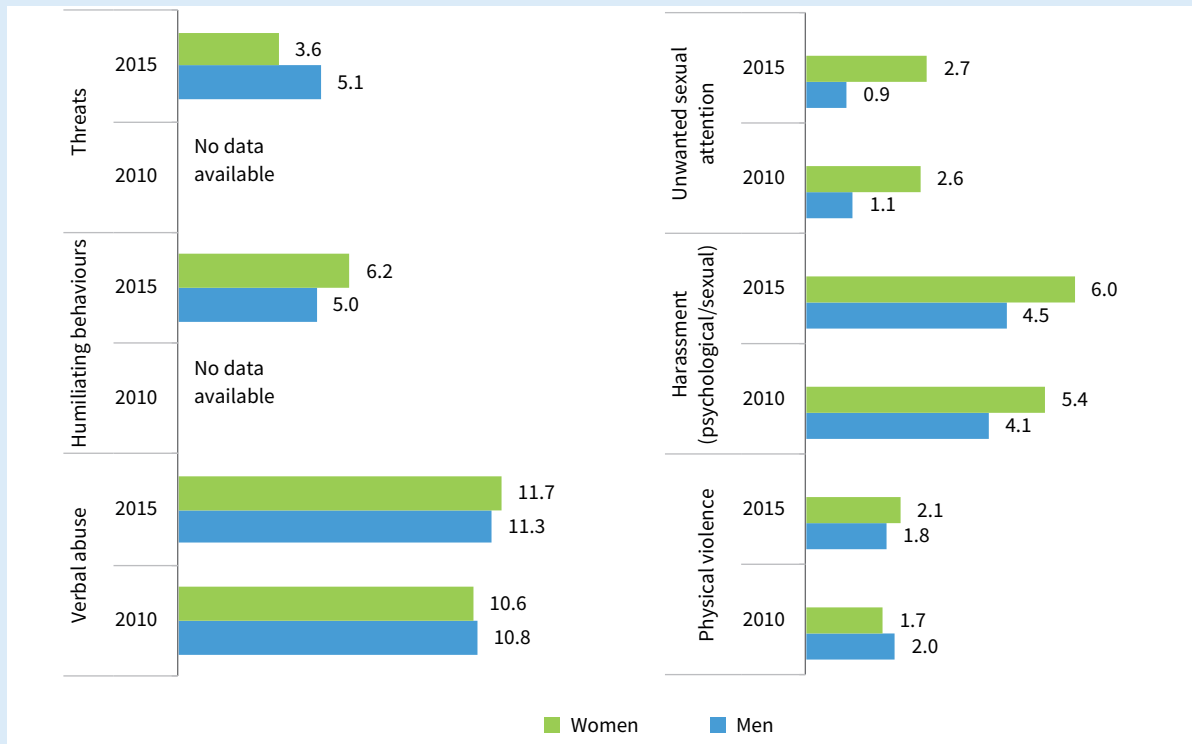
The pattern across age groups is very similar regarding support from managers, but the trajectory over time differs (Figure 16). The situation improved for the older age groups (45 years and over) particularly, significantly reducing the age gap in social support. The proportion of workers aged 55 years and over with poor support from managers shrank from 33% in 2005 to 21.5% in 2015, while good social support increased by 6 percentage points in the same period. The reasons for this development could be improved age management in companies, better return-to-work schemes and overall more flexible arrangements in terms of working time and handling the transition of older workers towards retirement more efficiently.

Box 1: Adverse social behaviour

EWCS data on the exposure of workers to different adverse social behaviours – such as verbal abuse, bullying and sexual harassment – are available for 2010 and 2015. As Eurofound has emphasised, although data suggest that the occurrence of such behaviours remains relatively low, exposure to them may have a serious harmful effect on health and well-being and can also trigger early exit from the workforce (Eurofound, 2017c). Moreover, adverse social behaviours are particularly prevalent in some sectors, with the health sector reporting the highest percentage of workers subjected to all types of adverse social behaviour. However, it also needs to be noted that most incidents of sexual harassment and violence are not reported (see ILO, 2018).

Overall, exposure to at least one type of adverse social behaviour as observed in the EWCS increased over the period for both men and women (Figure 17). Verbal abuse appears to be the most widespread behaviour, with 12% of women and 11% of men reporting it in 2015, a slight increase compared with 2010. Around 6% of female and 4.5% of male workers were exposed to harassment (sexual, psychological or both) in 2015. This figure was stable since 2010.

Figure 17: Exposure to adverse social behaviour (%), by gender, EU27 and the UK, 2010 and 2015



Source: EWCS 2005 and 2015

Takeaways

- Social support from colleagues decreased moderately between 2005 and 2015, with a growing gap between the youngest and oldest age groups. This is a concerning trend, given the importance of social support from colleagues as a resource to balance high work demands.
- Social support from managers increased in the period observed and particularly so for the older age groups of workers. A reason for this could be improved age management in companies and increased awareness of the potential of older workers and need to retain them in tightening labour markets.

Policy pointer

The social environment, in general, and social support from both colleagues and managers, specifically, are crucial resources for enabling workers to balance work demands such as emotionally demanding situations or high work intensity. The negative effects of a poor social environment on workers' health and well-being and willingness and ability to stay in employment requires the establishment of effective systems for reporting sexual harassment, bullying and violence in the workplace, as outlined by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2019).

Earnings: Perception of fair pay

Worker earnings – that is, the wages of dependent employees and the revenues of self-employed workers – are among the most important features of work and are a core element of job quality. For most employees, their wage is the primary form of compensation received in return for their labour and is usually their principal source of income. It is one of the main motivators to work. For employers, wages are the cost of securing workers' productive capacity and often account for a significant share of total costs.

Earnings data collected in the EWCS are not comparable in quality or reliability to data collected via surveys designed to gather such information, such as the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). In this section, we therefore include findings on developments in income inequality from Eurofound research using data sources other than the EWCS. Previous Eurofound research has shown that growing income inequality from the onset of the financial and economic crisis was mainly due to rising unemployment levels and not widening pay differentials among workers (Eurofound, 2017a). The evolution of earnings inequality among workers was moderate, with no clear pattern. In fact, in the countries where unemployment grew more, the crisis often had a contradictory impact on the earnings of workers and the labour income of the working age population: while it made the latter significantly more unequal (by expanding the share of people earning no labour income), it often reduced the inequality of the former.

Countries and country clusters

A gulf emerged between the core and the peripheral EU countries during the crisis. The hike in unemployment and the associated surges in income inequalities were much more significant in the Southern and Baltic clusters (and Ireland, Slovakia and Slovenia) than in the Continental and Northern clusters. Inequalities in monthly earnings among workers still vary notably across countries, being relatively high in Anglophone and some Southern and Baltic countries and lowest in Northern and some Central-Eastern countries (except Poland) and Belgium. Cross-country variations result not only from wage differentials but also from structural factors, such as high shares of self-employment and part-time work (Eurofound, 2017a).

How do these findings relate to a more indirect measure of earnings covered in the EWCS: fair pay? Figure 18 shows the trends, by Member State, in the proportions of workers who responded that they 'strongly agree' or 'agree', on the one hand, or 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree', on the other, with the statement 'I feel I get paid appropriately', between 2005 and 2015. The perception of fair or adequate pay is an important extrinsic motivator for workers and, as such, plays a crucial role in work sustainability over the life course, as was shown in previous Eurofound research (Eurofound, 2018d).

While the proportion of workers who considered their pay appropriate increased from 43% to 51% in the EU27 and the UK, the proportion of workers who disagreed that their pay was appropriate remained at almost the same level (31–30%).⁵ Some countries deviate from this pattern. In a couple of eastern European Member States, workers' dissatisfaction with their pay decreased considerably between 2005 and 2015. Finland was, however, the country with the highest level of satisfaction (62%) and with the steepest improvement between 2005 and 2015 (+26 percentage points). In several other countries, the reverse was observed, namely with increasing dissatisfaction, such as in Spain (+14 percentage points), Ireland (+7 percentage points) and France and Luxembourg (both +6 percentage points).

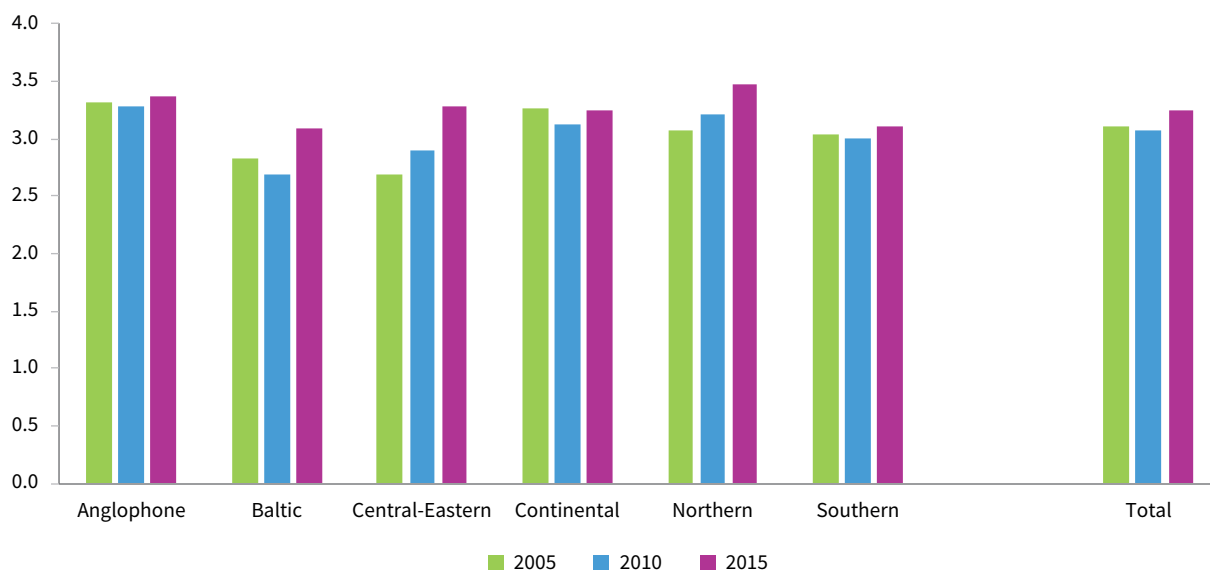
5 The remaining 19% neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

Figure 18: Perception of fair pay (%), by Member State and the UK, 2005–2015



Note: Workers' responses to the statement 'Considering all my efforts and achievements in my job, I feel I get paid appropriately'.
Source: EWCS 2005, 2010 and 2015

Figure 19: Perceived appropriateness of pay, by country cluster, EU27 and the UK, 2005–2015



Note: Scale of 1–5

Source: EWCS 2005, 2010 and 2015

Figure 19 summarises these findings, illustrating the mean values for perceived appropriateness of pay by country clusters from 2005 to 2015. Levels were largely stable in the Anglophone and Continental clusters but increased substantially in the Northern, Baltic and Central-Eastern groups, with the latter two catching up with the EU average. The Southern group recorded a small increase between 2010 and 2015.

Occupations

Agreement with the appropriateness of their pay increased significantly among agricultural workers (+30 percentage points), plant and machine operators (+9 percentage points), and clerks and elementary occupations (both +7 percentage points). For managers, on the other hand, the proportion of disagreement increased by 6 percentage points between 2005 and 2015.

Contractual status

We see significant and growing satisfaction with remuneration among the solo self-employed (+13 percentage points), workers with fixed-term contracts (+10 percentage points) and employees with other or no contracts (+9 percentage points).

Sociodemographic factors: Income

Satisfaction with their pay has also increased above the average growth among workers in the lower income groups since 2010: the proportion of workers perceiving their income as appropriate grew in the lowest quintile by 18 percentage points (to 46%) and in the second quintile by 11 percentage points (to 41%), compared with growth of 5 percentage points in the highest quintile (to 67%).

Takeaways

- Income inequalities among workers increased mainly due to an increase in unemployment, but wage differentials remained stable in the period 2005–2015.
- The perception of being paid appropriately improved overall between 2005 and 2015. The Central-Eastern, Baltic and Northern groups in particular reported higher mean values over the period 2005–2015, while the levels remained stable in the Anglophone and Continental clusters.
- An increasing proportion of lower-skilled occupations and lower income groups agreed or strongly agreed that their pay was appropriate in the period observed. The proportion of workers in this group who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement remained stable over time.
- A growing perception of fair pay was also reported among the solo self-employed, workers with fixed-term contracts and employees with other or no contracts in the period observed (+9 percentage points).

Policy pointer

The perception of fair or appropriate pay is an important indicator of work satisfaction and sustainability. An increasing number of Member States have established minimum wages over recent years with the intention to assure fair wages (Eurofound, 2020a). In this context, monitoring how workers perceive the appropriateness of their pay provides important information for policymakers and employers.

Summary and policy pointers

Summary

Job quality matters. It has a substantial effect on health and well-being and is the key factor in making work more sustainable over the life course. There is, as Felstead et al (2015, p. 191) point out, ‘a strong case for trying to improve job quality at all levels’. It is therefore important to monitor developments in the various dimensions of job quality and to assess if and why progress has been achieved for all subgroups of workers or if the gaps between those groups are widening as inequality rises.

Previous research by Eurofound has demonstrated that among the EU27 Member States and the UK there has been upward convergence in both labour market participation and in most dimensions of job quality since 2000 providing evidence that Europe has been moving in the right direction towards more and better jobs. This chapter sought to complement these results with more granular analyses of trends and inequalities at EU level in dimensions of job quality across economic sectors, occupational categories employment statuses and sociodemographic groups. The aim is to support EU policymakers in identifying areas where policy intervention continues to be needed.

To summarise, in most dimensions of job quality, inequality between different groups of workers has decreased or at least remained at the same level, while averages moderately increased. The Prospects dimension is the exception, with improvements on average but inequality between workers increasing at the same time. This complements findings from the Eurofound flagship report on labour market change, which showed that there has been an increase in ‘compound’ non-standard employment, such as very marginal part-time work, very short temporary contracts, working without a contract and casual work, all of which traditionally have low security and poor prospects for career development (Eurofound, 2020a). In addition, high youth unemployment rates in the Southern country cluster contribute to pessimistic assessments of job prospects.

We identified the main drivers of differences in job quality as the economic sector, occupation, employment or contractual status, and country of residence. However, the role of gender and age should not be underestimated in shaping working conditions, as previous Eurofound research has highlighted, with differences between men and women and between different age groups remaining stable over time.

Economic sector was identified as an important driver of inequalities in most job quality dimensions, but particularly for the Physical environment dimension and (to a lesser extent) Work intensity. Agriculture is the sector with the lowest average scores in almost all job quality dimensions. However, it is also the sector that has made major improvements, particularly as regards Working time quality, Work intensity and Prospects. Average Skills and discretion scores, on the other hand, increased considerably in the construction and industry sectors, but both sectors remained at the bottom of the ranking as regards Physical environment and Work intensity. Job quality developments were muted in the transport sector, and this sector retained the lowest average scores in the Skills and discretion, Working time quality and Prospects indices. Work intensity increased particularly in the commerce and hospitality sector.

Above-average improvements in job quality were apparent in some of the most vulnerable occupations, and the gap between the higher- and lower-skilled occupations has narrowed. Plant and machine operators are the only occupational group with improvements in all dimensions (mostly above average), but the average scores for agricultural workers and craft workers also increased considerably in some dimensions. Elementary occupations, however, did not benefit from these developments in job quality. Work intensity in this occupational category increased, and average scores remained at the bottom of the ranking in several other dimensions. This finding is reflected in the job quality profiles developed for the sixth EWCS overview report (Eurofound, 2017c), where 52% of elementary occupations were in the poor-quality profile. The intensification of work particularly affected service and sales workers and professionals (and, to a lesser extent, office clerks).

Employment status turned out to be a crucial factor explaining differences in Working time quality, with substantially higher average scores for employees than for the self-employed. Over time, these differences have reduced. However, this was mainly due to a reduction in long working hours (48 hours or more per week) for the solo self-employed, and not for those who were self-employed with employees. In addition, the growing gap between permanent and fixed-term workers and between full-time and part-time workers as regards the take-up of training paid for by the employer should be a policy concern. The proportions of workers engaging in employer-paid training increased in all groups, but so did the differences between the groups (Eurofound, 2018a).

Finally, job quality also varied significantly across countries and country groups, with clear north–east and south–west divides. Substantial improvements were, however, observed in the Central-Eastern and Baltic country clusters, narrowing the gap between these clusters and the Continental and Northern clusters in two job quality dimensions, namely Working time quality and Prospects. However, a divide remains between the north and south of Europe, with

unchanged levels of inequality over the years. Although job quality improved in the Southern cluster (especially in the Physical environment, Skills and discretion and Working time quality dimensions), there were also some less favourable developments in this country group such as increased work intensity and reduced job prospects.

The following points highlight some findings that need particular policy attention.

- Physical working conditions remain a significant issue for the craft and related trades workers occupational category, especially in the construction sector, which consistently reported the lowest scores – in 2015, these were even below the level of 2000. Special attention is needed in the Anglophone country cluster, which reported the worst score for Physical environment and negative trends.
- Work intensity needs to be monitored particularly in the commerce and hospitality sector, where it has increased considerably over time (mainly due to increases in the hotels and restaurants subsector). Service and sales workers are the most affected occupation within the sector. However, craft workers and plant and machine operators were the occupations with the highest levels of work intensity over the period observed, most of whom work in the industry, construction and transport sectors.
- Although Skills and discretion improved substantially over time, this was not the case for all sectors and occupations. The transport and hospitality sectors remained at the bottom of the ranking, with scores having hardly improved over the years. Although occupations common in these sectors, such as plant and machine operators (for example, lorry drivers) and elementary occupations, caught up a little bit, they remained by far the poorest-scoring among all workers.
- The occupations most affected by poor working time quality are service and sales workers, plant and machine operators (due to shift work), agricultural workers and managers (due to long working hours). The sectors associated with these occupations are commerce and hospitality (particularly the latter subsector), transport and agriculture. Agriculture has a high proportion of self-employed workers, which is the employment status with the poorest scores on the Working time quality dimension, and these have improved little over time. The working time quality of service and sales workers requires special attention in the Southern and Central-Eastern clusters, where it has remained at very low levels over the years.
- Prospects are poorest in the construction and transport sectors, where they did not substantially improve over time. The most disadvantaged occupations are plant and machine operators and elementary occupations. Among country groups, this dimension deteriorated most in the Southern cluster, with the most affected occupations being service and sales workers, craft workers and elementary occupations.
- The perception of being paid appropriately largely improved in the EU between 2005 and 2015. However, the proportions of workers reporting the opposite have remained almost stable, particularly in the low- and medium-skilled occupations; for example, the proportion disagreeing that they are paid appropriately increased among workers with only a primary education. Construction was the only sector where the proportion of workers reporting appropriate pay decreased.

Policy pointers

The implications of improvements in specific dimensions of job quality need to be reflected upon carefully and contextualised against the backdrop of macroeconomic developments and megatrends. For instance, to what extent are improvements in the physical environment for low-skilled workers linked with automation and with structural effects such as decreased employment levels for these subgroups of workers?

Rising levels of work intensity, particularly in the commerce and hospitality sector and for service and sales workers and professionals, contribute to increased psychosocial risks, such as a rising risk of high stress levels and their consequent ill-effects on health and well-being. Policies targeting these specific groups and sectoral agreements to reduce the presence of stressors would be beneficial, as would programmes to ameliorate the effects of high levels of stress.

Increased inequality across the workforce as regards job prospects needs to be closely monitored and countermeasures need to be taken. In particular, lower-skilled workers are at risk of higher job insecurity and lower employability than more highly skilled workers. Steps should be taken to secure continuous upskilling (for example, in the form of training funds) and on-the-job learning for vulnerable occupations and those on non-standard employment contracts.

Further research is needed to understand why lower-skilled occupations face particularly high physical risks in the Southern and Baltic countries. A dialogue needs to be initiated with those countries, and policymakers must take measures to assure that directives are being transposed and regulations implemented and applied efficiently.

The widening gap between fixed-term and permanent workers and between full-time and part-time workers as regards the take-up of training paid for by the employer is a source of growing concern. Specific policy instruments to tackle these issues could include public funding of training to equip temporary workers with the skills that the labour market demands, as well as state-backed measures to enhance temporary workers' career prospects and facilitate their transition into permanent jobs. The provisions of the EU directives on part-time and fixed-term work need to be enforced and monitored to avoid unequal treatment at the workplace and ensure improved employment and career prospects.

2 Job quality for all: The status quo

The objective to build ‘an economy that works for people’ – a policy priority of the European Commission – requires workers to have access to jobs that offer a high level of job quality. In the previous chapter, we examined trends in the development of working conditions, looking at each dimension of job quality and establishing whether or not all groups of workers have benefited from the overall improvements in job quality since 2000. This chapter looks at where we stand today as regards the quality of jobs in Europe. It looks specifically at differences in job quality experienced by men and women and will investigate whether job quality changes according to age over the life course. It includes links to case studies of policies pursued by governments and practices implemented by companies to address the issues discussed.

Job quality profile clusters

Evidence from the EWCS confirms the conventional wisdom that no job is perfect. It also shows that a fifth of jobs in the EU27 and the UK are of poor quality.

The EWCS data revealed that jobs in the EU27 and the UK fall into five categories; each category includes jobs having the same characteristics as regards different dimensions of job quality. The sixth EWCS overview report presented these categories as ‘job quality profiles’ and named them ‘high flying’ jobs, ‘smooth running’ jobs, ‘active manual’ jobs, ‘under pressure’ jobs and ‘poor quality’ jobs (Eurofound, 2017c).

From Figure 20, it is evident that no profile is without flaws. Notwithstanding the ‘poor quality’ profile, in which jobs rank lowest in almost all of the indices discussed in Chapter 1, even the ‘high flying’ profile presents some downsides.

The high job prospects in these jobs point to opportunities for career progression and job security. The downside of these high-earning, high-skilled jobs is their higher work intensity and their lower working time quality.

(Eurofound, 2017c, p. 129)

The jobs in the ‘active manual’ profile stand out due to the high level of risks in the physical environment. Moreover, in this profile, working time quality is lower than average, mostly because of the greater incidence of atypical working hours and shift work.

It is interesting to see that, looking at the European averages, the share of workers in each group is almost even, at around one-fifth, with the ‘under pressure’ group somewhat smaller (13% of workers) and the ‘smooth running’ group slightly larger (25% of workers; Figure 21).

Unsurprisingly, the characteristics of workers in each group differ quite substantially. As regards level of education, for instance, workers with only a primary education are very strongly overrepresented (53%) in the ‘poor quality’ profile; conversely, a similar proportion of workers (46%) in the ‘high flying’ profile have a tertiary education (Eurofound, 2017c).

Different sectors have concentrations of different job quality profiles. The public sector – public administration, education and health – mainly consists of ‘smooth running’ jobs, ‘under pressure’ jobs and ‘high flying’ jobs. Health and public administration stand out because of their high proportion of ‘under pressure’ jobs, representing a quarter of workers in each, the highest shares of this profile across all sectors (Eurofound, 2017c).

Figure 20: Job quality profiles: Scores on seven job quality indices, EU27 and the UK, 2015

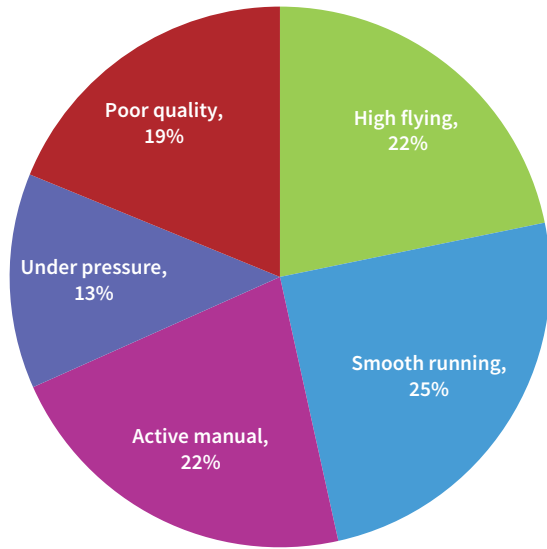
	High flying	Smooth running	Active manual	Under pressure	Poor quality
Skills and discretion	High	Low	Low	Low	Low
Social environment	High	High	High	Low	Low
Physical environment	High	High	Low	Low	Low
Work intensity (reversed)*	Low	High	Low	Low	Low
Prospects	High	High	High	Low	Low
Working time quality	Low	High	Low	Low	Low
Earnings	High	Low	Low	Low	Low

* In contrast to the other job quality indices, a higher level of work intensity indicates lower job quality; hence, the scores are reversed.

Note: The bars in the figure represent the z-scores for each cluster (column) on each of the job quality indices (rows).

Source: EWCS 2015

Figure 21: Distribution of workers according to job quality profiles, EU27 and the UK, 2015



Source: EWCS 2015

In addition, the proportion of men and women in each profile is not equal. Men are overrepresented in the ‘active manual’ profile, whereas women are more likely to have ‘smooth running’ jobs. Smaller differences are also apparent, with men being slightly overrepresented in the ‘high flying’ profile and women in ‘poor quality’ jobs.

This analysis from the sixth EWCS overview report, considering all workers together, assumes that job quality features cluster in the same way for men and women, leading to the same job profiles. However, as further analysis of the data for the *Gender equality at work* report revealed (Eurofound, 2020b), differences in job quality profiles are more noticeable when data for women and men are analysed separately (Figures 22 and 23).

The female job quality profiles show stronger polarisation. In the ‘high flying’ job profile, women score higher than men in all indices, except Skills and discretion and Earnings. This means that it is a more positive profile than average. On the other hand, in the ‘poor quality’ job profile, women score significantly below average in all of the indices, except Working time quality. Working time quality is even worse for women ‘under pressure’ (Eurofound, 2020b).

Figure 22: Job quality profiles of men, by job quality indices, EU27 and the UK, 2015

	High flying	Smooth running	Active manual	Under pressure	Poor quality
Skills and discretion	Blue	Red	Red	Blue	Red
Social environment	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red
Physical environment	Blue	Blue	Red	Red	Red
Work intensity (reversed)*	Blue	Blue	Red	Red	Red
Prospects	Blue	Red	Blue	Blue	Red
Working time quality	Red	Blue	Blue	Red	Red
Earnings	Blue	Red	Blue	Blue	Red

* In contrast with the other job quality indices, a higher level of work intensity lowers job quality, hence the scores are reversed.

Note: The bars in the figure represent the z-scores for each cluster (column) on each of the job quality indices (rows).

Source: EWCS 2015

Figure 23: Job quality profiles of women, by job quality indices, EU27 and the UK, 2015

	High flying	Smooth running	Good environment	Under pressure	Poor quality
Skills and discretion	Blue	Red	Blue	Blue	Red
Social environment	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red
Physical environment	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red
Work intensity (reversed)*	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red
Prospects	Blue	Red	Blue	Blue	Red
Working time quality	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red
Earnings	Blue	Red	Red	Blue	Red

* In contrast with the other job quality indices, a higher level of work intensity lowers job quality, hence the scores are reversed.

Note: The bars in the figure represent the z-scores for each cluster (column) on each of the job quality indices (rows).

Source: EWCS 2015

For one of the clusters, the difference between the male and female profiles is so strong that it would be misleading to label the profiles in the same way. Therefore, the cluster of female workers that would correspond to the ‘active manual’ profile of male jobs was relabelled as the ‘good environment’ job profile. Female jobs in this cluster have positive scores on all indices, except Earnings.

This outcome clearly underlines the importance of analysing female and male job profiles separately, as a joint analysis can mask important differences. From a policy perspective, it is particularly interesting to note the lower scoring across all profiles of women on Earnings and of men on Physical environment (Eurofound, 2020b).

The next section explores in more detail the extent to which workers experience different working conditions depending on their gender and the factors behind these differences. The analysis above clearly shows that the gender gaps identified are not in all cases to the disadvantage of female workers but that in some dimensions of job quality, for example for the Physical environment dimension, the gap between male and female workers is to the detriment of men.

Gender gap in job quality

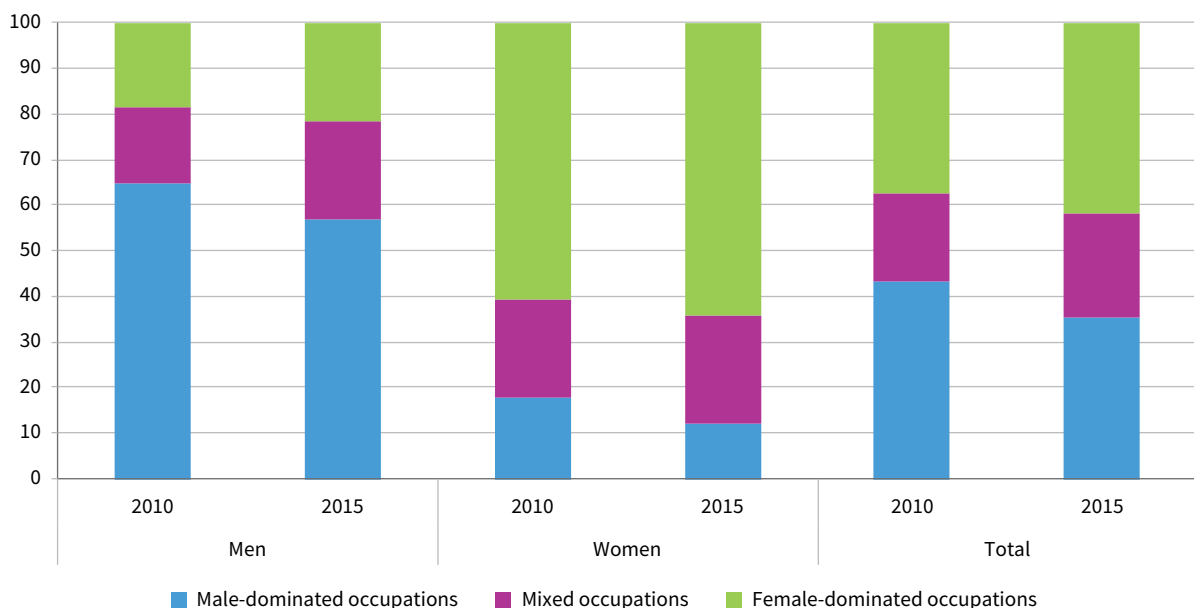
While gender segregation in labour markets has been widely researched, differences in working conditions and job quality between women and men have been less systematically explored. Eurofound has been investigating these differences in more detail, mostly based on EWCS data.

Occupational segregation

Men and women do not experience work in the same way. Most workers are in occupations filled predominantly by workers of the same gender and have a manager of their own gender.

EWCS data show that the gender diversity of occupations is changing very slowly and that the proportions of men and women working in occupations composed mainly (above 60%) of workers of their own gender remain high (Figure 24). In 2015, 57% of male workers and 64% of female workers were in male- and female-dominated occupations, respectively. There were relatively more women and men working in mixed occupations in 2015 than in 2010, with an increase from 17% to 22% among men and from 22% to 24% among women. At the same time, there were relatively more men in female-dominated occupations in 2015 (22%) than five years earlier (19%). However, the proportion of women in male-dominated occupations decreased between 2010 and 2015 from 18% to 12%.

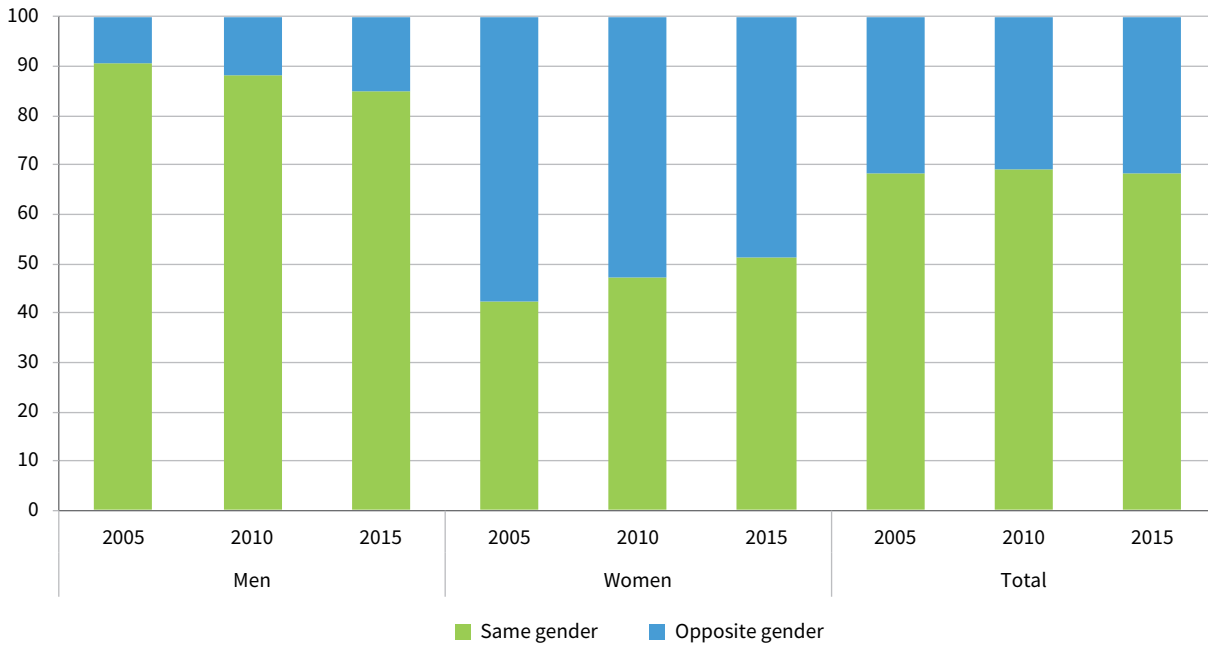
Figure 24: Distribution of employees according to predominant gender in occupation (%), by gender, EU27 and the UK, 2010 and 2015



Notes: Based on ISCO-08 classification. Male-dominated and female-dominated occupations are those that have 60% or more male or female employees, respectively; mixed occupations are those with proportions of men and women between 40% and 60%.

Source: EWCS 2010 and 2015

Figure 25: Gender of immediate manager (%), by worker’s gender, EU27 and the UK, 2005–2015



Source: EWCS 2005, 2010 and 2015

Eurofound’s 2020 analysis of job quality in the 20 largest occupations highlighted that mixed occupations showed better job quality in most dimensions (Eurofound, 2020b). Interestingly, in these mixed occupations, the differences between men and women as regards their average scores for the dimensions were also smaller than the gender differences in either male- or female-dominated occupations. Gender-balanced occupations, therefore, are more likely to show high levels not only of job quality but also of gender equality in working conditions. However, less than a quarter of employees in the EU are in gender-balanced occupations.

EWCS data also show that, while the vast majority of male employees have a male manager, only half of female employees have an immediate manager of the same gender. The shares of men and women with a female manager have increased since 2005, but more so for women than for men (Figure 25). It is interesting to note that managerial experience is also different for men and women, with the latter paying a higher price in terms of tensions between work and family life and higher work intensity in some types of managerial positions. This is shown in Eurofound’s research on female managers (Eurofound, 2018e).

While the gender of the boss seems to be irrelevant for workers’ job quality, having a female manager makes a difference in some respects: individuals with a female manager tend to report better management quality and receiving more social support.

Areas showing improvement

As Chapter 1 noted, between 2000 and 2015, many aspects of working conditions evolved positively while other aspects deteriorated. In either case, these developments were not always equally shared by men and women, sometimes resulting in undesirable outcomes from a gender-equality perspective. Some of the observed improvements were accompanied by widening gender gaps (Eurofound, 2020b).

This section looks at some of the aspects of working conditions for which the EWCS data provide evidence of ‘progress’ from a gender perspective: the Prospects dimension and an important consequence related to the Earnings dimension – being able to make ends meet. Despite the positive trends in these areas, though, some challenges remain for female workers.

Prospects

Prospects encompasses a worker’s opportunities for career advancement, their job security and their employability. It is part of the ‘resource toolbox’ at the disposal of workers, which accounts for how they can progress in the organisation employing them, while also representing how they would fare in the labour market if obliged to get, or to consider getting, a new job. This element is strongly associated with workers’ level of engagement in their work and, through this aspect, with their health and well-being.

Figure 26: Female employees reporting good prospects for career advancement and gender gap (%), EU27 and the UK, 2005–2015



Source: EWCS 2015

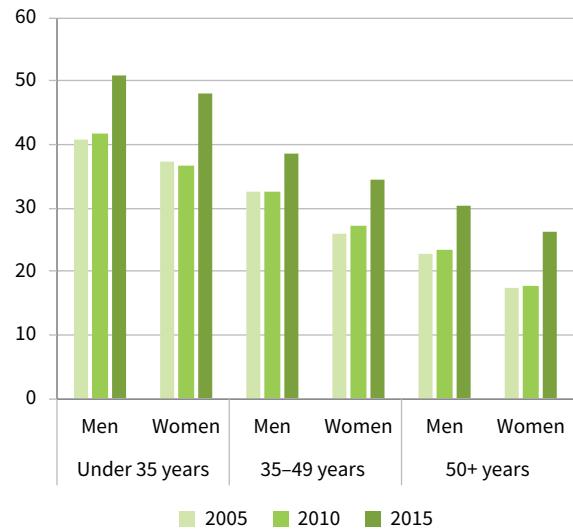
Women report worse career prospects than men. Since 2005, the share of male employees reporting that their job offers good prospects for career advancement has persistently been larger than that of female employees. The gender gap barely changed between 2005 and 2010 (Figure 26). However, there was a notable increase in the shares of employees reporting good career prospects between 2010 and 2015, which was accompanied by a reduction in the gender gap because of the substantial improvement recorded for women.

As shown in Chapter 1, good prospects for career advancement increased between 2010 and 2015 for all age groups, although particularly for young employees (Figure 27). However, prospects for career advancement diminish with age. The poor prospects reported by men and, particularly, women aged over 50 is of great concern, given that the extension of working lives is a declared policy goal in most Member States.

For women, in particular, the possibilities for career advancement are often curtailed due to periods of absence from the labour market related to family formation or caring for older or disabled relatives, with gender stereotypes and pay differentials continuing to influence women's decisions around taking such leave or reducing their working hours, or both. Recent policy initiatives, including the EU Work–Life Balance Directive adopted in 2019, have sought to encourage more men to assume caring responsibilities. A number of Member States have taken action in this area in anticipation of the implementation deadline of the EU directive, with initiatives mainly targeting the extension and coverage of paternity leave.

- Case study: [National policies extending access to leave for fathers](#)

Figure 27: Good prospects for career advancement (%), by age and gender, EU27 and the UK, 2005–2015



Source: EWCS 2015

In addition to legislative initiatives at European and national levels, company practices have also sought to encourage more fathers to take leave and to meet increasing demands by fathers for enhanced work–life balance.

- Case study: [Raising awareness of work–life balance for fathers: Pilot project](#)

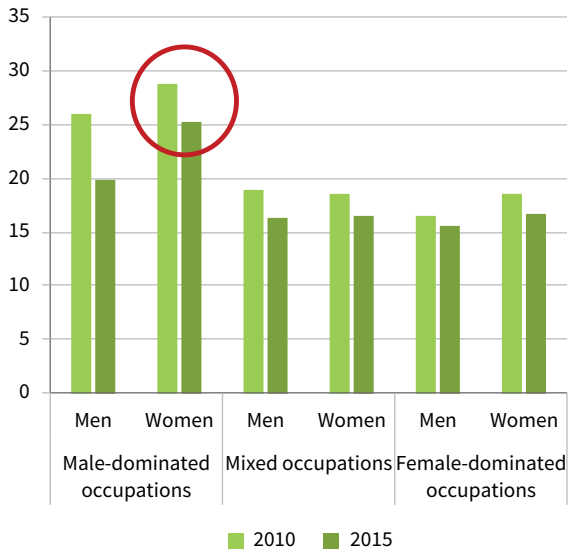
While some legislation stops short of equalising leave entitlements for mothers and fathers following the birth of a child, a small number of companies have taken steps in this direction.

- Case study: [Equalising leave entitlements between mothers and fathers: Diageo](#)

Prospects also takes account of the possibility of losing one's job in the next six months (job security) and the ease of finding a job of a similar salary if one were to lose or quit one's job (employability). EWCS data show progress in terms of job security and employability from a gender perspective. Overall, the shares of men and women reporting job insecurity (those who agreed with the statement 'I might lose my job in the next six months') decreased between 2010 and 2015 (Figure 28), while the proportions of men and women who had confidence in their employability increased in the same period (Figure 29).

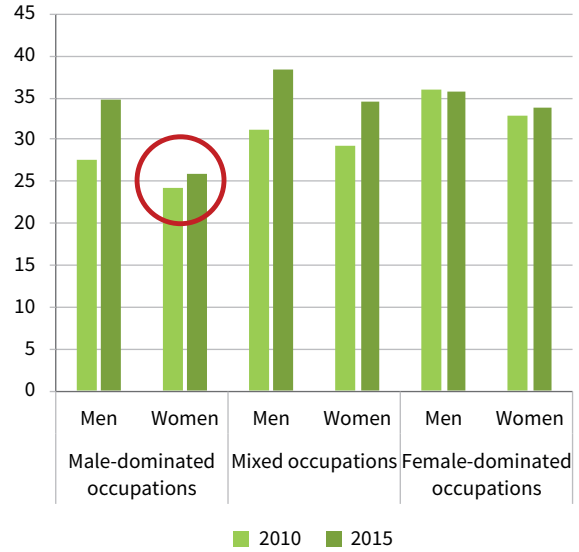
The overall share of employees reporting job insecurity in 2015 was the same for men and women (16%). Improvements in employability, however, were larger for men and, as a result, the gender gap increased in the same period. Women in male-dominated occupations are the most vulnerable group, given that they cumulatively show the highest levels of job insecurity (Figure 28) and the lowest levels of employability (Figure 29).

Figure 28: Job insecurity according to predominant gender in occupation (%), by gender, EU27 and the UK, 2010 and 2015



Source: EWCS 2010 and 2015

Figure 29: Employability according to predominant gender in occupation (%), by gender, EU27 and the UK, 2010 and 2015



Source: EWCS 2010 and 2015

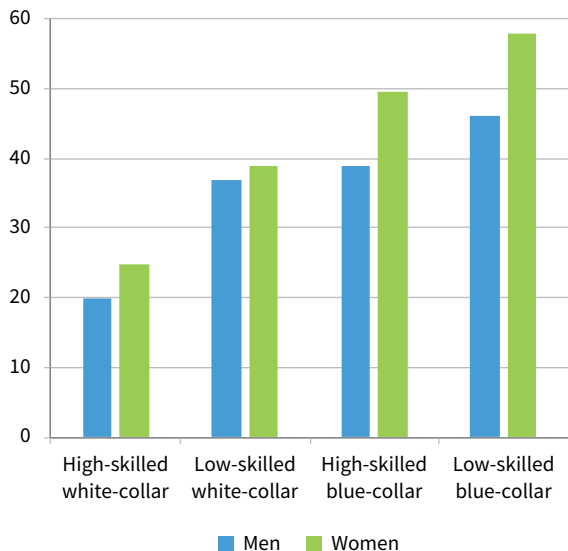
Earnings – Making ends meet

Another aspect of job quality that has seen a positive trend relates to the Earnings dimension and whether or not earnings from work are sufficient to cover household expenses. The proportion of employees reporting that they have some difficulty making ends meet decreased between 2010 and 2015 for both men and women. The difference between the genders in 2015, however, is still notable, with 33% of male

employees reporting difficulty compared to 36% of female employees.

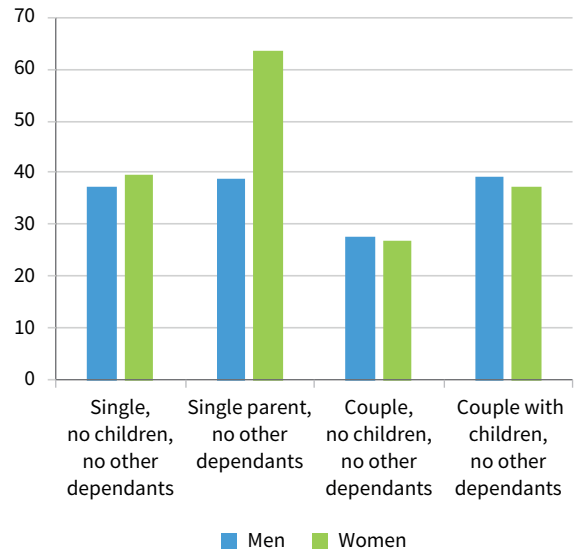
Making ends meet is more difficult for workers in blue-collar occupations than those in white-collar occupations, and more so if they are women in low-skilled occupations (Figure 30). Lone mothers are also of particular concern: 63% report difficulty making ends meet compared to 35% of all employees in the EU (and 39% of lone fathers; Figure 31). Women in

Figure 30: Employees reporting difficulty making ends meet according to occupation type (%), by gender, EU27 and the UK, 2015

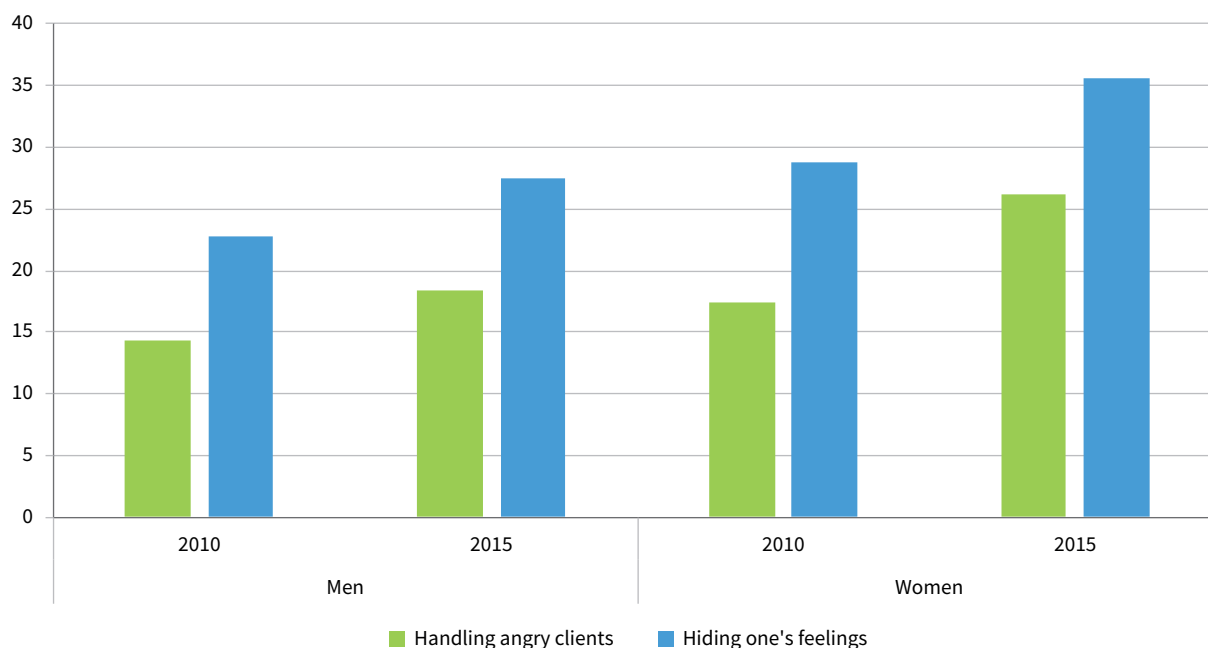


Source: EWCS 2015

Figure 31: Employees reporting difficulty making ends meet according to household type (%), by gender, EU27 and the UK, 2015



Source: EWCS 2015

Figure 32: Employee experience of selected emotional demands (%), by gender, EU27 and the UK, 2010 and 2015

Notes: 'Handling angry clients' is the percentage of employees who report handling angry clients, customers, patients, pupils, etc. half of the time or more. 'Hiding one's feelings' is the percentage who report having to hide their feelings at work always or most of the time.
Source: EWCS 2010 and 2015

low-skilled blue-collar occupations and lone mothers are, therefore, two groups requiring particular attention and support regarding the capacity to cover household expenses.

Persistent challenges

In some job quality dimensions, differences between men and women remain significant, seem persistent and are even worsening from a gender equality point of view. Among the dimensions that contribute to this trend are Work intensity and Working time quality as well as Earnings in relation to earnings of a variable nature.

Work intensity

Men and women report similar levels of overall work intensity. However, large differences exist when comparing quantitative demands (such as working at very high speed or to tight deadlines) and emotional demands (such as handling angry clients, customers, patients or pupils; hiding one's feelings; and being in emotionally disturbing situations).

The most evident gender difference is that quantitative demands are reported more frequently by men, whereas emotional demands are reported more frequently by women. Consistent with higher reporting from female workers, emotional demands are more common in jobs that involve dealing with people (particularly those requiring care) and giving them

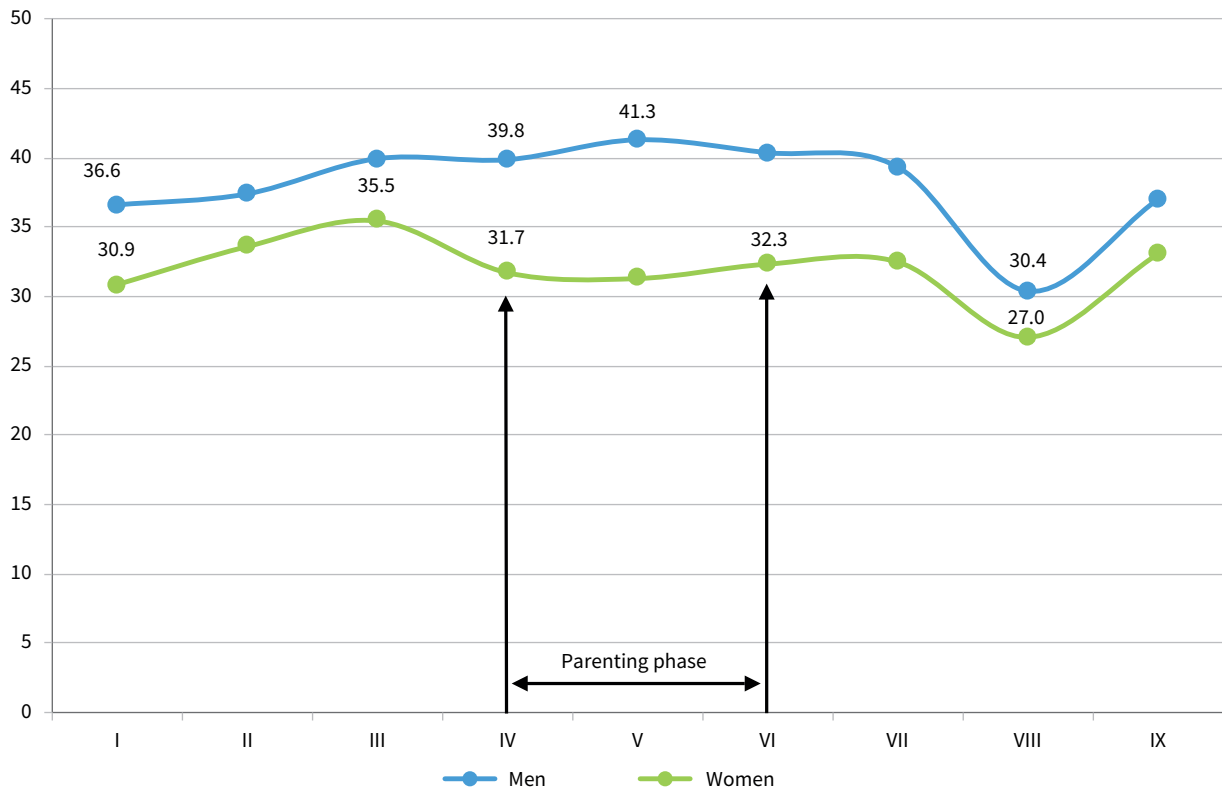
support. High emotional demands have been found to be a predictor of mental health problems, fatigue and burnout, while also being associated with musculoskeletal disorders (Roquelaure, 2018). In jobs where emotional demands represent a significant part of the activity, recruitment and retention have been identified as significant issues (Eurofound, 2020c).

Whereas quantitative demands remained relatively stable over time, emotional demands have increased for both men and women, but more so for women. In 2015, one-quarter of all female employees reported having to regularly handle angry clients, customers, patients and pupils, for example, while one-third were in jobs requiring them to hide their feelings always or most of the time (Figure 32).

Working time quality

From a gender perspective, the Working time quality dimension also remains a challenge. In the EU, societies are still organised in such a way that the patterns of (paid) working hours are very different for men and women during the life course. Figure 33 illustrates these patterns using a stylised typology of life stages. Women's working time reaches a peak during the phase of union formation (young cohabitating women without children, Stage III), while the peak for men happens later on – when they have children aged between 7 and 12 years (Stage V). The largest gender gap in working hours occurs during the parenting phase (Stages IV to VI).

Figure 33: Average weekly working hours of employees across the life course, by gender, EU27 and the UK, 2015



Notes: The life course stages are part of a stylised typology developed on the basis of the EWCS. The different stages are (I) single people (18–35 years) living with their parents or relatives, (II) single people (under 46 years) without children, (III) younger cohabiting couples (woman under 46 years) without children, (IV) cohabiting couples with youngest children under 7 years, (V) cohabiting couples with young children between 7 and 12 years, (VI) cohabiting couples with teenage children between 13 and 18 years, (VII) midlife ‘empty nest’ couples without resident children, (VIII) older cohabiting couples without resident children, (IX) single people (aged 50 years or older) without resident children (for more on the methodology, see Eurofound, 2017c).
Source: EWCS 2015

Rising demand for adaptable working hours has coincided with changes in methods of work and production and with societal changes. Adaptability meets the needs and preferences of both employers and workers, male and female alike.

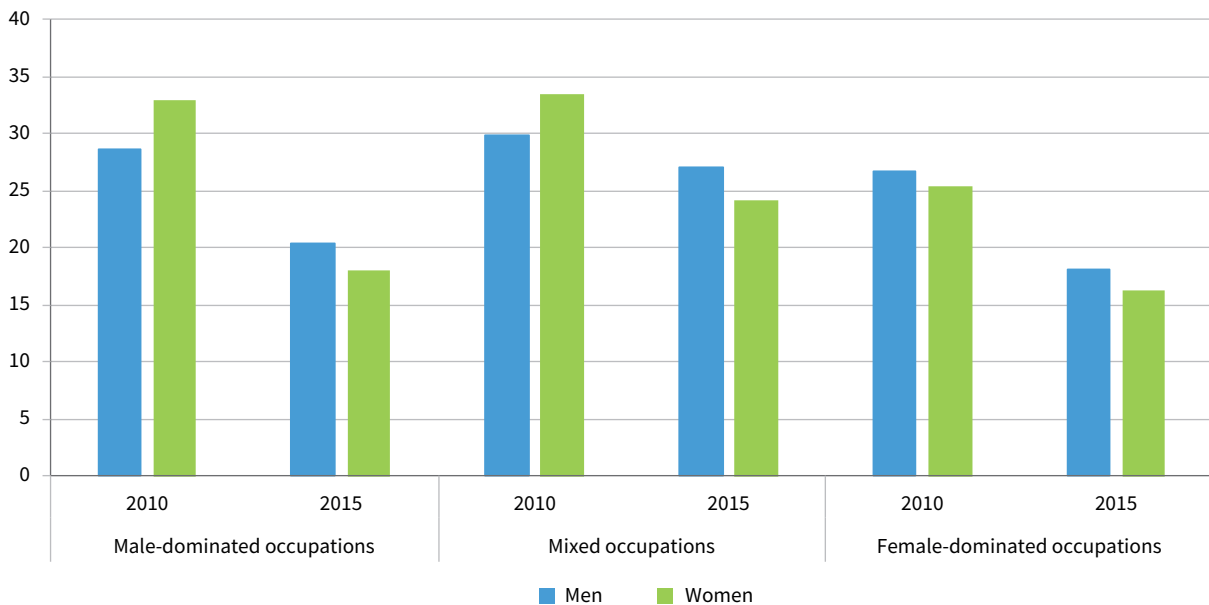
In 2015, 30% of male and female employees reported having some flexibility in the determination of their working hours, with about 20% saying that they could adapt their working hours within certain limits (flexitime) and 10% reporting that they had a choice between fixed schedules determined by their employer. Men and women in mixed occupations had the most flexibility, indicating that perhaps there is some scope for increasing workers’ autonomy over working time within male- and female-dominated occupations.

Having more autonomy over working time arrangements – being able to decide about work duration, starting and ending times, and scheduling, for example – can be important for workers’ work–life balance. However, simply being able ‘to take time off

from work on short notice for an hour or two to deal with personal or family issues’, as the EWCS question puts it, is actually more powerful. This element of working time quality has a very strong and positive effect on work–life balance – stronger than autonomy over working time arrangements – while its implementation usually comes with no additional cost to the employer (Eurofound, 2013, 2017b, 2018c).

However, EWCS data show that this feature of working time quality is not evolving in the right direction. The proportion of workers reporting that it was ‘very easy’ to take time off decreased during the period observed, from 28% (29% for men and 28% for women) to less than 20% (21% for men and 19% for women). As shown in Figure 34, the decrease affected all three subsets of occupations. It is lowest in female-dominated occupations. The largest decrease took place among female employees in male-dominated occupations (–15 percentage points, from 33% in 2010 to 18% in 2015), while the smallest decrease was for men in mixed occupations (–3 percentage points).

Figure 34: Flexibility to take time off according to predominant gender in occupation (%), by gender, EU27 and the UK, 2010 and 2015



Note: Percentage of employees who stated that it was 'very easy' to take an hour or two off during working hours to take care of personal or family matters.

Source: EWCS 2010 and 2015

While the overall regulation of working time tends to lie within the domain of national legislation (often derived from the EU Working Time Directive) or collective agreements, the precise organisation of working hours is more likely to be determined at company level. Despite the decline in the proportion of workers reporting that they found it very easy to take time off during working hours, some companies have put initiatives in place to provide greater flexibility for workers regarding when (and where) they work.

✓ Case study: [Enabling highly flexible working time and location arrangements](#)

Linked to the question of working hours, and possibly work intensity, is the total number of hours over which work is delivered. In this regard, some companies have begun to experiment with a 4-day or 30-hour working week – largely as a response to calls for enhanced work–life balance. Where such experiments are carried out, they tend to lead to higher levels of staff satisfaction. While some assessments speak of the possibility that a shorter working week is associated with improved productivity, insufficient evaluation is available regarding this issue and whether it is linked to increased work intensification during working hours.

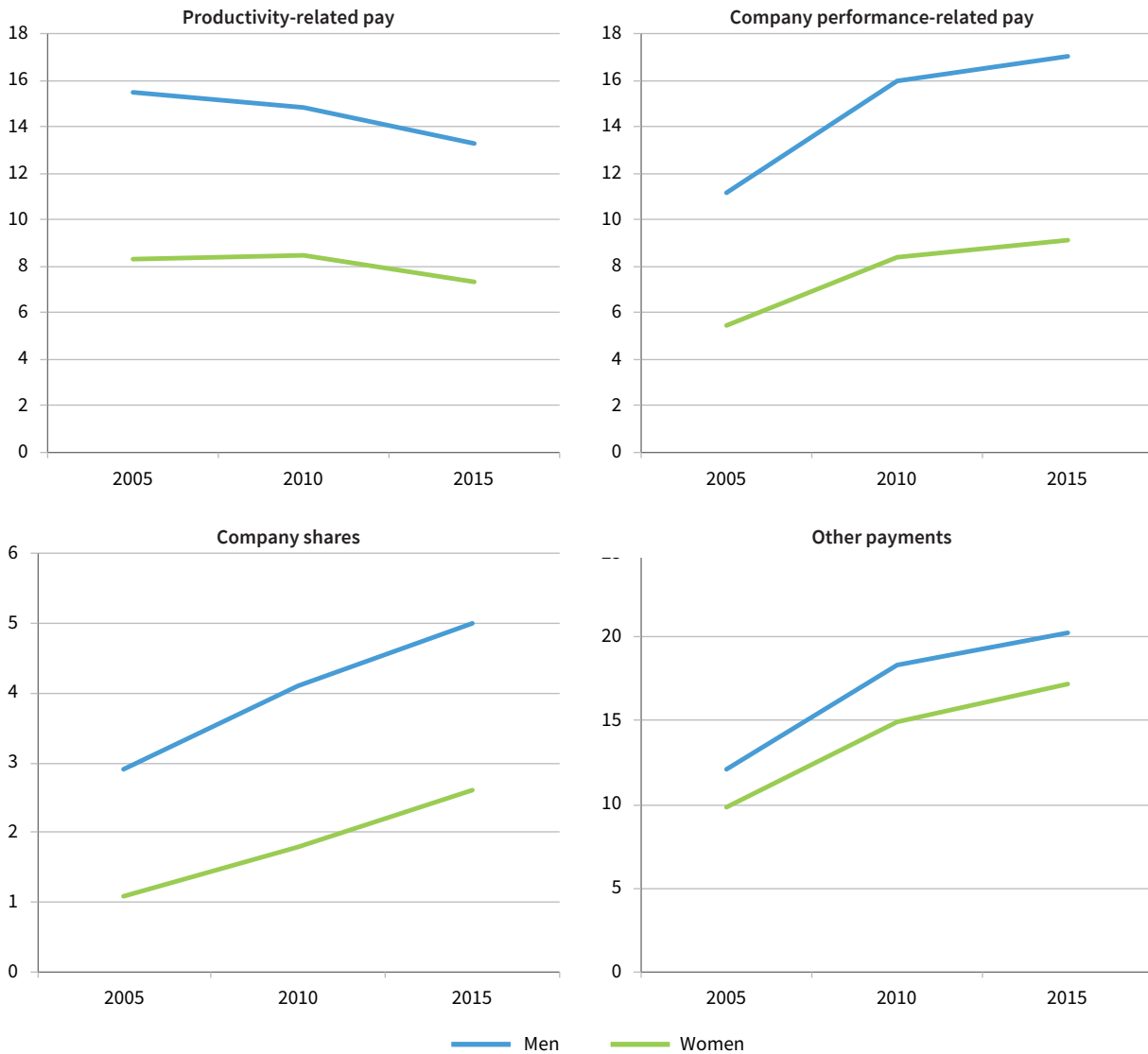
✓ Case study: [Reducing working time](#)

Variable pay

Finally, one more challenge related to an often-neglected aspect of the gender pay gap is variable forms of pay. The EWCS reports on various components of pay besides the basic wage: piece rate or productivity payments, overtime payments, profit sharing, employee share ownership programmes, unsocial working hours payments and benefits in-kind (for example, medical services and access to shops).

EWCS data show that the proportion of male employees who report receiving variable pay is significantly larger than that of their female counterparts. As Figure 35 illustrates, while more workers appear to be receiving the different types of variable pay, use is increasing faster for men than for women (except productivity-based pay, which seems to be in decline). If the measures to reduce the gender pay gap focus exclusively on basic pay, there is a risk that the gap may continue to widen, with the profusion of variable forms of pay benefiting more men than women.

Figure 35: Additional components of earnings from main job (%), by gender, EU27 and the UK, 2005–2015



Source: EWCS 2005, 2010 and 2015

Differences according to age and life stage

The demographic challenge that Europe is facing requires that a larger share of the working age population participates in the labour market. In addition to higher statutory retirement ages, complementary policy measures may be needed, enabling workers to extend their working lives. The latter can be achieved only if workers are in good health and are motivated to stay in work for longer. In addition, workers should be qualified for the job they perform. Good job quality and a favourable work environment are key for enabling all workers to remain longer in the labour market.

This means that work must be transformed to mitigate the factors that discourage or hinder workers from staying in or entering the workforce. It means that work

has to become more sustainable. According to Eurofound’s definition, sustainable work means achieving living and working conditions that support people in engaging and remaining in work throughout an extended working life. However, individual circumstances also have to be taken into account. Availability for work differs between people and is likely to change over the life course. The challenge is to match the needs and abilities of the individual with the quality of jobs on offer (Eurofound, 2017d).

It is, therefore, not enough to focus on improving the working conditions of older workers. Whether considering young or older workers, how we work today will have an impact on how we work in the future. Job quality needs to be addressed at every life stage. As the analysis of EWCS data shows, each stage is characterised by a different mix of good and poor working conditions, challenging the overall job quality and requiring targeted action.

The European Pillar of Social Rights provides a framework to facilitate labour markets to adapt to new challenges while promoting fairness and solidarity between the generations. It emphasises the right to a working environment adapted to a worker's professional needs so that they may prolong their participation in the labour market. The European social partners addressed the issue in their 2017 agreement on active ageing and the intergenerational approach (BusinessEurope et al, 2017), in which they commit to making it easier for older workers to actively participate and stay longer in the labour market.

Changes over the life course

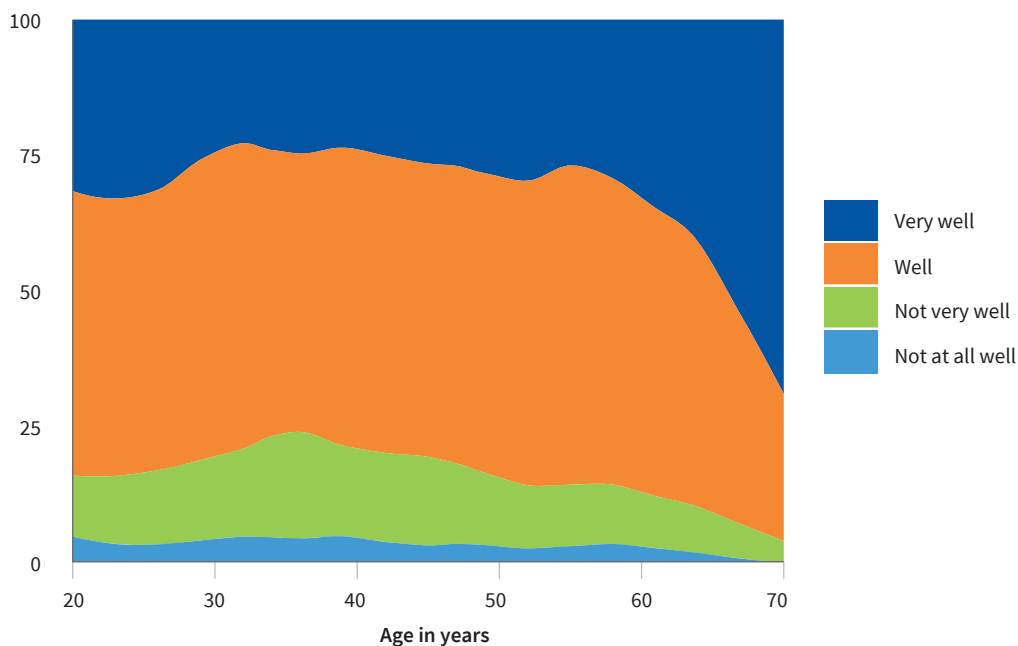
Important determinants of whether work is sustainable over the life course include work–life balance, subjective well-being, self-rated health, job prospects and the perceived ability to work until 60 years of age (Eurofound, 2017d). Job quality affects all, and analysis of EWCS data helps to identify the work-related factors that matter most. Being exposed to high levels of quantitative demands and to physical risks at work is associated with worse health outcomes and a poorer work–life balance. Workers who experience these working conditions are also more likely to state that they will not be able to continue working until the age of 60. An intention to leave the workforce before age 60 is also associated with poor-quality management and

experiencing adverse social behaviour. This association between poor working conditions and work outcomes that reduce the sustainability of work holds true for all employees, regardless of age. However, some factors are more prevalent or play a more important role depending on the age group.

For younger workers (aged 35 years and under), some features of the social environment can be problematic. On the one hand, these workers are more likely to receive social support and encouragement from colleagues and their boss. On the other hand, they experience more adverse social behaviour – particularly women. Job security is another area in which younger workers face challenges. As these workers are more likely to hold temporary contracts than other age groups, this is likely to contribute to the greater job insecurity that they report.

During prime working age (35–44 years of age), difficulties in achieving work–life balance are greater than in other age groups. As can be seen in Figure 36, a higher proportion of workers in this age group than in other age groups report that work fits ‘not very well’ or ‘not at all well’ with their private life. This is related to the fact that workers in this age group, on average, work longer hours and have more care responsibilities than in other age groups.

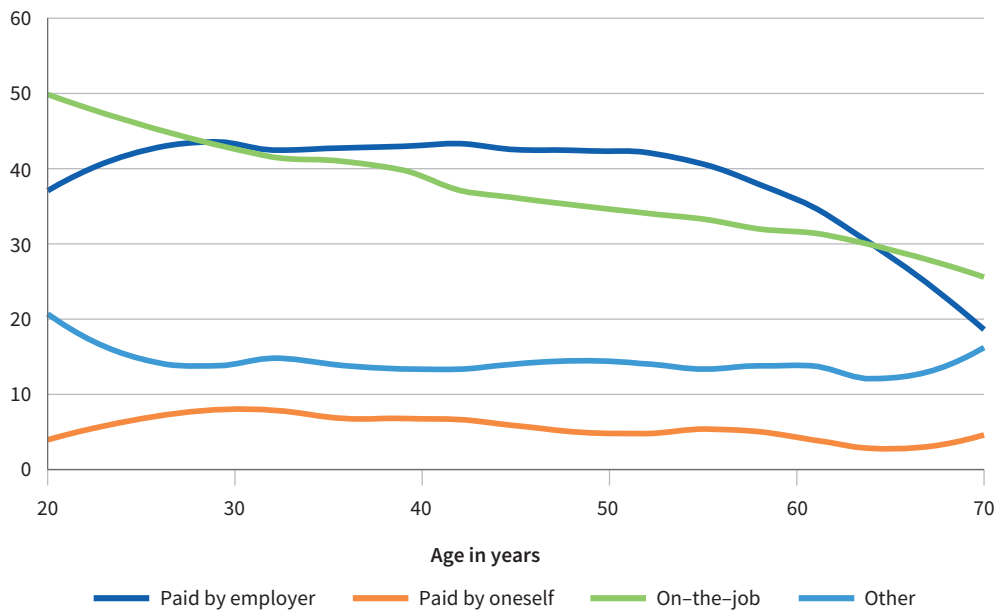
Figure 36: Employees' perception of their work–life balance (%), by age, EU27 and the UK, 2015



Note: The survey question asks 'In general, how do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work?'

Source: EWCS 2015

Figure 37: Employees' participation in training (%), by age and training classification, EU27 and the UK, 2015



Source: EWCS 2015

For workers in the 45–54 years age group, the main concerns are skills and career prospects. They fare better than younger cohorts in terms of quantitative demands. Generally speaking, as workers get older, these demands are reported less, either because these demands are reduced or because older workers have gained the skills to cope with them. However, participation in training decreases in this age group, especially for on-the-job training but also for employer-paid training (Figure 37).

Some health outcomes deteriorate with age. In general, musculoskeletal disorders increase with age, with this increase being more acute for women than for men. For upper limb, shoulder and neck problems, for example, gender differences are already observed in the 35–49 years age group, whereas differences in the prevalence of lower limb problems and backache emerge clearly only at older age (older than 50 years), with more women than men reporting them. With respect to psychological well-being, it generally tends to worsen until 35–49 years. These results potentially point to a cumulative effect of poor working conditions that negatively affect health and thus the sustainability of work over the life course.

However, some working conditions improve after 55 years of age. And if working conditions are good, if they allow for good work–life balance with fewer working hours and greater flexibility, it suggests that older employees will be more likely to continue working until retirement age. Moreover, in the oldest group (workers over 65 years of age), the prevalence of health problems, such as musculoskeletal disorders, is lower than in the group aged 55–65 years, indicating a

selection effect, as only the healthier employees are able and willing to work at this age. Although this selection effect is commonly referred to as the ‘healthy worker effect’, it is not limited to health. There are many reasons other than health for workers exiting the labour market or remaining in work. For example, workers who cannot combine work with caring for relatives may give up work, whereas those who are able to achieve a good work–life balance remain (see Figure 36).

To address early exit from the labour market, a general improvement in working conditions throughout the life course is required, with specific attention paid to those factors that show the strongest association with poor work outcomes: physical risks, level of job demands and (adverse) social behaviour. At the same time, specific attention needs to be given to age-related poorer working conditions. Addressing poor working conditions only for workers aged 55 and over might be too late for most individuals and, therefore, the objective of keeping workers in employment for longer, at least until retirement age, would not be met.

At workplace level, the need to ensure workers’ ability to work throughout the life course has been acknowledged, and a number of organisations have introduced broad work ability assessments. This concept was initially developed by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and was based on a so-called ‘work ability index’. This index acknowledges the importance of a broad range of factors, from both within and outside the workplace, that can have an impact on an individual’s ability to continue working (in the same job) up to retirement age. It emphasises the importance of buy-in from higher levels of management, as well as from workers themselves.

Examples from company level demonstrate the positive impact of holistic age management policies on worker retention and on reducing the incidence of sick leave.

- v Case study: [Implementing holistic age management: City of Kankaanpää](#)

Sustainable work and occupation

Some of the important determinants of sustainable work over the life course (self-rated health, subjective well-being and career prospects) are typically worse for employees in mid- and low-level occupations (clerks, service and sales workers, craft workers, plant and machine operators, and workers in elementary occupations). Employees in high-level occupations (managers, professionals, and technicians) show better results for these outcomes; and they demonstrate more positive attitudes towards sustainable work, as they are more optimistic about being able to work until the age of 60 (Eurofound, 2017d).

Employees in elementary occupations and craft workers fare worse than those in other occupations in terms of self-rated health, well-being and career prospects. Plant and machine operators consistently report below-average work–life balance throughout the life course.

However, there are exceptions to these common trends, especially as regards working time and work–life balance, that are not related to the employee’s socioeconomic status and skills level. For example, occupations such as production and service managers and business associate professionals (high-level occupations as regards their socioeconomic status) are found to report worse conditions for those indicators than other occupations. Another exception are health professionals, a higher proportion of whom report a negative impact of work on their health than the average in low- and mid-level occupations. The analysis by occupation confirms that within occupations different age groups also experience different levels of exposure to poor conditions over the life course.

It is worth considering what happens when an employee spends their entire career in an occupation with a greater incidence of the factors that make working life less sustainable. As many studies demonstrate, working conditions have a cumulative effect over the life course. There are likely to be negative consequences for the health of workers exposed to these conditions over a long period. This would mean that the working conditions of some middle- and low-level occupations (and few high-level occupations) could endanger the ability of employees to continue working at older ages and, by extension, push them into early retirement.

In sectors and occupations that place particular health and safety demands on individuals – of both a physical and a psychological nature – company practices can

assist in extending the working lives of employees, by, for instance, placing a strong emphasis on occupational health and safety measures or exploring the possibility of occupational reintegration after illness or of reorientation in cases where remaining in the same occupation is not feasible. Mid-career reviews can play a role in this process, anticipating requirements for career reorientation.

- v Case study: [Emphasising employability and knowledge transfer: ATM](#)

Country differences

The duration of working life relates not only to working conditions but also to social norms around retiring, the legal retirement age and opportunities for early retirement. National contexts clearly play a role in shaping both the duration of working life as well as working conditions and job quality over the life course.

Belgium is an interesting example illustrating the importance of institutional factors such as policies on retirement age and early retirement for the duration of working life. The country scores comparatively highly on several features linked to work sustainability, such as health and well-being, work–life balance, job security, and employability or prospects. However, the duration of working life in Belgium is below the average for the EU27 and the UK. Belgium has the highest percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) expenditure on early retirement, with many workers leaving the labour market early (Eurofound, 2017d). In contrast, Estonia has poorer results on working conditions, with a longer working life and a higher employment rate among older ages than the average for the EU27 and the UK, with correspondingly low early retirement rates.

Differences by country are evident in both the quality of working conditions and the patterns across age: Denmark, Finland, Ireland and Sweden normally fare better in sustainable work outcomes, while generally the Baltic states and the Southern country cluster report worse outcomes. As regards age patterns, self-reported health status, for example, is worst for older age groups in the Baltic states, while for other countries age discrepancies on this indicator are less apparent. Work–life balance is mainly a problem for prime-age workers (aged 35–44 years) in most countries, but in Greece and Hungary, it is the older age group that struggles most with work–life balance.

The country differences observed suggest that there is potential for national policies and norms to mediate the influence of working conditions on sustainable work. Country comparisons also highlight the role of the institutional setting in fostering (or hindering) sustainable work outcomes. If the institutional characteristics of each country play an important role in employees’ job quality, changing those characteristics can be one of the ways to ensure fairer working conditions and sustainable work across the EU.

Summary and policy pointers

This chapter set out to show where we stand today as regards the quality of jobs in Europe, given that access to high-quality jobs for all workers is a prerequisite for building ‘an economy that works for people’.

Eurofound’s analysis shows that workers in the EU27 and the UK can be almost equally divided into five distinct job quality profiles: ‘high flying’, ‘smooth running’, ‘active manual’, ‘under pressure’ and ‘poor quality’. While ‘poor quality’ jobs rank poorly in most job quality indices, all of these profiles contain some unfavourable elements. There is, therefore, a continued need for policymakers and the social partners to intervene. The focus should be on the multitude of detrimental working conditions experienced by workers in the ‘poor quality’ profile. These are linked to higher levels of absence due to work-related illness, lower levels of engagement and lack of sustainability of work. This means that ‘poor quality’ jobs not only affect the individual worker but also have costs for employers and society.

Occupational segregation along gender lines remains a feature of EU labour markets. While the share of men and women in mixed occupations has increased somewhat, the share of women in male-dominated occupations actually declined between 2010 and 2015. The improvement of job security and employability in male-dominated occupations would encourage women to take up those occupations and reduce gender segregation. Access to working time flexibility, availability of high-quality and affordable childcare, and more equal sharing of caring responsibilities are important policy priorities to ensure greater gender equality in the labour market. The possibility to take time off work to deal with personal or family issues is an inexpensive and effective solution for better work–life balance. However, the evidence shows that the trend in this area seems to be going in the wrong direction: the proportions of men and women reporting that it is very easy to take time off during working hours declined between 2010 and 2015.

The proper transposition, implementation and enforcement of the EU Work–Life Balance Directive – which aims to improve families’ access to flexible work arrangements and family leave – must therefore be closely monitored and collective bargaining on the issue encouraged. Gender pay gaps remain, and measures addressing them must account for the various forms of pay, including basic and variable pay, and the fact that men have more significant access to the variable types of pay than women. Pay transparency measures, such as those requested by the European Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, must take into consideration and address the gender differences resulting from variable pay. The analysis also serves to highlight the impact of continued occupational and sectoral segregation along gender lines and the dangers of a ‘gender blind’ approach to addressing working conditions and job quality, including occupational safety and health.

Each stage of working life is characterised by a different mix of good and poor working conditions. At the same time, it is clear that the job quality experienced by workers today will have an impact on their ability to work tomorrow. Among the work-related factors that matter most are being exposed to high levels of quantitative demands and to physical risks at work. These factors are associated with worse health outcomes and a poorer work–life balance, which, in turn, reduces workers’ perceived ability to continue working until the age of 60. It is, therefore, not enough to focus on improving the working conditions of older workers. Job quality must be ensured throughout working life to enable workers to remain in work until retirement age.

However, specific attention must be paid to certain working conditions at certain ages, for example work–life balance for prime-age workers (aged 35–44 years) or access to training for older workers. Addressing the working conditions of the 44–55 years age group is crucial, as it is at 55 years that the significant drop-out from the labour market takes place in most countries. Workers experiencing conditions that are conducive to good health, work–life balance and skills development before entering the next age cohort are more likely to work until retirement age. In sectors and occupations that place particular demands on individuals from a health and safety perspective, longer working lives could be achieved if occupational reintegration after illness were possible or if job reorientation were available in cases where remaining in the same occupation is not feasible. The very poor career prospects reported by those aged over 50, especially women, are of great concern, given that the extension of working lives continues to be at the top of policymaking agendas.

3 Improving job quality: Challenges ahead

Job quality remains a moving target. While many dimensions of job quality have improved, as shown in Chapter 1, changes in the world of work raise questions about the overall sustainability of these improvements. Europe's economy and labour markets are developing against a background of globalisation, workforce diversification, rapid 'game-changing' technological developments and the flexibilisation of work. Each of these transformative currents has an impact on working conditions, job quality and, therefore, the sustainability of work. This chapter presents some key challenges facing the world of work in the years ahead: the rise in psychosocial risks, the digitally mediated merging of work and life, and the growth of non-standard employment types. It examines the impact of these developments on job quality, while also reflecting on how these challenges can be addressed. The chapter also discusses the changes experienced by workers to their working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Psychosocial risks at work

The 2019–2021 work programme of the European cross-industry social partners identifies psychosocial risks as 'among the most challenging and growing health and safety concerns at work' (ETUC et al, 2019, p. 5). The work programme highlights that it is not only workers who suffer as a result of stress and burnout; companies must also cope with the effects of higher staff turnover and absenteeism. It also mentions the cost for society of long-term absenteeism and healthcare expenditure.

This singling out of psychosocial factors echoes the European Commission's 2017 communication *Safer and healthier work for all – Modernisation of the EU occupational safety and health legislation and policy*, which describes psychosocial risks and work-related stress as 'among the most challenging – and growing – occupational safety and health concerns', noting that workplace stress has a 'serious impact on productivity' (European Commission, 2017, p. 8).

Awareness has increased among policy actors of the negative impact that psychosocial risks have on workers' health and well-being (giving rise to

cardiovascular and musculoskeletal diseases and depression, for instance) and on company performance (being a root cause of poor creativity, increased staff turnover, and work-related accidents and illnesses). But to tackle this aspect of the workplace, psychosocial risks need to be seen in the context of recent changes in work and the way it is organised, which increase the likelihood of exposure to them.

Identifying psychosocial risks

Psychosocial risks can be defined as 'those aspects of the design and management of work, and its social and organisational contexts, that have the potential for causing psychological or physical harm' (Cox et al, 2002, p. 195).

There is no consensus on a definitive list of psychosocial risk factors, but they broadly fall within one of the following six categories (Eurofound, 2012a):⁶

1. high demands and intensive work
2. emotional demands
3. lack of autonomy
4. ethical conflicts
5. poor social relationships
6. job and work insecurity

These factors are captured in Eurofound's job quality framework and feature in five of the seven job quality dimensions: Work intensity, Working time quality (especially the subdimension of long working hours), Skills and discretion (decision latitude and organisational participation), Social environment (adverse social behaviour, social support and management quality) and Prospects (job security).

Identifying psychosocial risk factors and quantifying workers' exposure to them enables companies and workers to design jobs and organisational interventions in the best way to address the risks.

Jobs with most risk

From the five job quality profiles identified by Eurofound, as presented in Chapter 2, two are particularly exposed to psychosocial risks: 'under pressure' jobs and 'poor quality' jobs.

⁶ The six categories are based on the classification developed by the College d'Expertise de Suivi des Risques Psychosociaux au Travail (French expert group on psychosocial risks at work).

Jobs in the ‘under pressure’ cluster, which represents about 13% of all jobs, are most exposed to psychosocial risks. Workers in jobs in this cluster have a high level of exposure to adverse social behaviour, receive little support from managers or colleagues, and are often subject to emotionally disturbing situations, combined with working at high speed to tight deadlines and not having enough time to get the job done. Working time quality is relatively poor, with above-average atypical working hours, limited flexibility and longer working weeks.

Similar profiles result from the separate analyses of the male and female samples, although with different sizes: some 22% of female workers are in ‘under pressure’ jobs, compared to 17% of men. Male and female ‘under pressure’ profiles are rather different in terms of occupation and sector of activity. Most women in these jobs are professionals and technicians (69%, compared with 49% of men). While most women in the ‘under pressure’ profile work in health (41%) or education (21%), men can be found across many more sectors, the largest proportions being in industry (16%), commerce and hospitality (14%) and other services (18%).

Jobs in the ‘poor quality’ cluster, which represent 20% of all jobs, are exposed to the full set of psychosocial risks but with lower levels of intensity than the ‘under pressure’ jobs. One-third of these workers fear they might lose their jobs, and more than 40% strongly disagree that their job offers good prospects for career advancement. Work intensity, however, is slightly better than for those in the ‘under pressure’ profile, which reduces psychosocial risks.

The ‘poor quality’ profile includes 22% of female workers and 23% of male workers, again with some substantial differences between the two. While both score poorly on all dimensions, the work intensity experienced by women is greater than that experienced by men; the social environment is slightly better for men. Agriculture is the sector with the highest proportion of workers in the ‘poor quality’ cluster (42%), but a third of commerce and hospitality jobs are in this cluster too. In terms of occupation, 54% of workers in elementary occupations are in ‘poor quality’ jobs, as are over one-third of agricultural workers (41%), plant and machine operators (38%), and service and sales workers (33%) (Eurofound, 2017a).

Box 2: Burnout

Burnout is one outcome of psychosocial risk in the workplace. While there has been growing interest in burnout and more reference to it in discussions of working conditions, its definition remains vague, and comparable data are lacking. Common to all approaches to the topic of burnout is the recognition of the role of exhaustion – particularly emotional – and extreme fatigue as a result of long-term exposure to strenuous work factors. Eurofound’s research (2018f) on burnout has identified the following issues.

- While it is widely studied, research tends to be patchy, applies a range of different instruments to measure it and can rarely rely on quantitative data from surveys with a reliable sample size.
- The lack of comparable data, as studies build on different definitions, hinders common identification of and responses to the phenomenon. The prevalence of burnout as a medical diagnosis seems to be very low (less than 5%).
- One reason that may explain why there are so few diagnosed cases could be that burnout, anxiety and depression may be present in the same individuals, and individuals may have been diagnosed with anxiety or depression, or both, rather than burnout. Some studies have supported this hypothesis by highlighting the similarities and crossover between burnout and depression or anxiety. For example, the fatigue or loss of energy that patients suffering from depression may experience can also be related to the emotional exhaustion component of burnout.
- There is a significant correlation between burnout and psychosocial risks. In general, people working in places or jobs that are characterised by a high level of exposure to psychosocial risks such as high work intensity, long working hours, emotional demands, a low level of autonomy and tense social relationships at work were found to be at a higher risk of burnout and indeed more likely to already be developing it.

Addressing psychosocial risks

Experience shows that identifying and addressing psychosocial risks is a challenge for companies. According to the outcomes of the third European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER-3; EU-OSHA, 2019), several establishments report more difficulty tackling psychosocial risks than other risks. The reluctance to talk openly about the issue is one of the main barriers, mentioned by 61% of establishments in the EU27 and the UK, and is reported more frequently as establishment size grows. EU-OSHA has been addressing the issue of stress for many years and dedicated its 2014–2015 Healthy Workplaces Campaign to the management of stress. In addition, many sectoral social partners, building on the 2004 Framework Agreement on Work-related Stress, have developed guides and agreements on the matter, in the ICT, education, central government and railway sectors, among others (CER and ETF, 2013; EUPAE and TUNED, 2013, 2017; ETF and CER, 2014; EFEE and ETUCE, 2016a, 2016b; UNI Europa and ETNO, 2019).

Recent Eurofound research has examined some promising emergent approaches to reducing psychological risks.

- Job demands and resources:** This approach focuses on developing workers' job resources and reducing their exposure to psychosocial risks.
- High-involvement organisation:** This focuses on developing the conditions that facilitate the engagement of workers, suggesting that high-involvement forms of work organisation could be part of a solution.

Job demands and resources

The job demands–resources model is an occupational stress model built on the idea that jobs are made up of demands and resources, both of which affect workers' health and well-being through two distinct paths: one of exhaustion and one of engagement. Demands refer to aspects of the job that require sustained physical or psychological effort or skills and have psychological and physiological costs (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Resources are defined as aspects that reduce job demands or their costs, helping to achieve one's work goals and foster personal growth (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

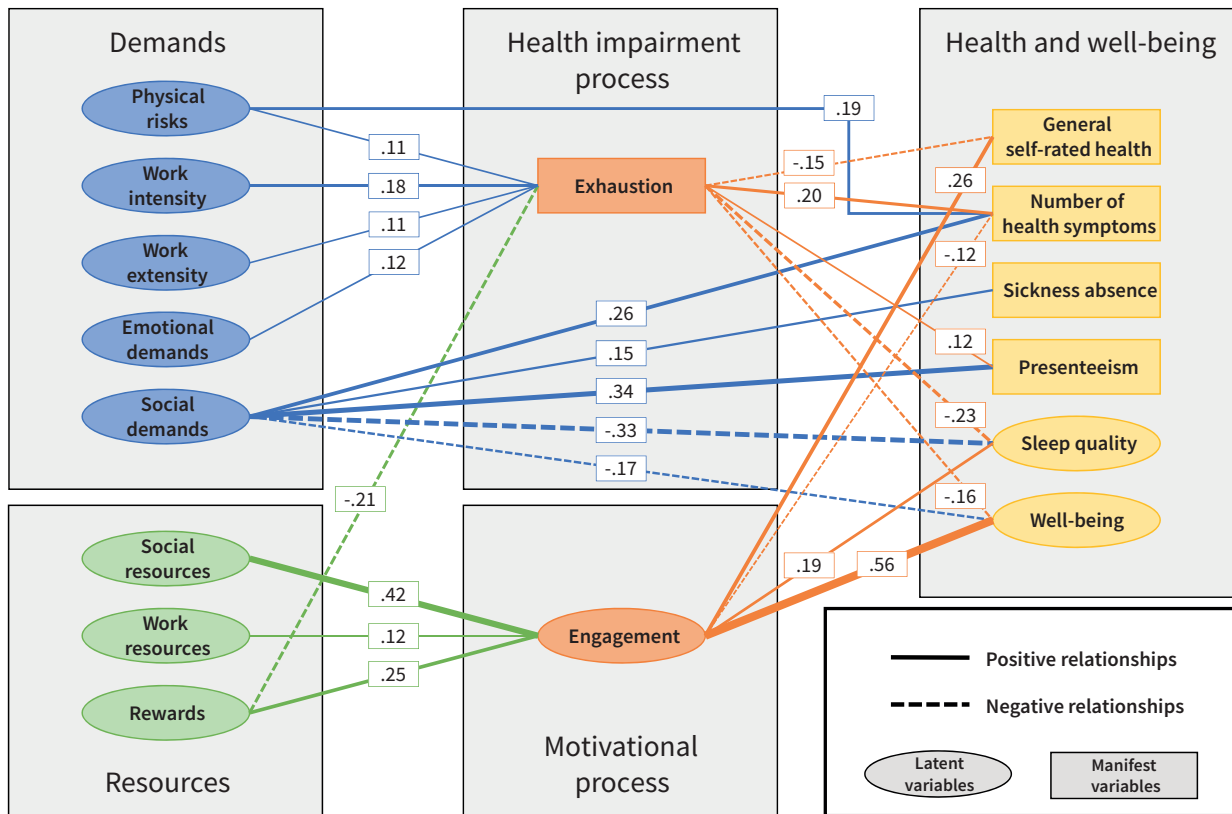
With the job demands–resources model as a framework, Eurofound analysed the direct and indirect associations of job demands and resources with health and well-being using EWCS data (Eurofound, 2019b). Table 2 presents the constituent elements of the model built.

Table 2: Elements of the job demands–resources model based on the EWCS

Element	Indicators
Demands	
Physical risks	Ambient risks; biochemical risks; posture-related risks
Work intensity	Working at very high speed; working to tight deadlines
Work extensity	Weekly working hours; long working days
Emotional demands	Handling angry clients; emotionally disturbing situations
Social demands	Harassment; discrimination
Resources	
Social resources	Support from colleagues; support from supervisors; recognition; justice in the organisation
Work resources	Control over the job; skills use in the job; participation
Rewards	Pay; career prospects; job security
Motivational and health-impairing processes	
Exhaustion	Feeling exhausted at the end of the working day
Engagement	Feeling full of energy; enthusiastic about the job; time flies at work
Health and well-being	
Self-rated general health	Appraisal of one's general health as 'very bad', 'bad', 'fair', 'good' or 'very good'
Number of health problems	Hearing problems; backache; headaches or eye strain; anxiety; fatigue
Sickness absence	Days absent from work due to sick leave or health-related leave
Presenteeism	Days worked while sick
Sleep quality	Difficulty falling asleep; waking up during sleep; feeling of exhaustion and fatigue
Well-being	Feeling cheerful, calm, active, fresh and rested; life filled with interesting things

Source: EWCS (more detailed information in Eurofound, 2019b)

Figure 38: Associations between demands and resources and workers' health and well-being



Notes: The width of the lines indicates the strength of the estimated paths. For clarity, paths with standardised estimates of an absolute value smaller than 0.10 are omitted. Source: EWCS 2015

The results of the analysis are shown schematically in Figure 38. It shows that job demands are linked to higher levels of exhaustion, which in turn are related to poorer health; of the five demands, for instance, work intensity increases exhaustion most. Job resources, on the other hand, are associated with higher levels of work engagement, which in turn are related to better health and well-being. Engagement, for instance, has a strong positive effect on well-being. The model suggests that well-designed jobs translate into better health: they are characterised by suitable levels of demands, high rewards, and high levels of work and social resources. For companies to apply this finding in the workplace, policies and practices should cover both work organisation and job design, with a view to reducing exposure to job demands while increasing workers' access to job resources.

Analyses of EWCS data from 2005 and 2010 suggested that the associations between job demands and job resources, on the one hand, and health and well-being, on the other hand, could be different for female and male workers. However, the assessment of the model using the 2015 EWCS data revealed that the same model

is equally relevant for men and women. This means that women's and men's health and well-being are, in principle, determined by the same job demands and resources and through the same psychological and physiological processes. For example, the effects of emotional demands are the same for the health and well-being of whoever is exposed to them, regardless of their gender – notwithstanding the fact that exposure is more frequent in some female-dominated sectors and occupations. In summary, improving working conditions will have equally positive effects for women and men.

High-involvement organisation

Another route to reducing psychosocial risks at work is through work organisation. Research based on EWCS data confirms that having discretion over job tasks and participating in organisational decision-making are associated with a higher level of engagement and well-being, as well as with greater skills development, among workers. The possibility for workers to influence and shape their work is a positive tool that also supports high-performance workplaces (Eurofound, 2020d).

The degree of task discretion given to workers and the extent of their organisational participation reflect companies' decisions as regards their work organisation and their competitive strategies. The cross-classification of these two dimensions result in four distinct forms of work organisation.

- **Low-involvement** (low task discretion and low organisational participation), the most prevalent type of work organisation in Europe, accounting for 35% of all employees.
- **High-involvement** (high task discretion and high organisational participation), which employs 29% of EU employees.
- **Discretionary** (high task discretion and low organisational participation), employing 20% of employees.
- **Consultative** (low task discretion and high organisational participation), employing 16% of employees.

Employees in high-involvement types of work organisation experience better working and employment conditions in that they are less exposed to physical risks at work and also show evidence of lower levels of psychosocial risks, such as lower levels of work intensity and higher job security. Management is more supportive in these organisations, and workers are more likely to experience organisational fairness: clear expectations, fair conflict resolution, fair work allocation, fair treatment and management trust in employees. Employees are also less exposed to multiple systems controlling their pace of work.

Creating the conditions for employee involvement will boost engagement, which is a strong form of positive motivation associated with both job performance and well-being. Employees with high work engagement report less time absent from work, present higher levels of discretionary effort (working in their free time to meet work demands) and prefer a later retirement age.

ICT-based mobile work and the merging of work and private life

Over the past two decades, developments in ICT have been among the key drivers of change in working life. Technology has contributed to new ways of organising work by providing workers with more flexibility over when and where tasks are performed, leading to the growth of telework (working from home) and other forms of ICT-based mobile working.

The new forms of work organisation that have resulted rely less on a regular rhythm for the working day and instead allocate tasks more flexibly across working time. In some countries, sectors and companies, this has gone hand in hand with a move away from thinking about work performance in terms of hours worked towards a greater emphasis on outputs delivered.

This ICT-based flexible work brings advantages for both employees and employers. However, the possibility to work at any time from anywhere brings with it the risk of a blurring of boundaries between work and non-work life.

Drivers of ICT-based flexible working

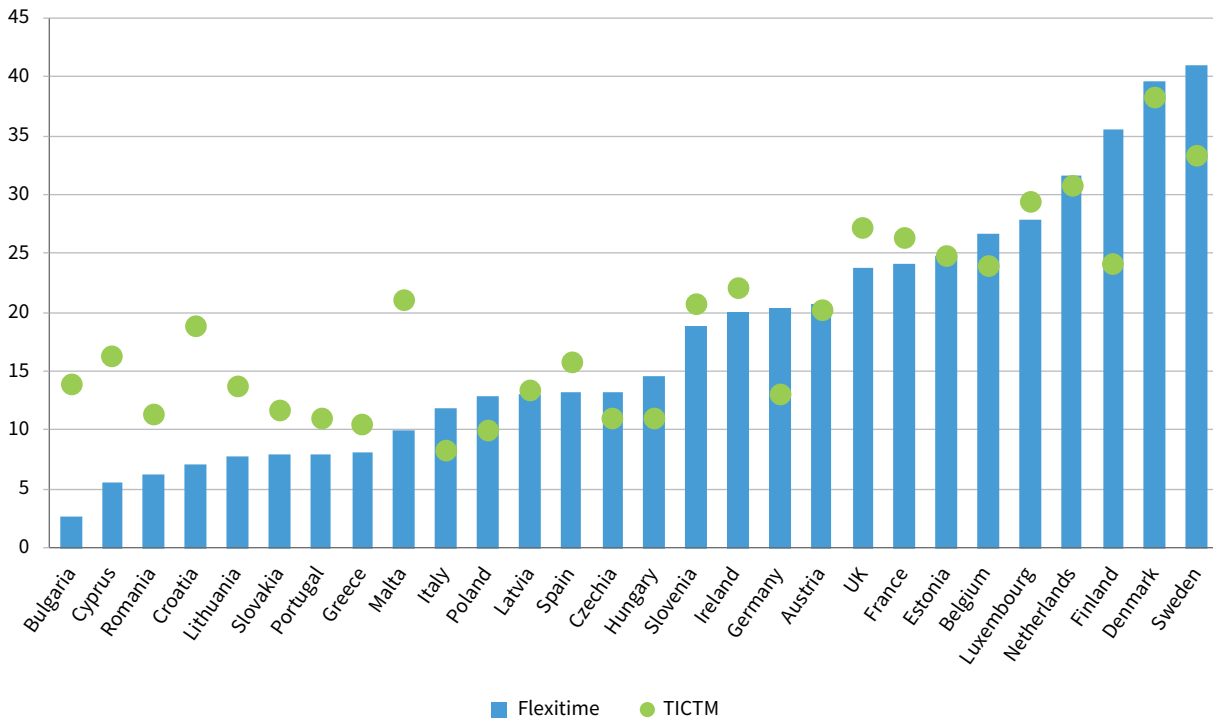
The report *Working anytime anywhere: The effects on the world of work* (Eurofound and ILO, 2017) underlines that the growth in telework and ICT-based mobile work (TICTM) has been partly driven by companies' need for higher productivity and improved performance. TICTM is linked to increased availability of workers but also more efficient work processes and time savings resulting from reduced commuting times. The increase in TICTM has also been driven by the development of new business models such as platform work. At the same time, it caters to employees' needs for spatial and temporal flexibility, to help balance work demands with family commitments and other aspects of personal life.

The need for such flexibility arises from a reconfiguration of responsibilities within households as more women enter employment. EU-LFS data show that there was an overall increase of 7 percentage points in female employment rates in the EU27 and the UK over a 15-year period, from 62% in 2003 to 69% in 2018. The proportion of dual-earner families has increased in Europe and has become the norm, which is one of the most significant social trends affecting European countries (Smith, 2005). With two adults working, the reconciliation of work with other aspects of life is more difficult, especially for families with children but also increasingly for those with caring responsibilities for older relatives in the context of demographic change.

The development and expansion of flexible arrangements would not have been possible without the introduction of digital technologies in the workplace. As well as enabling greater flexibility in terms of time and location, it has also facilitated interconnectivity, allowing workers to interact with colleagues, managers and other organisations virtually and to participate in the workflow or production process from anywhere at any time.

Although technology does not wholly determine work organisation, there is evidence that it has contributed to the rise in flexible working in many sectors, including public administration, professional activities, information and communication, financial services and sales. Figure 39 shows that countries with a high proportion of workers in flexitime schedules also have a relatively high number of workers in TICTM arrangements. This demonstrates the association between the flexible organisation of working time and the use of ICT and, more generally, the digitalisation of the work environment.

Figure 39: Proportion of workers with flexitime schedules and engaged in TICTM (%), EU27 and the UK, 2015



Source: EWCS 2015

Blurring boundaries

TICTM can influence work–life balance positively, as it gives workers greater autonomy to organise their working time based on their needs and preferences. In the EWCS 2015, TICTM workers reported the key characteristics of their work arrangements to be the ability to make decisions about their work schedules and pace of work and limited managerial control (Eurofound, 2020e).

However, higher levels of autonomy or flexibility can also lead to undesired consequences. Eurofound’s research suggests that a high level of flexibility in time and place of work combined with high levels of demands increases work intensity. This can mean, for instance, having insufficient time to finish work, a situation that is exacerbated by interruptions and requests for constant availability. High levels of work intensity can lead to long working hours and informal overtime. In such cases, autonomy turns from being an asset (a resource that gives workers the freedom to choose when, where and how to work) into a liability (the perceived obligation to deal with an increased workload). This autonomy paradox, identified by research (Mazmanian et al, 2013; Sewell and Taskin, 2015; Biron and van Veldhoven, 2016; Huws, 2017), can be self-imposed by the worker (due to self-expectations and ambitions) or driven by the employer (through work organisation, performance goals and monitoring, and management styles, for instance).

Another key characteristic in TICTM work environments is the potential for permanent availability facilitated by constant connectivity through digital technologies. Workers can potentially be available to their colleagues, employer and clients at all times, which can lead to extended working time and increased work pressure, as reported in several national studies. According to the Finnish quality of work life survey, 65% of teleworkers were contacted about work-related matters outside normal working hours in 2013, mostly via email. Over one-third (35%) reported that such contact had been made several times during the reference period (Sutela and Lehto, 2014). Similarly, 68% of Spanish workers confirmed that they had received emails or phone calls outside normal working hours (Randstad, 2012). In Sweden, more than half of the respondents (53%) to a survey of both ICT-based mobile workers and those working exclusively from the employer’s premises were available outside normal working hours, even on a daily basis (Unionen, 2013). However, contact is not always one way. In the same survey, 31% of respondents agreed ‘completely’ or ‘to a certain degree’ that they often checked work emails outside normal working hours.

This type of work environment, which leads to longer and irregular working hours and working in one’s free time, poses a risk of work and personal life overlapping (Dén-Nagy, 2014; Allen et al, 2015; Eurofound and ILO, 2017). EWCS data confirm that the boundary between work and life is more blurred for workers with a TICTM

arrangement, based on responses to questions about working in one’s free time and difficulty concentrating on work because of family responsibilities. Case studies conducted as part of Eurofound research demonstrate the bidirectional nature of spillovers between work and home life. The interviewees noted that domestic interruptions may interfere with their capacity to concentrate on work issues while interruptions from work can prevent them from attending to (and enjoying) their care responsibilities.

A new pattern of working time has emerged as a result of the power and spread of ICT, where it is more difficult to distinguish working time from non-working time and workplace from non-workplace.

Consequences for work–life balance

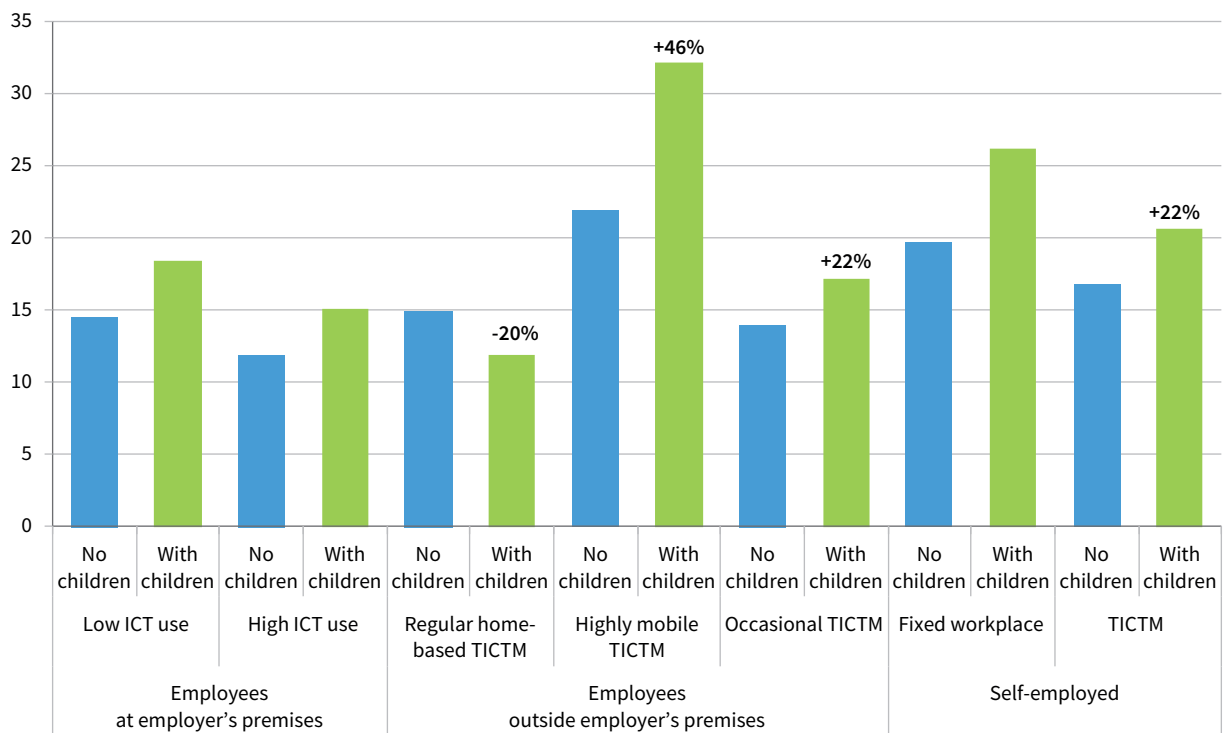
The blurring of boundaries between work and personal life can have negative consequences for work–life balance. However, a look at the different types of TICTM arrangements shows that some forms can actually help to improve work–life balance. Figure 40 shows the prevalence of work–balance problems for workers, who are classified according to where they are based for work, their use of TICTM arrangements and whether

they have children. It shows that compared to employees who work from their employer’s premises all the time, home-based TICTM workers with children report work–life balance problems less frequently. One of the reasons is that many female workers use this arrangement and do so precisely to combine work and care (Eurofound and ILO, 2017).

Other forms of TICTM arrangements are less advantageous for achieving a good work–life balance. Among employees without children, work–life balance problems are most common among highly mobile TICTM employees, compared to other groups. The proportion reporting difficulties increases sharply (by 46%) for highly mobile employees who have children compared to those without children. The case studies conducted by Eurofound confirm that highly mobile working patterns are largely incompatible with family needs, especially caring for children.

Occasional TICTM arrangements provide a level of flexibility that can accommodate certain care responsibilities, but the proportion of workers in this group reporting work–life balance problems increases (up by 22%) for those with children compared to occasional TICTM employees without children.

Figure 40: Workers reporting work–life balance problems (%), by work arrangement and presence or absence of children, EU27 and the UK, 2015



Note: The figures above the bars show the difference between the proportion of workers in a TICTM arrangement without children and that of those with children reporting work–life balance problems.

Source: EWCS 2015

Fragmentation of work

The ‘fragmentation’ of work and employment relationships is another area that is likely to present significant challenges in the period ahead. The European Industrial Relations Dictionary describes the fragmentation of the labour force in Europe as the result of an

increase in forms of work and employment which differ from the ‘standard employment relationship’ of permanent, full-time, socially secure employment. Complementing the standard form of employment is the growth of part-time work, fixed-term contracts, temporary agency work, homeworking, self-employment, casual work, seasonal work and other ‘non-standard’ forms of employment.

(Eurofound, 2017e)

In parallel, business strategies have led to the development of what David Weil (2014) called ‘fissured workplaces’, as the result of corporations increasingly distributing their activities through an extensive network of contracting, outsourcing, franchising and ownership.

It is important to note that the overall proportion of non-standard employment in the EU economy was relatively stable between 2008 and 2018. However, Eurofound has found that there has been an increase in so-called ‘compound’ non-standard employment, which combines different types of non-standard employment in one job, such as very marginal part-time work, very short temporary contracts, working without a contract and casual work (Eurofound, 2020a). Analysis of employment trends by Eurofound’s European Jobs Monitor shows that most net new employment created in the EU between 2011 and 2016 was in non-standard employment (Eurofound, 2017a). Newly hired staff are highly likely to have a temporary contract: in 2017, nearly half (49%) of employees that had been in their jobs for a year or less were on temporary contracts, compared to 14% of all employees (Eurofound, 2017f). Policy efforts have been made to incentivise permanent hiring, for example by reducing the gap in employment protections between temporary workers (who typically have low levels of protection) and those on permanent contracts (for whom protection is typically higher) or by subsidising the conversion of statuses from temporary to permanent for individual workers.

The growth of non-standard employment raises concerns, mainly because labour rights and protection are weaker. Data from the European Commission show that close to 40% of temporary part-time workers and 32% of temporary full-time workers do not have access to unemployment benefit, and around 10% of temporary part-time workers lack protection through sickness and maternity benefits. The EU has recognised the problems associated with the fragmentation of work and has extended the boundaries of EU labour regulation to include a wider range of employment relationships. A range of directives (some based on social partner agreements) aimed at providing protection for workers in non-standard forms of employment have been adopted.⁷

The other side of flexibility

The demand for increased flexibility from both sides of industry – from workers and businesses – has challenged the standard employment relationship, which has been deemed structurally too rigid. Flexible work is often seen as an opportunity for ‘win-win’ situations, allowing businesses to hire the required number of workers for the exact duration of the tasks to be performed and giving workers the opportunity to adapt their work obligations to their personal needs, enabling them to take part in learning, carry out care duties, or manage their health requirements.

Employers’ need to respond to market developments quickly and workers’ need for flexibility are partly behind the development of other forms of employment and work. These forms modify one or all of the characteristic features of standard employment and present alternatives: fixed-term employment, part-time work or work on demand; civil or commercial contracts; and having no direct relationship with just one employer, with employers’ functions and roles split among several bodies.

These variations are intended to lead to mutually beneficial arrangements, simultaneously addressing businesses’ and workers’ needs. However, the reality appears to be more complex. Workers do not necessarily have the opportunity to craft their work obligations around personal needs. Highly skilled or very specialised workers who have the power to tailor the conditions under which they perform their activity can be in a win-win situation. Others, however, belonging to more vulnerable groups of workers – migrants, low-skilled workers, young workers and some

⁷ Council Directive 91/383/EEC of 25 June 1991, supplementing the measures to encourage improvement in the safety and health at work of workers with a fixed-duration employment relationship or a temporary employment relationship; Council Directive 97/81/EC of 15 December 1997 concerning the Framework Agreement on part-time work concluded by UNICE, CEEP and the ETUC; Council Directive 1999/70/EC of 28 June 1999 concerning the framework agreement on fixed-term work concluded by ETUC, UNICE and CEEP; Directive 2008/104/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 November 2008 on temporary agency work; and Directive (EU) 2019/1152 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on transparent and predictable working conditions in the European Union.

groups of women (such as single mothers) – do not necessarily have this negotiating power and therefore often enter into an employer-driven flexibility pattern, with little or no control over their contractual and working conditions.

Situations become particularly problematic when such forms of employment are not voluntary and do not act as a stepping stone to more secure forms of employment. While part-time work tends to be voluntary, in 2017, 60% of temporary workers indicated that their main reason for working on such a contract was that they could not find permanent employment. Furthermore, transition rates from temporary to permanent employment remain relatively low, particularly in countries with high shares of temporary employment (Eurofound, 2020a).

Digitalisation: Platform work

The digital revolution and the general acceleration in the pace of technological change have contributed to the fragmentation of work. One of the consequences of workplace digitalisation already noted is the expansion in ICT-based flexible work, with its associated benefits and challenges. Another phenomenon closely linked to technological advances is the development of new businesses models and in particular platform work. Platform work is a form of employment where organisations or individuals use an online platform to access other organisations or individuals to solve problems or provide services in exchange for payment (Eurofound, 2018g). It is challenging to gather reliable data on the scale of platform work. According to the COLLEEM survey conducted by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC), which contains a direct measure of service provision via platforms by the respondents in 14 EU Member States, 1.4% of the workforce do platform work as their main job, 4.1% do it as a secondary job, 3.1% are marginal platform workers and 2.4% are sporadic (European Commission, 2020a).

Although the scale of this type of employment remains small, there is a significant associated policy debate, not least because it challenges established labour market concepts, regulations and institutions (Eurofound, 2019c). Eurofound research emphasises the important differences in the quality of working conditions and contractual arrangements between different types of platform work, but policy attention is understandably focused on the type that comprises low-skilled tasks, which includes, for example, transport services such as Uber and Deliveroo. This type of work represented more than 30% of platforms and platform workers in 2017, making it the most widespread type of platform work in Europe (Eurofound, 2019c). One of the main complications associated with this type of platform work is the classification of workers'

employment status, whether as employees or self-employed. Proper classification is a key issue, as it defines workers' rights and entitlements, for example as regards social protection, working time, earnings and representation. Courts have begun to address these issues, and the debate around classification is likely to remain high on the policy agenda.

Flexibility: Casual work

Casual work is among the forms of work that aim for better adaptation of work and employment relationships to the needs of both businesses and workers through increasing labour market flexibility. Eurofound's research on casual work illustrates the key challenges that these forms of contracting work pose to workers, work organisation and business models (Eurofound, 2019d). As a starting point, it highlights the challenge of a lack of a universally agreed definition of casual work. The European Parliament (2000) described it as 'work which is irregular or intermittent, with no expectation of continuous employment'. The absence of regularity and the ad hoc nature of work go hand in hand, as the employment of casual workers depends on fluctuations in the employer's workload. The employer is not obliged to regularly provide workers with work and instead has the flexibility of calling them in 'on demand' (Eurofound, 2018h).

Casual workers, therefore, often experience unpredictable and irregular working hours. This results in unpredictable and insecure income, increasing the likelihood that these workers will have difficulty making ends meet. Beyond the short-term challenges, casual workers are also more likely to face negative long-term consequences, with reduced pension entitlements and, consequently, less economic security in old age. Several Member States have addressed the risk of precariousness for casual workers and have acted to include them in social protection. However, most national models cover casual workers fully only if their income reaches a certain minimum threshold, leaving a proportion of them unprotected (Eurofound, 2019d).

A key question is whether the spread of such work arrangements could result in a more general acceptance of the fragmentation of work. Since the Great Recession, there has been a pronounced rise in casual work in several Member States. This is the case especially for newly recruited workers, as evidence from Czechia, the Netherlands, Poland and the United Kingdom illustrates. Several countries have opted to 'normalise' forms of casual work, either through specific regulation that brings casual forms of work closer to standard employment (as in France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands) or using already existing (normal) contract types, for example civil law contracts in Poland (Eurofound, 2019d).

Eurofound's research also showed that casual forms of work can pose challenges for workers in standard employment. As workers on open-ended contracts often work side by side and on the same tasks as casual workers, competition can develop, with standard workers fearing that they may lose their jobs and be replaced with cheaper and more flexible workers. Secondly, workers on permanent contracts must invest time and resources to integrate newly recruited staff into work processes. Given the high turnover of casual workers, this can be time-consuming and can increase the workload or work intensity of workers on permanent contracts, while potentially reducing productivity. Often there is a lack of time to build the mutual confidence and trust necessary for an efficient and smooth work process. Finally, there is also a potential impact on wages and other working conditions. Being able to rely on an easily available, flexible and often cheaper workforce when needed increases employers' negotiating power to place downwards pressure on wages and working conditions. Casual workers are also less likely to be organised and to be members of a trade union and often have no voice in collective negotiations.

From the employer's perspective, casual work is a flexible form of employment that allows workers to be quickly hired for tasks that arise at short notice (Eurofound, 2018i), and to be shed rapidly and without significant costs when demand declines. In lower income and lower profit sectors, especially, some companies see casual work as a response to globalisation, allowing them to remain competitive.

However, the downsides are also apparent. The expected financial advantages do not always materialise. In addition, the availability of cheap labour allows labour-intensive production processes to be maintained as an alternative to making productivity-enhancing innovation investments. The tacit knowledge that workers accumulate is not retained or shared within the firm to the same extent if there is a flexible workforce rather than permanent staff. Lower levels of motivation and commitment towards the company and the tasks assigned can also be observed. As a result of lower productivity – or the provision of lower quality products or services – the company's reputation can be affected.

While many employer organisations call for the further flexibilisation of employment relationships, others stress the need for security in hiring workers and emphasise the benefits of a stable workforce that is trained in and committed to the company culture. These arguments are behind the trend of permittance in France: employers re-hire the same casual workers, allowing them to skip the induction and training period, and rely on skills and competences already acquired and tested to ensure good-quality work outputs.

The key issue at the societal level is to ensure that the flexibility desired by employers and workers goes hand in hand with the protection of workers and fair competition. Enhancing the predictability of working conditions is one of the main objectives of the Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions adopted in 2019. The situation of casual workers will require specific attention in the transposition and implementation of this directive.⁸

Box 3: Multiple-job holding and job quality

A small, though not insignificant, number of workers in the EU hold down more than one job. These multiple-job holders represent about 4% of the workforce in the EU27 and the UK (3.6% of men and 4.5% of women). However, some of its consequences are of concern for the workers involved in this practice.

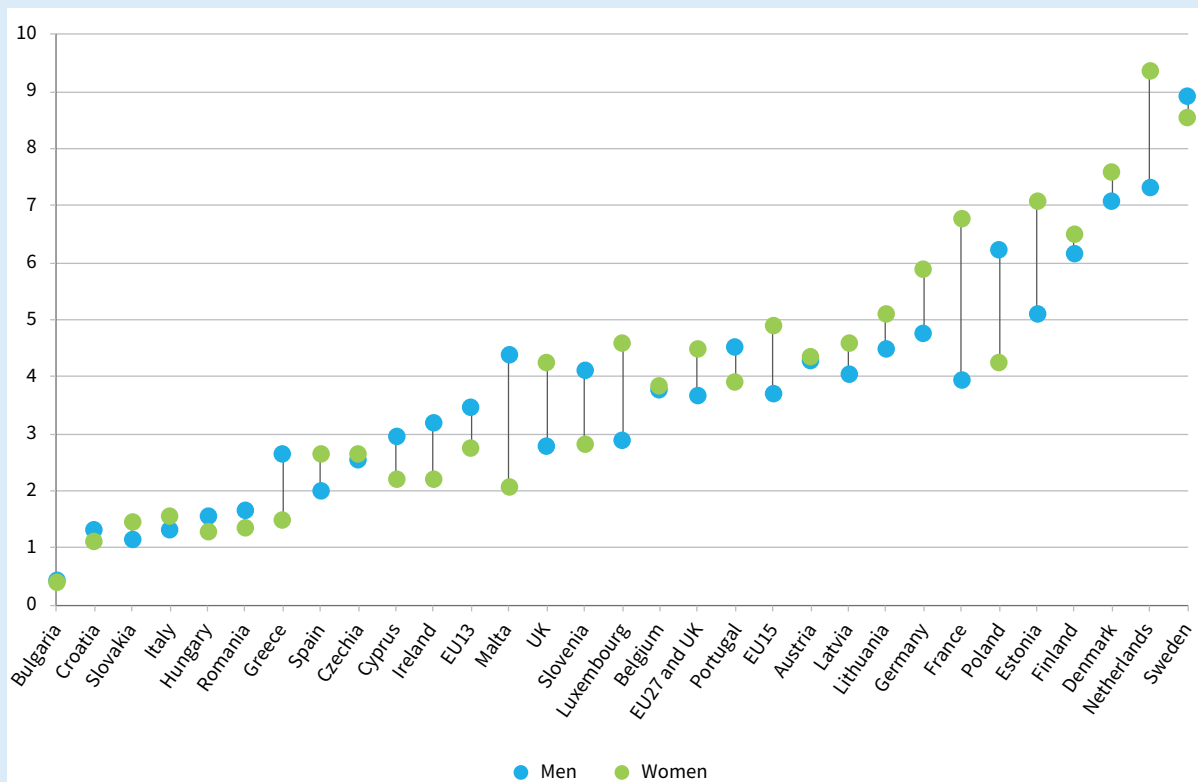
Multiple-job holding can offer individuals an opportunity to acquire new skills, gain work experience or establish their own business. However, it can also signify dissatisfaction with the working conditions in a person's main job, linked, for instance, to insufficient hours of work or income, to a mismatch between one's skills and experience and those used at work, or to a lack of opportunities for career advancement.

Prevalence and employment status

It is becoming more common: the number of multiple-job holders in the EU increased from 8.9 million in 2013 to 9.3 million in 2018. As Figure 41 illustrates, the prevalence varies across countries, and while more women than men are multiple-job holders overall, the opposite is the case in the countries that joined the EU after 2004 (the EU13) as well as Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Sweden.

⁸ Directive (EU) 2019/1152 needs to be transposed at Member State level by 2022.

Figure 41: Multiple-job holders as a proportion of total employment (%), by gender and country, EU27 and the UK, 2018



Source: EU-LFS

In terms of employment status, 60% are employees in both their main and second jobs. Others combine employee status with self-employment; combinations involving self-employment are increasing for female multiple-job holders.

Working time

Multiple-job holding does raise concerns about the impact it has on workers’ health and well-being. According to EWCS data, multiple-job holders, and particularly male multiple-job holders, are more likely to work long days (more than 10 hours in a day) and atypical hours (nights, Saturdays and Sundays) than single-job holders. They are also more likely to work 48 hours or more per week and to report insufficient rest between two working days (insufficient rest being less than 11 hours). This means that the limits prescribed by the European Working Time Directive, which aims to protect workers’ health and safety, may be breached.

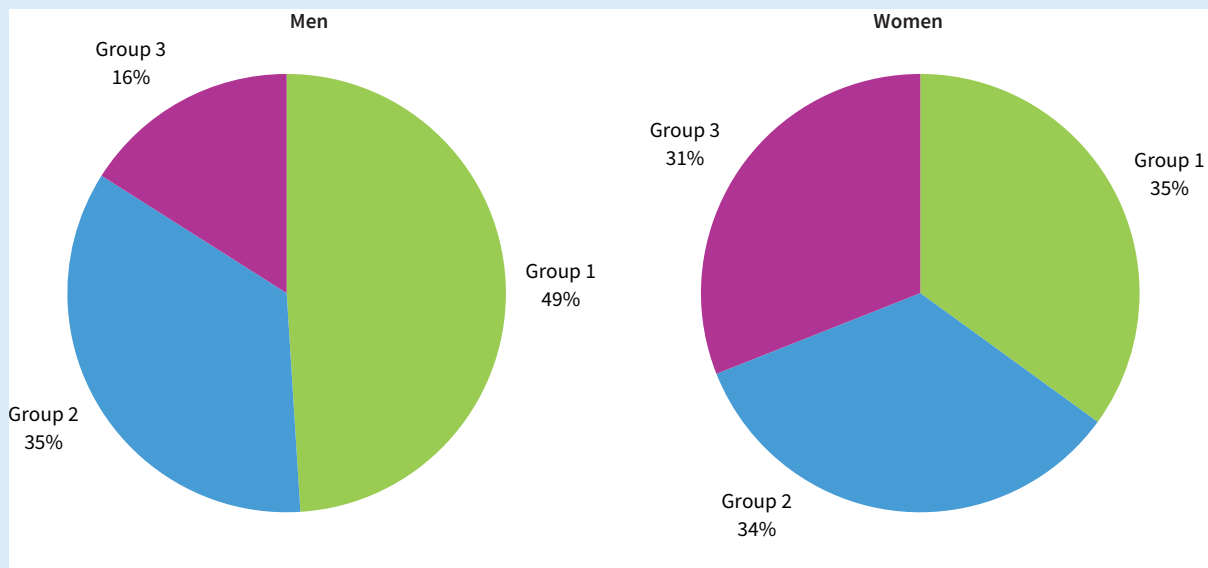
Counter-intuitively, multiple-job holders report achieving a similar balance between their working hours and family or social commitments as single-job holders. However, they are also more likely to report certain activities indicative of a relatively poor work-life balance: irregular working hours,⁹ being requested to come to work at short notice and working in their free time to meet work demands. They are also more likely to work while sick (presenteeism) than single-job holders.

Job quality

Does the job quality of the main job shed light on the reasons why workers search for another paid activity? To answer this question, three groups of male and female multiple-job holders were identified on the basis of the job quality of their main jobs, assessed using the seven dimensions of job quality (Figure 42).

9 High regularity means working the same number of hours per day and per week, working the same number of days per week and having fixed starting and finishing times.

Figure 42: Job quality profiles of multiple-job holders' main jobs, by gender, EU27 and the UK, 2015



Source: EWCS 2015

The first group, to which 49% of male and 35% of female multiple-job holders belong, is made up mostly of high-earning professionals with comparatively good job quality in their main jobs. They report high levels of skills development and skills use as well as a good social environment. The main issue within this group is long working hours, but they do not report poor work–life balance or high work intensity. Men in this group are some of the highest earners, while women are concentrated in the two lowest income quintiles. This is despite having similar working conditions and similar occupational profiles, albeit working in different sectors.

The next largest group is made up of those multiple-job holders whose main jobs have very poor job quality. They score below average in every job quality dimension, except for Skills and discretion and, for men, Prospects and Earnings. These workers are usually younger and have the longest working hours. Men report working, on average, over 48 hours per week and have a mixed occupational profile, with an even spread between white- and blue-collar jobs, and high- and low-skilled jobs. Women in this group work, on average, the conventional working week and have clearer profiles: the largest occupational groups are professionals and technicians and associate professionals. However, they earn much less than their male counterparts and are concentrated at the bottom of the income ladder. About one-third of male and one-third of female multiple job holders are in this category.

Multiple-job holders in the third group have a decent social environment but score low on skills development, future prospects and earnings. Twice as many women (31%) are categorised in this group as men (16%). In this group, working hours are much shorter than in the other groups. Perhaps linked with this is the fact that workers in this group are also more likely to be lone parents. If taking care of a child by yourself does not permit you to work a regular 40-hour work week, you may need to piece together several jobs with fewer hours each to make the schedule work and still secure sufficient income.

In summary, the analysis of the job quality of multiple-job holders' main jobs confirms that there are differences based on gender. While women are evenly distributed across the three groups, almost half of male multiple-job holders are concentrated in jobs with comparatively good job quality. The proportion of men in the very low-earning cluster is about half that of women. Overall, about one-third of multiple-job holders are in very poor-quality main jobs.

Job quality challenges in the era of COVID-19

The containment measures put in place by governments around the world to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus, which was declared a global pandemic on 11 March 2020, put large parts of the global economy effectively in hibernation for several months (European Commission, 2020b). The containment measures affected the economic sectors differently. Sectors and services deemed essential (such as food and pharmaceutical production, utilities, transport, health and some forms of retail) continued to operate, in some cases even taking on additional staff. Some non-essential sectors, such as leisure and hospitality, on the other hand, were shut down, in some cases literally overnight. Other non-essential business activity was able to continue online, and workers started to telework from home. According to Eurofound's online Living, working and COVID-19 survey,¹⁰ in April 2020, this was the case for over one-third of the EU workforce (37%). Working conditions changed for all groups of workers, but in very different ways.

Working conditions of 'essential workers'

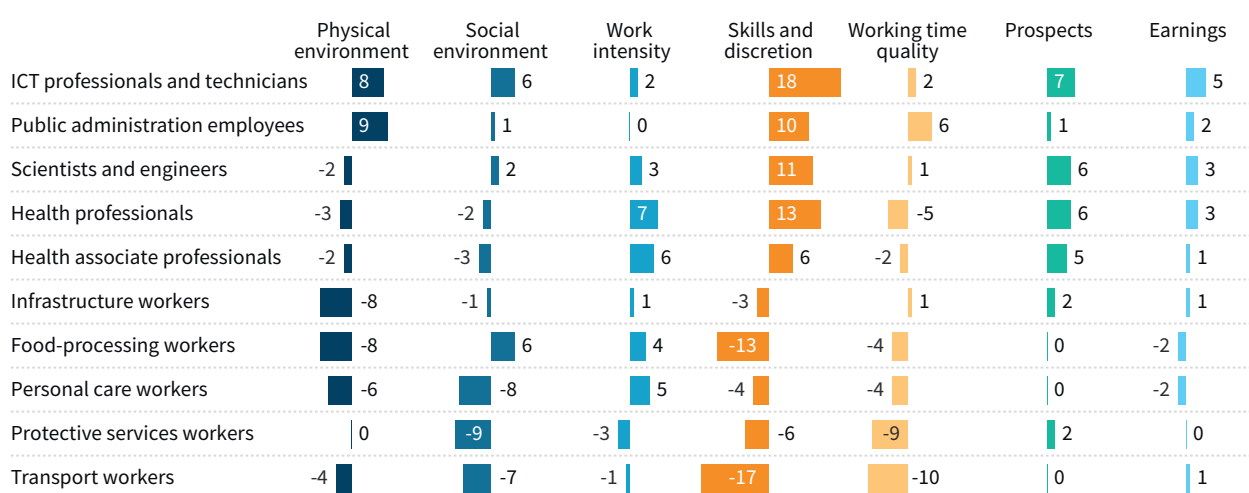
The guidelines concerning the exercise of the free movement of workers during the COVID-19 outbreak, published by the European Commission in March 2020, presented a list of 'critical occupations'. According to this, critical occupations are frontline jobs in fighting the pandemic (such as healthcare workers), as well as those that ensure economic continuity in times of crisis

and that preserve the European single market (such as transport workers). This list has some differences from, but also many similarities with, national lists published by Member States' governments.

For the current study, EWCS data were analysed to discover the job quality in these critical occupations prior to the crisis. (They do not correspond fully to the Commission's list due to data limitations in the EWCS.) This analysis shows substantial differences between them. As Figure 43 illustrates, many frontline workers were already faced with challenges in several dimensions. Health professionals (such as medical doctors and nurses) and health associate professionals (such as radiographers and medical and pharmaceutical technicians) had above-average scores on the Prospects, Skills and discretion and Earnings dimensions, but they were performing below average in relation to Physical environment, Social environment, Working time quality and Work intensity. As already highlighted in Chapter 2, more health professionals report that work has a negative impact on their health than the average in low- and mid-level occupations. Personal care workers (including nursing aides, patient care assistants and psychiatric aides) were in an even more difficult situation, with worse-than-average job quality in all dimensions except Prospects.

Protective service workers (including police officers, security workers and prison guards) and transport workers (including bus and train drivers and pilots) had very low scores on Skills and discretion, Working time quality and Social environment. Their scores on Work

Figure 43: Job quality of selected critical occupations in relation to the workforce average

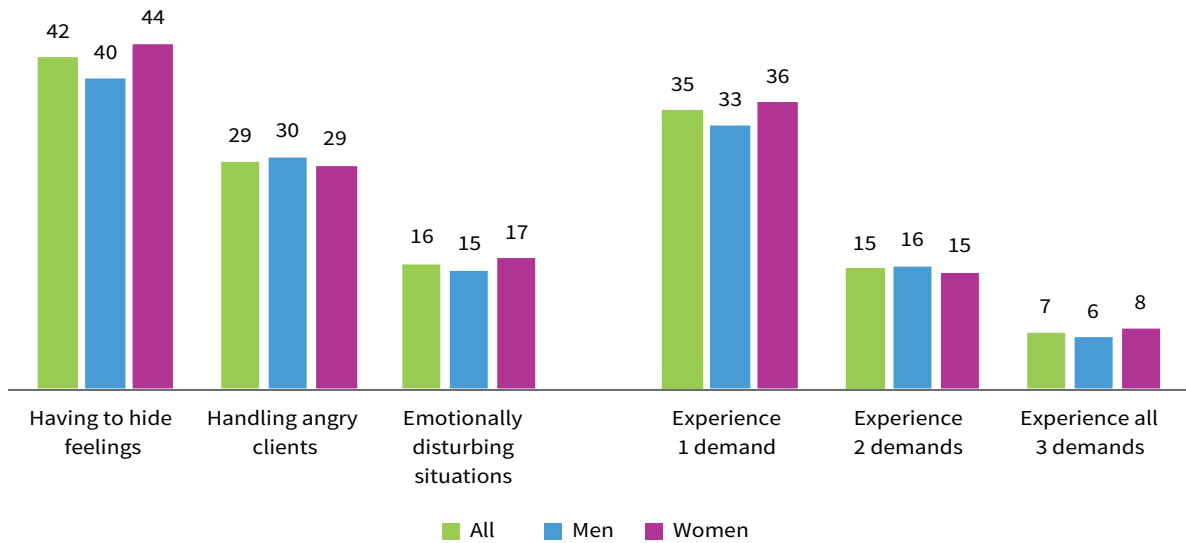


Notes: Values on the right side of each axis represent better-than-average scores while values to the left represent worse-than-average scores, except for Work intensity, for which the reverse is the case.

Source: EWCS 2015

¹⁰ The Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey is an online tool designed to gather information quickly from respondents via a web link. Unlike Eurofound's two regular population surveys – the EWCS and the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) – this e-survey applied a non-probabilistic sampling method. Survey participants were recruited using snowball sampling methods and social media advertisements.

Figure 44: Emotional demands on ISWs and extent of those demands (%), EU27 and the UK, 2015



Sources: EWCS 2015, Eurofound (2020c)

intensity were only slightly better than the average, while their Prospects and Earnings scores were close to the average. Food-processing workers reported scores on Skills and discretion and Physical environment much lower than average, much like infrastructure workers.

During the crisis, many aspects of working conditions deteriorated further for workers in essential activities. Generally, health risks have been higher for all those not able to work from home. Frontline workers have been at greater risk of contracting the virus because of their direct contact with the public and, in the case of healthcare workers, with patients suffering from COVID-19.

In addition, many of these workers experienced unprecedented levels of demands and work intensity. This was exacerbated for health professionals by the fact that, in many countries, staff shortages were already prevalent prior to the crisis, and there was a lack of access to personal protective equipment, as well as a lack of beds and ventilators for the sick. In some cases, this included having to select the patients to be first attended to (and possibly saved) in light of the lack of resources.

The importance of emotional demands in jobs that require direct interaction with clients, patients, students or pupils was examined in Eurofound’s policy brief on interactive service workers (ISWs) (Eurofound, 2020c). ISWs are a broad category including, for instance, call-centre workers, business consultants, teachers, nurses and postal service workers.

According to EWCS data, in 2015, there were around 75.5 million employees (aged 15 years or over), or 41% of the workforce, in the EU27 and the UK directly dealing with service recipients. Almost 35% of these workers had been exposed to at least one of the three types of emotional demands that the EWCS asks about: hiding one’s feelings, dealing with angry clients and being in emotionally demanding situations. 15% were exposed to two or more of these factors (Figure 44).

The ISW workforce in general is female-dominated. This is also true for emotionally demanding interactive service work: 61% of workers in such environments are women. Health professionals and health associate professionals account for 15% of ISWs with high emotional demands, followed by sales workers (13%), teaching professionals (12%) and personal care workers (9%).

The impacts on health and well-being of coping with such emotional demands are significant. ISWs with high emotional demands score lower on a mental well-being index (63 points out of 100) than ISWs who do not have high emotional demands (70 points). In addition, over 50% of ISWs with high emotional demands report suffering from stressful work, exhaustion and fatigue, compared to between 24% and 34% of workers generally and ISWs with low emotional demands.

According to Eurofound estimates, 36% of all those who interact with service recipients are workers in the newly defined critical occupations, including health workers on the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition

to the emotional demands on these workers, work intensity is a pressing issue. According to the Eurofound report *Gender equality at work*, the health sector already had the highest work intensity among all sectors in 2015, and it was much higher for women (Eurofound, 2020b). As indicated above, COVID-19 has drastically increased work intensity within hospitals and other care settings. However, as the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) highlighted, nursing and healthcare work are among the most undervalued and underpaid jobs in the EU (EIGE, 2020).

Remote working during COVID-19

Remote working during COVID-19 offered a buffer against job loss, the reduction of working hours and the loss of earnings. Recent analysis done jointly by the JRC and Eurofound shows that, whereas over 50% of those not teleworking had seen their working hours decrease, this was the case for fewer than 40% of teleworkers. Non-teleworkers were also twice as likely to report that they feared they might lose their job within the next three months (European Commission and Eurofound, 2020).

Women were somewhat more likely to report having started working from home during the crisis than men (41% versus 37%, respectively). The biggest rise in incidence was among young workers, a group that had little access to telework before the crisis. As regards educational status, employees with third-level degrees were much more likely to telework than others.

Eurofound's 2020 online survey also illustrates the difficulties encountered by workers working remotely in the special circumstances created by the pandemic, which left many workers with no choice but to work from home every day, while schools and childcare facilities were closed. Among workers teleworking, over one in four (27%) stated that they worked in their free time to meet the demands of work (at least every other day) compared with 18% of workers overall.

Another issue is work–life conflict. People with children have been particularly challenged during the COVID-19 crisis, especially parents of young children. More than one in five workers (22%) living with children under 12 years of age reported difficulties in concentrating on their job all or most of the time, compared with just 5% of households with no children and 7% with children aged 12–17 years. Among those teleworking during the crisis, over a quarter (26%) live in households with children under 12 years of age and so have had to confront this challenge (Eurofound, 2020f).

In light of the increase in telework during the pandemic, which will arguably lead to a broader shift towards this way of working in a 'new normal', policy debates around the regulatory framework for teleworking and the modalities of connection and disconnection have re-ignited. European cross-industry social partner framework agreements have been at the forefront of setting standards for telework, with an agreement negotiated as far back as 2002. A new agreement on digitalisation reached in June 2020 acknowledged many of the key challenges of the increase in ICT-enabled flexible working arrangements.

Supporting workers during COVID-19

While the pandemic has led to a dramatic increase in teleworking, it has at the same time demonstrated that not all jobs are suitable for remote working. The workers most significantly affected by the pandemic were those whose tasks were neither 'teleworkable' nor on the list of critical services. Although the full employment impact of COVID-19 remains cushioned by widespread access to short-time working schemes, it is clear that differences in the labour market impact of the pandemic have some important consequences for labour market inequalities (Eurofound, 2020g). The sectors most affected by business suspension and closures have been mainly those that are female-dominated, that employ more young and low-paid workers, and that have more temporary or self-employed activity (European Commission, 2020c). This was a cause for particular concern because it meant unemployment or loss of income associated with reduced working hours was more likely to affect workers already struggling to make ends meet, as well as those less likely to be covered by social protection. While the challenges posed by the current design of social protection systems in the context of an expansion of non-standard work have been the subject of policy debate for some time,¹¹ the pandemic provided a new impetus for discussions around what might be described as universal minimum income schemes.

The extent to which workers on non-standard contracts and the self-employed have been affected by COVID-19 has led many Member States to institute income-protection measures that previously appeared to be impossible to instigate (Eurofound, 2020g). Since March 2020, 19 Member States as well as the UK have introduced measures covering different groups of self-employed workers, and a number of countries (for example, France and Italy) have specifically opened up short-time working schemes to workers on

11 A Council recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed was adopted in 2019.

temporary contracts. However, as Eurofound's report on the policy response to COVID-19 demonstrates, although such measures have largely been welcomed by stakeholders, the new income protection schemes for the self-employed and other groups not previously protected tend to offer lower benefits than those provided to workers in standard employment, in some cases not linked to prior income or amounting to only a one-off payment (Eurofound, 2020g).

Another feature of the expansion of social protection systems was the extension of paid sick leave to a wider group of labour market participants.

Thus, having protection systems that cover all categories of workers has become indispensable during the health emergency, in part to discourage individuals

from reporting to work while sick because they cannot afford to lose their income. It has not been straightforward for governments to extend coverage, however. The public debate in Italy in April 2020 on the best way to cover undeclared workers, who do not pay into social protection systems but who also lost their incomes, epitomises these challenges. As highlighted by Eurofound in a blog post on the problems facing governments regarding undeclared workers during the pandemic, different approaches exist across Europe (Eurofound, 2020h). While Spain implemented a scheme to protect the incomes of domestic workers, this is limited to registered workers in this sector. Because their activity is not declared, undeclared workers are excluded from income support and often fail to claim other hardship support for fear of detection.

Summary and policy pointers

This chapter has highlighted some of the challenges ahead in achieving the target of not just more but also better jobs. Creating and maintaining high-quality jobs remains a crucial goal in an evolving world of work, where changes in the way that work is organised and delivered lead to new challenges and where traditional solutions may no longer be applicable or effective.

Structural change, most evident in the growth of the service sector, has led to the emergence of new workplace risks. Many of these are psychosocial risks, which can be more challenging to address than physical hazards, not only because workers may be more reluctant to report them and their impact on their mental well-being but also because the social interactions and work processes causing them may be more complex. However, the human cost and financial burden associated with the consequences, such as stress and burnout, and the fact that psychosocial risks are more widespread in sectors with expanding employment, require a search for solutions. Particularly promising in this regard is research that demonstrates the positive feedback loop between high-involvement work organisation, well-designed jobs and better health outcomes in a model of work where the demands of the job are balanced by the resources encircling it.

Two trends are driving the growth of ICT-based flexible work, what we call TICTM work, the second challenge highlighted in this chapter: the increase in female labour market participation and the increasing digitalisation of working life. The ability to work from home and other locations on an adaptable work schedule has many advantages and much potential for enhanced work–life balance. At the same time, the flexibilisation of when and where to work risks undermining the balance between work and non-work life by blurring the boundaries between the two. Eurofound research highlights the importance of distinguishing between the types of TICTM work that can contribute to reconciliation of home and work and those that might endanger it. Regulation of TICTM, for example through a right to disconnect, could be a way to address the risks associated with a culture of work characterised by high levels of autonomy but also by high job demands and constant availability. The right to disconnect is a worker's right to refrain from engaging in work-related electronic communications, such as emails or other messages, during non-work hours. By March 2020, only four countries in Europe had passed legislation that included the right to disconnect (Belgium, France, Italy and Spain). In all cases, the law relies on the social partners to implement this right through collective agreements at different levels (for a detailed description, see Eurofound, 2020i). A social dialogue approach to the issues of connection and disconnection is also favoured by a recent European social partner agreement on digitalisation.

A further development described in this chapter that challenges the established solutions is the rise in non-standard employment relationships. Although the overall proportion of part-time and temporary contracts did not increase significantly between 2008 and 2018, there has been an expansion in some Member States of the most precarious forms of work, including working without a contract, casual work, part-time work with very low hours and fixed-term contracts of very short duration. This has contributed to the increase in the numbers of workers not being covered (or being covered only partially) by employment and social protection, as most employment and social protection mechanisms continue to be based on the standard employment relationship. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed some of these fault lines and has led policymakers at EU and Member State levels to take unprecedented measures not only in terms of their financial scale but also in their ambition to provide social protection and income support for groups that had previously been excluded. However, most of the legislative initiatives are currently time-limited, and it remains to be seen whether they are withdrawn once the pandemic abates or represent tentative steps towards a more encompassing approach that will help to reduce inequalities in a 'new normal'.

Conclusion

The June 2020 European Council conclusions on enhancing well-being at work stressed the importance for all stakeholders to

include a ‘well-being at work’ perspective in their reflections in the policy fields within their remit ... [and] continue improving and developing, in cooperation with the EU institutions, reliable and internationally comparable indicators for measuring well-being at work.

(Council of the European Union, 2020, p. 9)

Summarising the key findings of Eurofound’s research on working conditions conducted over the programming period 2017–2020, this report contributes to this debate by outlining the existing evidence base regarding trends in working conditions, the challenges that remain and emerging areas of concern. Although this work was carried out prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the findings and policy pointers drawn from it were brought into sharper focus by the pandemic, reinforcing the policy messages.

Improving working conditions and job quality for all

The findings presented in this report lead to two rather different conclusions: on the one hand, good progress has been made towards improving job quality overall, demonstrating the effectiveness of regulatory frameworks, joint action by the social partners, and workplace policies and practices; on the other hand, important differences remain between different groups of workers. These persisting differences, and the fact that new challenges are developing, signal that the improvement of job quality, in pursuit of increased well-being at work, must be inclusive. In other words, it must address the variance between countries, sectors, occupations, employment statuses, worker characteristics and business models.

Learning from progress made in different countries and sectors

One of the striking elements of the analysis of trends in job quality relates to the differences between sectors and countries. The accounts of the sectors that appear to be lagging behind – or have indeed witnessed a worsening in working conditions – can act as a guide for policymakers, showing where efforts need to be concentrated, for example reducing physical risks in the construction sector or addressing work intensity for service and sales workers. The divergent experiences of countries and country clusters in relation to the same sectors and occupations show that poorer working

conditions and job quality are not necessarily inherent in specific sectoral and occupational profiles and can be addressed. This points not only to the need for a better understanding of the factors that underpin these differences in performance but also to the potential for learning, which can be supported through EU-level initiatives.

Improving working conditions independently of employment status

As Eurofound research shows, employment status still matters for job quality. Temporary employees, part-time workers, casual workers and certain groups of self-employed are among the most disadvantaged groups in several aspects of working conditions. Temporary employees (particularly those with very short-term contracts) have poorer career prospects and less scope to exercise their skills and discretion in the workplace. Part-time workers, and especially involuntary part-time workers, experience lower job quality regarding, for example, access to training and the social environment at work. The solo self-employed have more autonomy at work than employees, but they work in a poorer social environment, their working time quality suffers, and they are less likely to take up training. This report discerned the growing gap in access to training between those in a standard employment relationship and workers on atypical contracts. Moreover, non-standard forms of work put workers at risk of having insufficient access to social protection, career opportunities and good-quality jobs in general. This is of particular concern in light of evidence of the expansion in so-called compound non-standard employment relationships (Eurofound, 2020a).

At European level, several directives, strategies and actions have sought to ensure equal treatment of workers with different employment statuses and different employment contracts. Some of these measures date back over two decades (such as the Part-time Work Directive and Fixed-term Work Directive), which raises the question of whether or not they have fully achieved their goals. The Europe 2020 strategy and the European Pillar of Social Rights re-stated the importance of the quality of jobs:

Proclaimed by all EU institutions in 2017, the 20 principles of the Pillar aim at improving equal opportunities and jobs for all, fair working conditions and social protection and inclusion. Implementing them upholds the commitment, made at the highest level, that people are at the centre, regardless of change, and that no one is left behind.

(European Commission, 2020d)

The Council recommendation on access to social protection aims to ensure that everyone is protected during unemployment, illness, old age or invalidity, or in case of accidents at work, regardless of their employment status (Council of the European Union, 2019).

The issue of working conditions and how they are linked to employment status intersects with the debate around the emergence of new business models and platform work in particular. While Eurofound research demonstrates that not all platform work is of poor quality, the question of the employment status of some platform workers has been subject to debate, not least as a result of relevant case law. The working conditions of different types of platform workers is therefore an area deserving of further investigation. Connected to this, but not limited to platform work, are policies that are required to combat abuses and to address undeclared and fraudulent forms of work. Of particular importance is clarifying the definition of employment statuses in many national regulations and improving controls and deterrent measures with the aim of enhancing working conditions for workers in atypical, undeclared and indeed fraudulent contractual arrangements.

The COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a further catalyst for policy action at Member State level to increase protections for the self-employed and workers on atypical contracts. Many countries have extended their social protection systems and income protection measures to cover workers on atypical contracts who were not previously covered. It remains to be seen whether this policy momentum is retained beyond the health emergency.

Recognising individual worker characteristics

The ambition to achieve fair working conditions in the EU requires that the differences in working conditions based on worker characteristics be addressed. This relates to the impact of gender and country of origin but also to level of education, which is closely interlinked with socioeconomic status.

Gender differences remain bound up with the distribution of paid and unpaid work and the valuation of so-called ‘women’s jobs’ (and women’s overrepresentation in these careers). While there has been some progress in relation to the gender segregation of the labour market, there have also been some backward steps that have had a negative impact on women particularly, such as the reduction in employees’ ability to take time off from work on short notice to deal with urgent family matters. The implementation of a strong gender equality agenda aimed at achieving a better balance in the division of

caring tasks between men and women, the reduction of vertical and horizontal labour market segmentation, and pay transparency is therefore as important as ever. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted that the working conditions in many female-dominated frontline jobs require further attention, as well as demanding a re-evaluation of the societal worth of these jobs and the remuneration and rewards they offer.

Tackling emerging risks

In addition to trends linked to the development of new business models mentioned above, there are other emerging risks requiring policy attention. These are connected to the ongoing shift towards a service economy and the accelerating digitalisation of working life.

Psychosocial risks

While physical risks have not disappeared and remain a significant challenge in some sectors, attention is increasingly focused on the human and financial costs associated with psychosocial risks. This is acknowledged in the June 2020 Council conclusions on enhancing well-being at work.

While stress, burnout, depression and other psychosocial risks at work are costly for employers and workers, and for society in general, and are estimated to be exceeding 4% of GDP, Member States still face challenges in addressing them effectively.

(Council of the European Union, 2020)

Over-connectedness

ICT-based flexible work is growing in importance and has contributed to the retention of employment during the pandemic. This report has demonstrated the advantages and disadvantages that can be associated with this form of work, depending on its intensity. The negative psychosocial consequences of the blurring of the divide between work and the private sphere and the reported impact of increased working hours and insufficient rest are attracting more policy attention. Most recently, in September 2020, the European Parliament presented an own-initiative report including a legislative proposal on a ‘right to disconnect’. A Eurofound report (2020j) documents existing practices on disconnection in the context of national legislation (in Belgium, France, Italy and Spain) and as developed at company level. These approaches emphasise the role of collective bargaining in agreeing on the modalities of disconnection, which has the potential – once again – to raise the issue of fairness, as workers in sectors not covered by collective bargaining are less likely to benefit. These include workers on atypical contracts, low-paid sectors and workers in countries with weakly developed collective bargaining systems.

Interactive working

Sectoral shifts in the economy have contributed – and will continue to contribute – to an increase in what this report has described as ‘interactive service work’, which requires workers to have contact with service recipients such as clients, customers, patients, users and pupils in their jobs. Such workers have been shown to be more likely to experience and suffer from the psychosocial effects of emotional demands and dealing with difficult clients. It is largely these workers who have seen their working conditions deteriorate further as a result of COVID-19, as many are involved in the delivery of essential services. Given that women are more likely to work in these sectors, policy measures in this sphere have a clear gender equality dimension.

Involving all stakeholders

It is paramount that companies and workers together devise a form of work organisation that allows for good job quality and working conditions. As Eurofound research has shown, high-involvement work practices are beneficial to all. The Council conclusions on enhancing well-being at work stress the ‘importance of workers’ involvement in decision-making processes’, which leads to positive outcomes, such as ‘enhancing satisfaction and self-development, strengthening overall well-being at work and increasing productivity’.

Worker involvement leads to greater commitment and motivates workers to make full use of their skills and to keep them current. It strengthens their initiative, especially in situations where close managerial control of work performance is unfeasible and creates the right work environment for innovation. Such involvement is particularly beneficial for low-skilled workers, but research shows that workers in low-skilled sectors and occupations are currently less likely to work in high-involvement organisations.

Strong social dialogue structures are an important factor when it comes to devising solutions to the challenges outlined in this report. These structures should include workers in non-standard employment relationships, the self-employed and workers in lower-skilled and lower-paid sectors, as well as workers (and employers) in the platform economy. Addressing this issue will be a key challenge for social partner organisations, enabling workers and employers to find solutions to existing and emerging challenges that best fit their needs within a suitable regulatory environment.

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This flagship report summarises the key findings of Eurofound’s research on working conditions conducted over the programming period 2017–2020. It maps the progress achieved since 2000 in improving working conditions and examines whether all workers have benefited equally from positive change. It highlights which groups are the most at risk of experiencing poor working conditions and being left behind. Given the changes in the world of work, emerging challenges for good job quality are identified. The report also provides evidence for measures that could lead to the further improvement of work and the achievement of fair working conditions for all in the EU.

The analysis shows that, overall, job quality in the EU is improving, if slowly. Not all workers are benefiting to the same extent, however. Furthermore, gender, age and contractual status have a significant bearing on a person’s working conditions. And while digitalisation helps to address some job quality issues, it also creates new challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated trends, reinforcing concerns and highlighting the importance of achieving job quality for all.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency established in 1975. Its role is to provide knowledge in the area of social, employment and work-related policies according to Regulation (EU) 2019/127.

