

First findings: Sixth European Working Conditions Survey

> résumé <

'Paid work contributes to quality of life both positively and negatively. Paid work provides income as well as identity and social interactions, but it may also be a source of negative experiences and risks. ... This underscores the importance of collecting more systematic information on the quality of paid work ...'

Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress (aimed at identifying the limits of GDP as an indicator of economic performance and social progress)

Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen and Jean-Paul Fitoussi, 2010



The sixth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) presents the diverse picture of Europe at work over time across countries, occupations, gender and age groups. The findings underline the complex reality with which Europe's policymakers are confronted as they seek to build a fair and competitive Europe. The findings draw attention to the range and scope of actions that policy actors could develop to address today's challenges.

Key findings

Positive developments in several areas

- Reported exposure to posture-related risks, while still significant at 43%, has declined.
- Nine out of ten workers report being either well informed or very well informed about the health and safety risks related to the performance of their job.
- A high proportion of workers (58%) report that their manager supports them all or most of the time, and a very high proportion (71%) receive support from colleagues all or most of the time.
- The proportion of employees whose immediate boss (supervisor) is a woman has increased from 24% in 2000 to 33% in 2015.
- The majority of the workforce (58%) report being satisfied with the working time in their main paid job.

- One-third of employees (31%) work in a 'high-involvement organisation', characterised by a high level of task discretion and a high level of organisational participation.
- Almost two-thirds of workers agree that the organisation they work for motivates them to give their best job performance: 39% 'tend to agree' and 24% 'strongly agree'.

Issues relating to specific groups of workers

- Gender differences remain important, both in work and in life outside work.
- Men more frequently work longer hours (48 hours or more – self-employed workers in particular) and women more frequently work shorter hours (fewer than 20 hours).
- Men report more paid working hours, but the total number of working hours (paid work in main and second jobs, commuting time and daily unpaid work) is higher for women than for men.
- Workers in smaller companies are less frequently informed about the health and safety risks related to the performance of their job.
- Young workers are more exposed to work intensity, shift work, adverse social behaviour and job insecurity than other workers.
- Workers over the age of 50 report lower prospects for career advancement and inadequate training provision.

Issues of concern

- Between 2010 and 2015, there has been a rise in the level of exposure to handling chemicals (from 15% to 17%) and infectious materials (11% to 13%).
- Many blue-collar workers remain exposed to high levels of work intensity, while reporting low levels of autonomy, job security and employment security.
- Almost one in six workers (16%) reports having been subject to adverse social behaviour – such as acts of violence, harassment and unwanted sexual attention – with potentially serious negative consequences for the workers concerned and for their continued participation in work.
- The proportion of workers who always experience the feeling of work well done has fallen sharply, to 40%.
- Gender segregation is still prevalent, with two-thirds of employees (67%) having a male supervisor and 85% of male employees having a male supervisor.
- In 2015, 16% of employees ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ that they might lose their job in the next six months – the same proportion as in 2010.
- Some workers experience poor job quality in a few or several domains, suggesting that actions are needed to support workers across their working life.

Introduction

Work is a fundamental activity for the achievement of one of the European Union’s key goals, which is to strive towards ‘the sustainable development of Europe based on balanced economic growth and price stability, a highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress, and a high level of protection and improvement of the quality

of the environment ...’ (Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union). The recent renewed policy focus on the measurement of well-being has also demonstrated the importance of work in shaping societal progress.

The current employment policy priorities – to boost employment levels, prolong working life, increase the participation of women, develop productivity and innovation, and adapt to the digital challenge – depend for their success not just on changes in the external labour market but also on developing good working conditions and job quality. This means, in particular, ensuring that over the life course there are practices supportive of work–life balance and career development both at work and in wider society. As the International Labour Organization (ILO) states ‘... the future of work is what we will make it. The challenge is to make it the one we want.’¹

Eurofound’s preliminary findings from the sixth wave of the EWCS contribute to understanding these critical challenges.

Labour market situation

Shifts in the employment structure of occupations, in employment conditions and in the labour force are pivotal in shaping the working conditions of workers in Europe.

According to the European Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS), aggregate EU employment levels in 2014 are still lower than at the outset of the crisis. Employment rates have significantly decreased in Greece, Portugal and Spain. Men and women have been affected by the crisis and the recovery in very different ways. Over time, the share of women in total employment in the EU continues to increase, while the workforce in general is ageing.

¹ ‘The future of work centenary initiative’, International Labour Conference, 15 May 2015.

Table 1: Exposure to challenging working conditions by age (%)

	Under 35 years	35–49 years	50+ years
Painful or tiring positions (a quarter of the time or more)	42	44	43
Not learning new things	25	27	33
Shift work	26	22	16
No training provided in the last 12 month	59	57	62
Affected by restructuring or reorganisation	19	24	25
Working at high speed (three-quarters of the time or more)	37	34	28
Adverse social behaviour *	18	17	13
Not able to change methods of work	34	31	27
Fear of losing job in next six months	19	15	14
Poor prospects for career advancement	50	63	71

* Adverse social behaviour is measured in the survey with questions on the occurrence of seven behaviours: verbal abuse, unwanted sexual attention, threats, humiliating behaviours, physical violence, sexual harassment and bullying/harassment.

The share of professionals in total employment in the EU increased from 13% in 2005 to 19% in 2014, while the share of sales and service workers increased from 13% to 17%. On the other hand, the share of craft workers, as well as plant and machine operators, decreased: from 14% to 12% and from 9% to 7%, respectively. Between 2010 and 2014, there was also a fall in the share of managers in total employment from 8% to 6%.

Over the last 10 years, part-time work has become a regular feature of labour markets in all countries. The share of both self-employed and temporary workers in the EU has remained at the same level: 15% and 12%, respectively, of total employment (EU-LFS).

Ageing and work sustainability

With demographic ageing and longer working lives, it is more important than ever to link labour market participation with job quality. Monitoring and understanding better the relationships between working conditions and individuals in the course of their careers is crucial. Of particular relevance in this context are those challenging working conditions that could lead to premature exit from the labour market or that underutilise workers' potential. In contrast, sustainable work contributes to the development of workers and, ultimately, to retaining workers longer in the labour market.

Achieving work sustainability for workers means ensuring that older workers can continue to meet their job demands and that the way their work is organised allows them to work in a manner that is healthy, protects them from vulnerability, and makes the best use of their experience and knowledge. It also means that, across all ages, both working conditions and career paths help workers to retain their physical and mental health, motivation and productivity. Human resource management policies and company practices make it possible for older workers to contribute best in this context.

The sixth EWCS highlights working conditions that present particular challenges to sustainability over the life course, as exposure to these can have a negative impact on health. Table 1 presents data regarding the incidence of some of these challenging working conditions, broken down by age.

Gender segregation

The modalities under which women and men of different ages participate in the labour market and the work they do vary greatly. Gender segregation is a persistent feature of European labour markets. Despite progress, women and men continue to experience differences at work across many dimensions, ranging from occupation and sector to contract type, pay and working time. Over half of all workers report that they share their job title mainly with workers of the same sex as themselves (58% of

men and 54% of women), while just one-fifth (21%) of workers report sharing their job title with equal proportions of women and men.

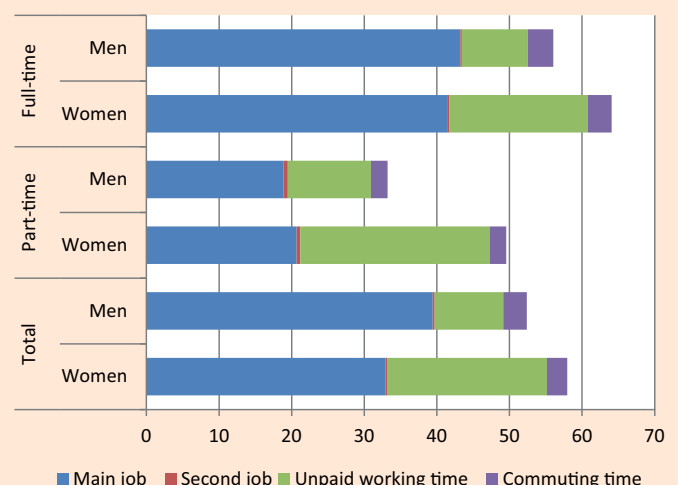
In terms of hierarchical segregation, the proportion of employees overall who report having a female supervisor has increased from 24% in 2000 to 33% in 2015. However, two-thirds of employees (67%) still have a male supervisor. Closer analysis reveals further gender differences: half of female employees have a female supervisor, compared to only 15% of men.

Time use and work–life balance

Achieving the Europe 2020 target of 75% of 20–64-year-olds in employment is strongly dependent on increasing the labour market participation of women in Europe. To achieve a greater participation of women, it is necessary to understand the interaction of working time with other time domains such as commuting time and unpaid work. The findings confirm that care responsibilities and unpaid domestic work are unevenly shared by women and men, with women undertaking a bigger share of unpaid work.

The EWCS's composite indicator of paid and unpaid working time – which includes paid work in the main and second jobs, commuting time and unpaid work (mainly linked to care of children and other dependants) – shows that, overall, women's working hours are longer when the paid and unpaid working hours are computed (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Composite indicator of paid and unpaid working hours of women and men



Job quality and workplace practices

Job quality is an important policy concern on the European agenda and is shaped by wider workplace practices. The job quality indices developed by Eurofound include earnings, prospects, intrinsic job quality (skill use and discretion, social environment, physical environment and work intensity) and working time quality.

Prospects

Job security and prospects for career advancement are important dimensions of job quality.

In 2015, 16% of workers ‘tend to agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ that they might lose their job in the next six months – the same proportion as in 2010. Of this group, the percentage of workers who state that in the event of losing their current job it would be easy for them to find a job with a similar salary rose from 32% in 2010 to 37% in 2015. Overall, 39% of employees ‘tend to agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ that their job offers good career prospects – up from 32% in 2010.

Workers who have short working hours report more often than other workers that it would be easy to find a similar job in the event of losing their job; at the same time, this group reports more job insecurity and poorer career prospects than the average.

There are marked differences between occupations in terms of employment security (confidence in ability to find a job) and job insecurity (fear of losing one’s job), with higher skilled workers reporting higher levels of job security (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Employment security and job insecurity by occupation (%)



Note: % of employees who strongly agree with each statement.

Job changes

Changes in workers’ jobs can include pay, working hours, degree of influence over work, and tasks and duties. It should be noted that during the recession, cuts in working hours and pay were negotiated or imposed in exchange for the preservation of jobs.

The majority of employees report no changes in their job. In terms of pay, 32% of employees report an increase in the last 12 months and 11% report a decrease. At the same time, 21% report an increase in their working hours and 8% a decrease, while 34% report an increase in their tasks and duties and 3% report a decrease. With regard to the amount of influence employees have over their jobs, 22% report an increase and 4% report a decrease.

Skills and development

A key aspect of the European Commission’s ‘New skills for new jobs’ initiative is to ensure that workers are able to develop their skills throughout their working life. Access to training as well as the extent to which a person is able to learn new skills in the performance of their work are critical factors in this respect.

There are significant differences in access to training over the last 12 months for both employees (training provided by their employer) and for the self-employed, according to employment status. Nearly half of employees with indefinite contracts (45%) received training, compared to 31% of employees with a fixed-term contract – a similar proportion to the self-employed with workers (32%). Self-employed workers without employees report the least access to training (19%).

It should be noted, however, that the duration and content of training are not considered here.

Opportunities for workers to learn new things and experience variation at work show mixed results. The opportunity to engage in complex tasks has slightly increased over the past 10 years (from 60% in 2005 to 63% in 2015) as well as the opportunity to learn new things (from 69% in 2005 to 72% in 2015). At the same time, the proportion of workers reporting that they carry out monotonous tasks has increased: from 43% in 2005 to 46% in 2015.

Working time

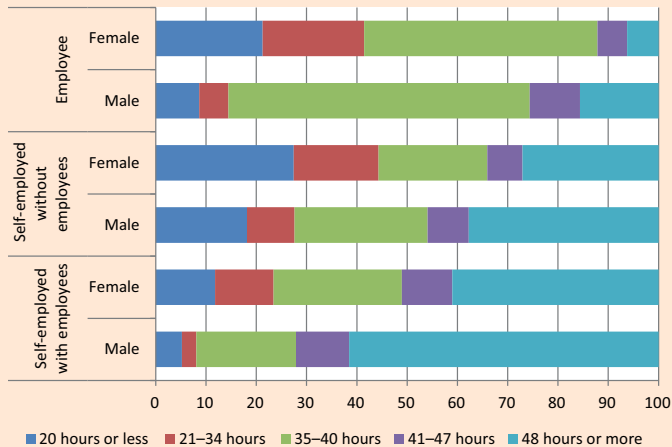
Differences according to gender and employment status

Working hours have been on the decrease for decades. However, while fewer workers are working 48 hours or more, the number of workers working ‘substantial part time’ (between 21 and 34 hours per week) and ‘short part time’ (20 hours per week or less) have both increased over time. Overall, while the proportion of workers with ‘standard’ working hours has reduced over time, it is still significant.

As Figure 3 illustrates, the self-employed work on average longer hours than employees, and women and men have different profiles.

The gender gap in weekly paid working hours in the EU has declined slightly since 2005, due to the fact that the paid working hours of men have declined more quickly than those of women. Nevertheless, the gender gap remains significant, with men on average working 39 hours and women 33 hours a week in their main paid job.

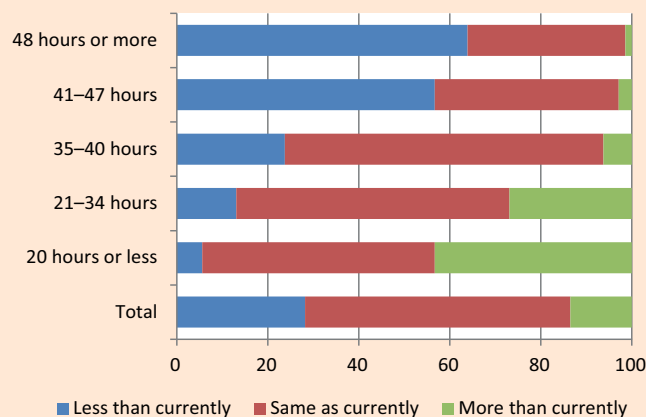
Figure 3: Working hours by employment status and gender (%)



Working hours and working time preferences

While the majority of the workforce (58%) report that working time in their main job is in line with their preferences (Figure 4), 13% would like to increase their working time and 28% would like to decrease it. This is provided that workers would be able to determine their own working hours, taking into account their own economic needs.

Figure 4: Working time preferences by usual working hours (%)



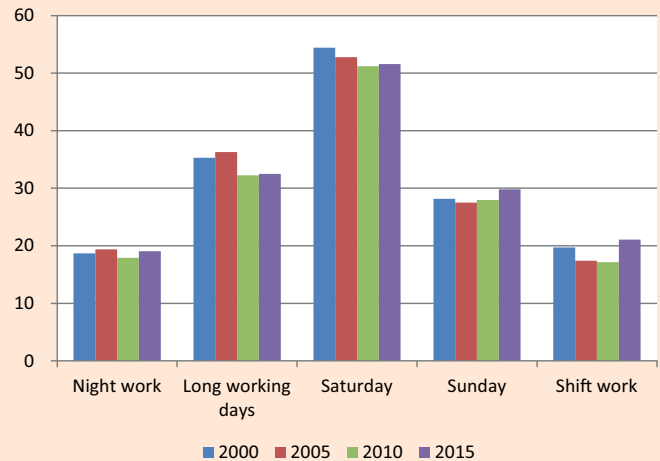
Working time arrangements

Regularity in the number of working hours per day and per week, in the number of days worked per week, and having the same starting and finishing times remain the norm for the majority of workers, though there has been a slight decrease in the number of hours worked per week and per day. Eurofound developed an index of regularity that shows that 43% of workers have highly regular working hours and arrangements, 28% have medium regularity and 30% have low regularity. More women (46%) than men (40%) have a job with high regularity of working hours.

Atypical working hours – working on Saturdays and Sundays, long working days (over 10 hours), shift and night work – are a feature of working life for a significant proportion of workers in the EU (Figure 5).

More than half of all workers work at least one Saturday per month (52%), while a third (32%) work long days of 10 hours or more at least once a month. Sunday work is increasing slightly (30%), as is shift work (21%), while 19% of workers engage in night work.

Figure 5: Atypical working hours 2000–2015 (%)



The findings show that for the majority of workers it is the employers that decide on their working schedules. Two-thirds of employees (64%) cannot change their schedule, while just one in 10 (10%) can choose between different schedules determined by the company. More women than men work in companies that make available a range of fixed work schedules that can be chosen by the employee.

One in five employees (20%) is free to adapt the starting and finishing times of their work within designated margins (flexitime), while 6% of employees determine their working hours themselves. Changes in working time arrangements occur for 31% of employees, often at short notice; 5% report that they are informed about the change on the same day and 8% that they are informed the day before. Furthermore, 11% of workers were requested to come to work at short notice several times in the month previous to the survey, while for 2% of workers this occurred several times in the week previous to the survey.

Blurring the boundaries between work and private life

The findings indicate to what degree work and private lives are interlinked: 14% of workers say that they continue to worry about work in their spare time 'always' or 'most of the time'; 21% say they 'always' or 'most of the time' feel too tired to do some of the household jobs that need to be done; and 11% report that their job prevents them from devoting time to their family 'always' or 'most of the time'. Finally, 3% of workers report that family and care responsibilities impact negatively on their job.

While the development of knowledge work as well as information and communication technology (ICT) allow workers to adapt to the demands of private life, it has also resulted in blurring the boundaries between work and private life: 45% of workers say that they have worked in their free time in order to meet work demands in the last 12 months, with 3% doing this on a daily basis, 7% several times a week and 13% several times a month. When questioned about the ability to arrange to take an hour or two off during working hours to take care of personal or family matters, 25% of workers report that it is 'very easy' for them to do this and 40% that it is 'fairly easy' to do so.

Social and physical environment

Information about health and safety at work

One in ten workers (10%) reports that they are 'not very well informed' or 'not at all well informed' about the health and safety risks related to the performance of their jobs. Workplaces of different sizes differ in this respect: 12% of workers in workplaces with fewer than 10 employees report that they are 'not very well informed' or 'not at all well informed', 10% in small and medium-sized workplaces (between 10 and 249 employees) and 9% in large workplaces (250 employees or more).

In general, the percentage of workers reporting that their health is at risk because of their work has declined: 23% of workers in the EU in 2015, compared to 31% in 2000. Men report this more frequently than women: 27% of men compared to 19% of women.

Exposure to physical risks over time

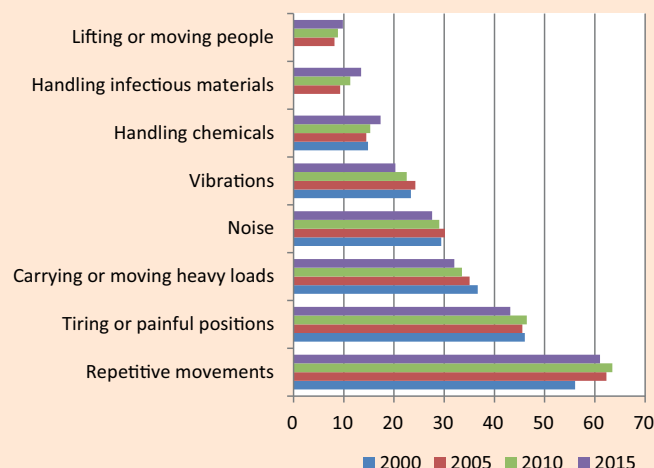
Figure 6 shows changes in exposure to physical risks since 2000. Exposure to repetitive hand and arm movements and tiring and painful positions is fairly common, with 61% and 43% of workers, respectively, reporting they are exposed at least a quarter of the time. These risks are slightly less reported in 2015 than they were in 2010.

Exposure to loud noise and exposure to vibrations due to machinery have been decreasing since 2005.

The reverse pattern is found for handling chemicals, handling infectious materials, and lifting or moving people. Although exposure to these risks is not very common, with between 10% and 17% of workers reporting being exposed to them for at least a quarter of the time, exposure levels have consistently increased from 2005 onwards.

Exposure levels are higher for men than for women with regard to most of these physical risks. The exceptions are repetitive movements, where exposure levels are more or less equal, and the handling of infectious material and the lifting and moving of people, which are more common for women than for men.

Figure 6: Exposure to physical risks over time (% exposed a quarter of the time or more)



These results should be interpreted with caution. Over the past few decades, the employment structure in terms of occupation and sector has changed: there are now fewer people working in the manufacturing industries and more people working in services. This shift could at least partly explain the patterns of risk exposure described above, which would imply that the risk level associated with the jobs themselves might not have changed much at all.

Managing psychosocial risks

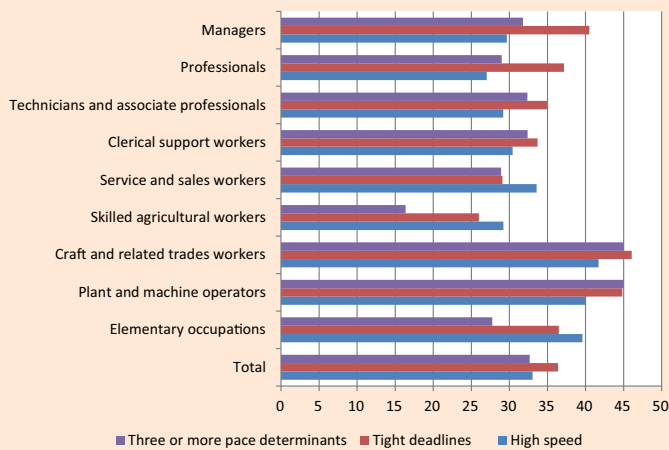
Psychosocial risk factors are related to the way work is designed, organised and managed, as well as to the economic and social context of work. In addition to job and employment insecurity, psychosocial risks include high demands and work intensity, emotional demands, lack of autonomy, poor social relationships and poor leadership.

Work demands

The findings point to a significant proportion of workers who are confronted with a very high level of work demands. Work demands can be high for a number of reasons: work has become more concentrated (working to tight deadlines), it needs to be done faster (working at high speed), there are frequent disruptive interruptions or there is simply too much work (not enough time to do the job). Workers may need to juggle various pace constraints at the same time, arising from their colleagues, supervisor, targets to be met, direct demands or the automatic speed of a machine.

Using all these indicators, the survey confirms that intensive work is quite prevalent: 36% of workers in the EU work 'all of the time' or 'almost all of the time' to tight deadlines, while 33% report working at high speed (Figure 7). One-third of workers (33%) report being subject to three or more pace determinants. The same proportion report frequent disruptive interruptions and never or rarely having enough time to do the job. Those who work long hours also report that the work is intensive.

Figure 7: High work demands by occupation (%)



* Pace determinants are: work done by colleagues, direct demands from people (customers, passengers, pupils, patients, etc.), numerical targets or performance targets, automatic speed of a machine or movement of a product, direct control of the supervisor.

Emotional demands, such as hiding or suppressing feelings, can result in psychological strain. Over one-quarter of all workers – 28% of men and 35% of women – report hiding their feelings at work most or all of the time.

Very intensive work has negative consequences in terms of physical and mental health and absenteeism. On the other hand, high work intensity can be associated with increased financial performance of companies and higher pay for workers, and some may perceive it as rewarding or interesting.

Autonomy over work

Autonomy or decision latitude – the ability to change the order of tasks, methods of work, and speed or rate of work – is important for workers, as it allows them to adapt as best they can to their work demands. A high level of autonomy is also encouraged for its expected positive effect on creativity, as well as motivation.

Autonomy – especially when it is associated with social support from colleagues and managers – can compensate for high work demands, but only up to a certain point.

As Figure 8 illustrates, the ability of employees to choose or change their order of tasks, methods of work, and speed or rate of work has slightly increased for both women and men in the EU since 2005.

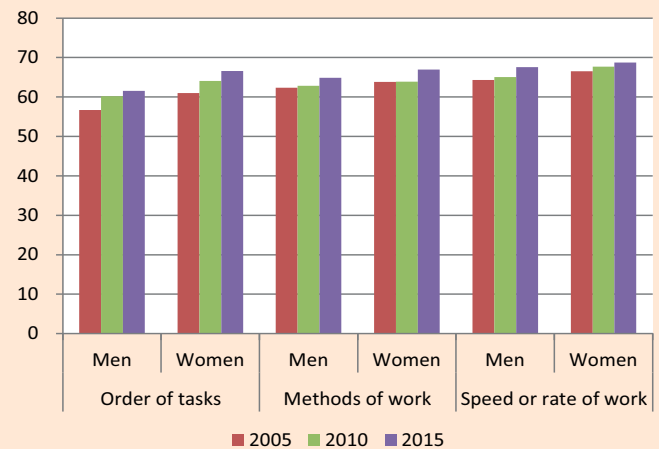
Social relationships at work

Good social relationships at work can contribute to increased efficiency as well as enhanced well-being and the feeling of belonging. Poor or abusive relationships can create inefficiency, resulting in absenteeism and exit intentions, as well as negatively impacting on the health and well-being of workers.

The level of support from colleagues experienced by workers in Europe remains at a high level: 36% report that their colleagues help and support them ‘all of the time’, with another 36% reporting that this happens

‘most of the time’. Support from managers is also high: 28% of workers report that their manager helps and supports them ‘all of the time’, and 31% report that this happens ‘most of the time’.

Figure 8: Employee autonomy by gender, 2005–2015 (%)



Leadership quality is an important component of relationships at work: 56% of employees ‘strongly agree’ that their supervisor respects them as a person. Some 4% of employees report that this is not the case. Just under one-third of employees (31%) strongly agree that their supervisor encourages and supports their development, while a similar proportion (32%) strongly agree that their supervisor gives them praise and recognition when they do a good job.

Adverse social behaviour in the workplace

Violence in the workplace can take different forms and is a major risk factor for depression, anxiety and suicide. It is hard to gather reliable data on this subject, especially in a comparative framework. The survey aims to capture the reported incidence of various types of adverse social behaviour such as verbal abuse, unwanted sexual attention, threats and humiliating behaviour in the month before the survey and the occurrence of physical violence, sexual harassment and bullying/harassment over the previous 12 months. In 2015, 17% of women and 15% of men report having been exposed to adverse social behaviour, and 7% of all workers report having experienced some type of discrimination (up from 5% in 2005 and 6% in 2010).

Place of work

Most workers – 62% of men and 78% of women – have a single main place of work where they work almost all of the time, generally their employer’s business premises (or their own if self-employed). Nearly a third of workers (30%) divide their working time across multiple locations, working at least several times a week at each different place of work. Despite the popular image of ‘mobile workers’ as young knowledge workers typing away on their laptops in a park or café, having more than one regular place of

work is most common in the construction (57%), transport (49%) and agriculture (50%) sectors.

Employee involvement

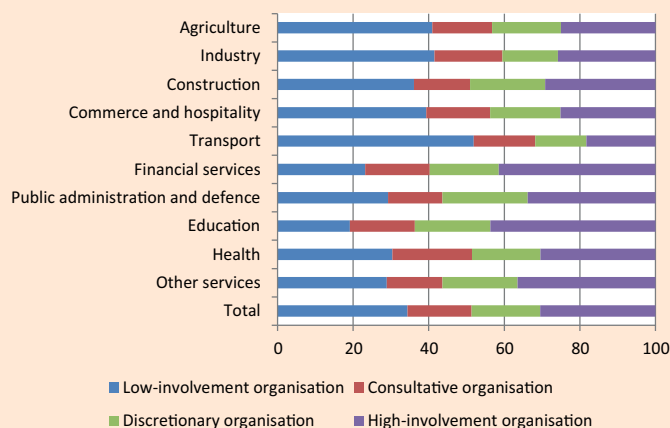
Much research, notably the recent analysis of Eurofound's European Company Survey (ECS), confirms that employee involvement can improve performance and enhance the quality of working life, as it taps into the tacit knowledge of workers and contributes to increased creativity and engagement. Moreover, in the context of an increasingly skilled workforce, meaningful work takes on a new significance.

Organisational participation refers to the influence employees have on how their work is organised. The majority of employees in the EU have some say in this: 67% of employees are at least 'sometimes' involved in improving the work organisation or work processes of their department or organisation. Similarly, 69% of employees feel that they can influence decisions that are important for their work.

Organisational participation together with task discretion (the ability to change the order of tasks, methods of work, or speed or rate of work, discussed in the previous section) are combined to determine the extent to which employees are involved in their organisations. Drawing on a framework developed for analysing the fifth EWCS,² this survey shows that 31% of all employees in the EU work in organisations with high levels of task discretion and high levels of organisational participation; 18% of employees work in discretionary organisations where they experience a high level of task discretion but less influence on organisational decisions; 17% of employees work in consultative organisations (low levels of task discretion but high levels of organisational participation); and 34% work in low-involvement organisations, which are low on task discretion as well as low on organisational participation.

As Figure 9 shows, high-involvement organisations are more common in service-oriented sectors such as financial services and education. Low-involvement organisations are more prevalent in manufacturing-related sectors such as transport and industry.

Figure 9: Employee involvement by economic activity (%)



Job well done

Agreeing on the quality of a product or of work performed is not a straightforward process in companies. It requires the concurrence of different points of view (worker, peers and hierarchy). From an individual worker's perspective, being able to carry out quality work and therefore experiencing the feeling of work well done is important, whereas not being able to do so could constitute a psychosocial risk.

The proportion of workers who 'always' experience the feeling of work well done has decreased over the past decade: from 51% in 2005 to 45% in 2010 and 40% in 2015. Strikingly, 5% of workers 'never' or 'rarely' have this feeling.

Methodology

The EWCS is a wide-ranging survey of workers carried out by Eurofound every five years since 1991. The survey interviews employees and self-employed workers about key issues related to their work and employment for an average time of 45 minutes.

The sixth edition of the EWCS was carried in 2015 in 35 countries. The EU28 analysis is based on 35,765 interviews that took place between February and September 2015. The survey questionnaire contains questions on employment status, physical and psychosocial risks, time and place of work, work organisation, skills use and skills development, social relations at work, as well as health and well-being.

² Work organisation and employee involvement in Europe, Eurofound, 2013.

Further information

More information about the European Working Conditions Survey series is available at <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/european-working-conditions-surveys-ewcs>

For further information, contact Sophia MacGoris, Research Assistant at smg@eurofound.europa.eu



doi: 10.2806/59106
ISBN: 978-92-897-1429-7

Coordinating the Network of EU Agencies 2015



EF/15/68/EN