



# Working conditions and job quality: Comparing sectors in Europe

## Executive summary

### Introduction

This report and the accompanying 33 sectoral information sheets aim to capture the diversity prevalent across sectors in Europe in terms of working conditions and job quality. The report provides a comparative overview of sectors and gives background information that enables the results presented in the individual information sheets to be interpreted. The information sheets indicate how each sector compares to the European average for all sectors, as well as highlighting differences and similarities among different groups of workers.

The sectoral analysis builds on the overview report and secondary analyses of the fifth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS). The research highlights trends across sectors in terms of working time and work–life balance, work organisation, skills and training, employee representation and the psychosocial and physical environment. It identifies sectors that score particularly well or particularly poorly regarding four indicators of job quality. Finally, some light is shed on differences between sectors in terms of the health and well-being of workers and the perceived sustainability of work.

### Policy context

Since its inception, the European Union has paid considerable attention to employment, and improving working conditions is one of its key policy goals. The sectoral perspective is highly relevant to the improvement of working conditions, as many interventions to improve working conditions are organised and implemented at this level. Focusing on the sectoral level has the potential to identify and promote good practices with regard to working conditions, as well as highlighting sectors in which there may be particular problems.

In order to meet the objectives of the EU's Europe 2020 Strategy to achieve high participation in employment, the

issue of sustainable work and employment needs to be given priority. For work and employment to be sustainable, steps need to be taken to avoid workers experiencing multiple disadvantages in terms of working conditions and job quality.

Social partners and other policymakers in the sectors – both at European and national level – have great potential to undertake and foster good practices with regard to working conditions and job quality, which is essential in view of the Europe 2020 goals. In order to tailor the information to the needs of sectoral policymakers, the selection of sectors in the report aimed to reflect the structure of the European sectoral social dialogue committees as closely as possible.

### Key findings

Large differences are found across sectors in terms of working time and the duration and organisation of work. Consequently, sectors differ substantially in terms of work–life balance, which is relatively poor in accommodation, food and beverage services and transport and storage, for example.

There is also considerable variation between sectors in relation to work organisation. In some sectors less than half of the workers work in teams, while in other sectors three-quarters of workers do so. There is similar variation in relation to task rotation and autonomous multiskilling. Sectors with particularly high levels of teamwork, task rotation and autonomy are human health services, residential care and social work.

Just over half (55%) of EU28 workers reported that their skills correspond well with their duties and there is limited variation between sectors on the level of skills match, which ranges from 47% to 60%. However, sectors differ on whether any mismatch that exists is the result of over-skilling or under-skilling.

Sectors differ considerably in terms of the availability of an employee representative at the workplace level. Employee representatives are available to around three-quarters of workers in utilities supply and the chemical industry, but to less than one-quarter of workers in food and beverage services and activities of households.

Exposure to psychosocial risk – in terms of experiencing job strain – is relatively high in the metal industry, transport and storage, the agro-food industry, and textiles and clothing. In terms of physical risks, there is a very clear difference between the services-oriented sectors and the production-oriented sectors, with the former, unsurprisingly, showing considerably lower levels of risk exposure than the latter.

Sectors were compared in terms of four job quality indicators. The following sectors score relatively well on all four indicators of job quality (earnings, prospects, intrinsic job quality and working time quality): the chemical industry, utilities supply, banking, insurance, real estate activities, legal and accounting activities, and financial services. Sectors that score relatively poorly on all four indicators are: administrative services, the agro-food industry, food and beverage services, textiles and clothing, transport and storage, and construction.

In these sectors, a significant proportion of workers are faced with multiple disadvantages, such as low pay, relatively high levels of exposure to both physical and psychosocial risks, irregular working time arrangements, little or no control over working time and few prospects for career improvement. In terms of health and well-being, workers in sectors with poor job quality are approximately twice as likely to report negative outcomes for health and well-being as workers in sectors with good job quality. Similarly, workers in sectors with poor job quality are about half as likely to report the ability to do their job when they are 60 as workers in sectors with good job quality.

It should be noted that sectors are not homogenous, and that they differ in terms of the variation in working conditions and job quality between different groups of workers in the sector. In many service-oriented sectors, workers in manual occupations experience considerably poorer working conditions in terms of

exposure to physical as well as psychosocial risks. Also, in many sectors women are worse off in terms of earnings and prospects and young workers are relatively likely to find themselves faced with multiple disadvantages. The information sheets for each of the sectors provide more insight into these differences within sectors.

## Policy pointers

In view of the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, high priority needs to be given to the issue of sustainable work and employment, as this is a precondition for meeting the objective of high participation in employment.

Steps need to be taken to avoid workers experiencing multiple disadvantages in terms of working conditions and job quality. This requires the specific attention of governments, social partners and individual employers. Stakeholders within the sectors – whether at European, national or local level – are in a position to organise and implement the necessary interventions.

The issue of multiple disadvantages requires particular focus in sectors that have been identified as having relatively poor job quality. Workers in these sectors are shown to report lower levels of health and well-being.

The sectoral information sheets reveal that there is also substantial variation within sectors, between men and women, younger and older workers and workers in different occupations. Therefore, policymakers in sectors that on average score relatively well in terms of job quality should consider measures to identify workers in the sector that are less well off in multiple respects.

In endeavouring to address the situation of multiple disadvantages, policymakers should try to identify and promote win-win arrangements, as working conditions associated with positive worker health and well-being are often also associated with high worker motivation, creativity and commitment, leading to good levels of work sustainability and therefore, ultimately, the productivity of organisations. Employers' organisations and trade unions can help individual companies in shaping these arrangements.

### Further information

The report, *Working conditions and job quality across sectors in Europe*, is available at <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1384.htm>

The sectoral information sheets are available at <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/ewcs/2010/sectorprofiles.htm>

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