



Quality of employment conditions and employment relations in Europe

Executive summary

Introduction

This report provides an in-depth analysis of the quality of employment conditions and employment relations in the European employed workforce. Employment in the report is viewed as the contractual relationship between an employer and a worker, specifically how the rights and duties embedded into the relationship are translated into real rights. The analysis is mainly based on data from the fifth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), conducted in 2010. Where appropriate, comparisons with earlier waves of the EWCS are made.

The report has four main objectives:

- to build indicators for different dimensions of the quality of employment;
- to identify problematic or advantageous situations regarding the quality of employment, as well as groups of workers requiring special attention;
- to examine the evolution of a number of selected indicators of the quality of employment;
- to investigate the relationship between the quality of employment and a number of characteristics of individual workers, their employing organisations, their broader work characteristics, and variations between countries.

Policy context

European policy is not only directed at the number of people in employment but also at improving the quality of such jobs. Improving job quality is highlighted in the European Employment Strategy (Guideline 7) – ‘Increasing labour market participation of women and

men, reducing structural unemployment and promoting job quality’ – and also forms part of the ‘Agenda for new skills and jobs’, one of the flagship initiatives of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. According to EU employment policy, high employment rates and high quality jobs are not mutually exclusive: good-quality jobs are an important precondition for fostering and safeguarding sustainable working careers, employee motivation and worker productivity. Good-quality jobs also lead to less work-related ill-health and fewer occupational accidents, and overall improvements in occupational health.

Key findings

- In Europe, the proportion of employees with indefinite (open-ended) contracts was 80% in 2010, compared to 78% in 2005 and 83% in 2000.
- Just 5% of employees in Europe were working without an employment contract in 2010: this figure was significantly higher among employees under 35 years of age (13%) and those with a lower level of education (14%). In addition, a number of countries had much higher proportions of workers working without contracts: Turkey (64%), Cyprus (39%), Greece (28%), Malta (27%), Albania (27%) and Ireland (24%).
- Only 32% of European employees in 2010 reported good employability prospects (defined as perceived ability to find a job of similar salary in the event of losing or quitting one’s current job).

- The research identified five main job clusters. The highest levels of employment quality are found in the 'high-quality standard employment relationship' cluster, prevalent among employees with a high educational level, professionals and technicians, office workers and managers, public sector employees, and workers employed in large organisations.
- The lowest levels of employment quality are found in the 'precarious unsustainable' cluster. The majority of workers in this group are younger workers, older women, shop and sales workers, unskilled workers, employees in the agricultural sector and employees in very small organisations.
- There is no significant difference in employment quality between men and women. However, young workers have a lower mean employment quality score, and employees with a higher educational level have higher overall employment quality, compared with those with lower educational attainment.
- Job insecurity is more frequently reported by young workers (21%), workers with lower educational attainment (20%), workers in elementary occupations (26%), and workers in manufacturing (23%).
- The Nordic countries (Finland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway) have the highest levels of employment quality, while eastern and southern countries (Turkey, the former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania and Greece) have the lowest.
- Opportunities for workers to communicate with their superiors about work-related issues and participate in resolving them remain low. Just under half of all salaried workers in the EU (45%) report having an employee representative at their workplace. Workers who report the presence of an employee representative tend to work in larger organisations and in the civil service; they are also found mainly among older, higher-educated, high-skilled white-collar workers.
- Employees in precarious forms of employment are unduly exposed to adverse general work environments, reporting less favourable outcomes in terms of satisfaction, ability to stay in employment, and health and well-being.
- Jobs that strongly depart from the standard employment job type show less favourable results in terms of job satisfaction, reported ability to do the same job until the age of 60, sick leave, and health and well-being.

Policy pointers

- The research points to the ongoing polarisation of the labour force in many European countries between, on one hand, jobs in the extremely time-flexible, highly-skilled niche of the labour market and, on the other, jobs in the numerically flexible, low-skilled segment with poor job content and poor reward. This polarity needs to be addressed in employment policies in order to maintain a sustainable labour force in the long term.
- Flexicurity policies need to address the negative consequences of poor-quality jobs for the well-being, health and job satisfaction of employees. Not tackling this issue will not only have adverse consequences for labour productivity, but is likely to also jeopardise the ability of employees to stay in employment until a later age.
- Developing professional skills and competences and continuous training are essential measures for increasing employability and hence – through improving access to employment contracts – increasing the quality of employment. Despite the existence of a strong political commitment to lifelong learning, just half of all European salaried workers underwent training in 2010. Among women, older workers, lower-skilled workers, workers in small companies, and workers in southern and eastern European countries, the figures are particularly low. Workers in unstable and precarious labour market situations should be targeted as a priority in training initiatives.

Further information

The report *Quality of employment conditions and employment relations in Europe* is available at <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1367>.

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