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Policy Lessons from the Fifth EWCS: The Pursuit of More and Better Jobs

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Policy Lessons from the Fifth EWCS: The Pursuit of More and Better Jobs

Abstract

[Excerpt] This report examines the evidence and policy lessons that can be drawn from the findings of the fifth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) carried out in 2010. The focus is on the links between working conditions and labour market participation in the light of the EU's longstanding policy pursuit of more and better jobs. The report also assesses how the EWCS is valued by policy users and researchers, and where its further development or usage could enhance EU policy on employment and social developments.

The contribution of the fifth EWCS was assessed on the basis of the mix of evidence available to policymakers, including:

- the extent to which EWCS data or findings are cited or used by representatives of European and national authorities, research centres and researchers;
- secondary analyses of EWCS data and other research which addresses current policy concerns;
- interviews with key users of EWCS data, especially those working in EU-level policymaking and research centres.

The current economic and social policy concerns and objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy are not dramatically different from those in earlier times. However, there has been a steady increase in the level of cooperation between Member States around a mutual learning and target-based approach, supported by greater use of monitoring indicators.

While the EWCS initially focused on evidence on working conditions, it has progressively developed its coverage. Today it embraces a range of issues including workplace organisation and innovation, patterns of working time and job quality.

The EWCS has been particularly successful in highlighting trends, convergences and divergences through the development of indicators of policy concerns such as the quality of jobs or workplace risks (physical or psychological). It has provided new insights and understanding – often through innovative multidisciplinary research – on matters such as the relationship between different aspects of life at the workplace, and between the workplace and the household.

Keywords

Eurofound, European Working Conditions Survey, EWCS, working conditions, policy

Comments

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The pursuit of more and better jobs



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Author: John Morley, Applica

Research managers: Agnès Parent-Thirion and Greet Vermeylen

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European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Telephone (+353 1) 204 31 00

Email: information@eurofound.europa.eu

Web: www.eurofound.europa.eu

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Executive summary

Introduction

This report examines the evidence and policy lessons that can be drawn from the findings of the fifth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) carried out in 2010. The focus is on the links between working conditions and labour market participation in the light of the EU's longstanding policy pursuit of more and better jobs. The report also assesses how the EWCS is valued by policy users and researchers, and where its further development or usage could enhance EU policy on employment and social developments.

The contribution of the fifth EWCS was assessed on the basis of the mix of evidence available to policymakers, including:

- the extent to which EWCS data or findings are cited or used by representatives of European and national authorities, research centres and researchers;
- secondary analyses of EWCS data and other research which addresses current policy concerns;
- interviews with key users of EWCS data, especially those working in EU-level policymaking and research centres.

The current economic and social policy concerns and objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy are not dramatically different from those in earlier times. However, there has been a steady increase in the level of cooperation between Member States around a mutual learning and target-based approach, supported by greater use of monitoring indicators.

While the EWCS initially focused on evidence on working conditions, it has progressively developed its coverage. Today it embraces a range of issues including workplace organisation and innovation, patterns of working time and job quality.

The EWCS has been particularly successful in highlighting trends, convergences and divergences through the development of indicators of policy concerns such as the quality of jobs or workplace risks (physical or psychological). It has provided new insights and understanding – often through innovative multidisciplinary research – on matters such as the relationship between different aspects of life at the workplace, and between the workplace and the household.

New policy challenges and perspectives

The EWCS throws light on core issues such as the complex relationship between time spent at work and time spent outside work, and the ways in which households make their decisions about labour market participation. This is reinforced by the development of a 'lifetime' approach to life and work.

The survey results suggest that the focus on individual employees and their contractual relationships with their employers needs to be reviewed and extended so as to address the decision-making processes in households and the appropriateness of many workplace arrangements. They also highlight the extent to which family decisions on labour market participation depend not just on stereotypical gender roles, but also on practical considerations in the light of the specific legal, financial or wider policy decisions and arrangements in place in different countries.

The secondary analyses of EWCS survey data provide insights into the changes taking place within households and in the workplace. Such changes are likely to be of increasing importance, given the policy focus on promoting working life longevity, aligned with pressure to raise the pensionable age and encourage higher rates of labour market participation generally.

Overall, this body of emerging research findings underlines the need to address workplace issues and working lives in a broad social context. The pursuit of a better work–life balance needs to be recognised as a central element in ensuring the EU achieves its goals of more and better jobs, improved well-being, and greater dynamism and productivity performance at the workplace.

The evidence indicates that changes in the European policy environment are taking place as the EU evolves and integrates. Much of the traditional intra-EU stereotyping of countries in terms of their socioeconomic systems is increasingly misplaced. Elements of different labour market and welfare policy incentives and support arrangements are crossing boundaries. In effect policy convergence is taking place within the EU in different directions – for better or worse.

Key findings

- Success in achieving higher levels of labour market participation over an individual’s lifetime depends not just on a better functioning of external labour markets, but on achieving better workplace arrangements and a better work–life balance.
- Labour market and social policies need to be jointly reviewed, given the better understanding of the effect of household decision-making processes on labour market participation by household members.
- While physical risks at work remain issues of concern, the negative consequences of stress, abuse and other forms of psychological bullying are linked to sickness absences from work and reduced performance and participation.
- Success in addressing prevailing, or even worsening, social inequalities requires not just broadly based social policies but policy actions focused on the workplace. Concerns such as in-work poverty appear to be greatest in particular types or areas of work.
- Gender imbalances need to be seen as not just the result of stereotyping but as a function of a wide range of often poorly structured policy frameworks in terms of childcare, education, working time, qualifications, transport, social security and so on.
- It is puzzling that relatively little change has been detected in patterns of work organisation despite their perceived importance for innovation and productivity development. Discovering whether this is correct, or whether changes have simply proved difficult to measure, is a research priority.
- Although most of the recent EWCS-based research findings take us forward, there is a need to remain open-minded about the development, definition and use of newer concepts, particularly for issues around the quality of jobs and work.

Conclusions

Reconciling divergent approaches

There is a serious divide between labour market research (conducted primarily by economists) and social policy research (conducted primarily by sociologists); the former have a disproportionate reliance on quantitative data while the latter have a greater willingness to use more diverse sources of data, including subjective and qualitative material.

On a positive note, employment and social policy research work now takes place in a single directorate within the European Commission, with findings available in a common publication that draws on both Eurostat and Eurofound data sources.

However, much remains to be done to ensure that the interrelationships between economic, labour market and social concerns are addressed using the full range of available data (quantitative and qualitative, objective and subjective). Those working on policy development within bodies such as the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council or consultative committees can exploit the more exploratory dimension of the EWCS, with its potential to identify new approaches to policy development in areas where current practices do not appear to be producing very effective results.

Scope for improvement

The EWCS is highly valued by policymakers and researchers as an important and distinctive source of comparative and in-depth information. However, there are some minor practical issues where users see scope for improvement.

Introduction

The overall aims of the European Working Conditions Surveys (EWCS) are to:

- measure working conditions across European countries on a harmonised basis;
- analyse relationships between different aspects of working conditions;
- identify groups at risk, issues of concern and areas of progress;
- monitor trends over time.

This report presents the main policy lessons that can be drawn from the fifth EWCS. The aim is to raise awareness of the contribution this latest survey makes to the achievement of Europe's economic, employment and social goals, and to identify areas where its contribution could be developed further.

The report is intended to strengthen working relationships between policymakers and researchers across the European Union, and especially at EU level, by outlining the key findings from the latest EWCS with respect to the development of employment and social policies. This includes the survey's role not only in providing benchmark indicators and guidance that help monitor and guide progress, but also in supporting policy development through in-depth empirical research.

This has involved addressing, to varying degrees, the following set of issues:

- the extent to which the information available from the fifth EWCS is relevant for current EU employment and social policy concerns;
- the main research findings from analyses of the fifth EWCS with respect to these employment and social policy concerns;
- the extent to which those responsible for EU-level employment and social policy development are aware of the evidence from the EWCS and appreciate its value;
- the extent to which the findings from the fifth EWCS suggest areas and issues that will require further development of employment and social policies at both EU and national level.

The project on which this report is based had two phases. The first phase consisted of:

- agreeing on the EU policy framework against which to assess the contribution of the fifth EWCS;
- reviewing and summarising the findings of the overview report and the secondary analyses available at that time.

The second phase built on this work and in addition:

- reviewed the findings of new secondary analyses;
- reviewed use of the findings from the fifth EWCS for research by other official bodies, research centres and so on;
- reported on discussions with key users and policymakers on the usage of the EWCS and future policy priorities.

In addition, interviews were conducted with key users and policymakers to ascertain:

- their knowledge, use and assessment of the value of the EWCS in their work;
- their reaction to the new policy issues that appear to emerge from the research analyses of the 2010 findings (as outlined in this report);
- any suggestions they might have regarding the structure or content of future surveys.

Scope and policy framework of the fifth EWCS 1

Three-pronged approach

This report uses three basic approaches to:

- measure the policy usage of the fifth EWCS;
- identify the main policy lessons that emerge from the report;
- assess the value attributed to the EWCS by its users.

The first approach has been to document and review the kind of use made of the EWCS in practice by EU policy authorities and research centres concerned with the range of employment and social issues that are addressed, directly or indirectly, through the survey.

The second approach has been to identify the most important facts and policy lessons that might be drawn from the summarised evidence presented in Eurofound reports and the detailed examination of specific issues in the secondary analyses and other research using the fifth EWCS data.

The third approach has been to interview a representative selection of appropriate people in policy authorities and research centres to obtain more qualitative assessment of:

- the value of the survey for their purposes;
- significant developments or changes they have observed in the most recent data;
- suggestions or indications as to ways in which survey usage or content might be enhanced.

Aims and achievements of the EWCS

This report is concerned with the findings of the fifth EWCS, which was carried out in 2010. As stated in the EWCS overview report, this series of surveys aims to:

- measure working conditions across European countries on a harmonised basis;
- analyse relationships between different aspects of working conditions;
- identify groups at risk and issues of concern, as well as areas of progress;
- monitor trends over time;
- contribute to European policy development, in particular on quality of work and employment issues.

In these respects, the EWCS is seen to have been particularly successful in the following two areas:

- highlighting trends, convergences and divergences through the development of quantitative indicators with respect to key issues such as the evolving content of jobs, quality of work and workplace risks;

- providing new insights into the relationship between different aspects of workplace development through innovative multidisciplinary research (notably but not exclusively economic, ergonomic, sociological and psychological).

The findings that emerge from the fifth EWCS reflect this tradition while taking on board:

- the progressive development of the survey over time – including the incorporation of results from expanded questionnaires in response to user demands;
- the overall evolution of policy concerns, notably those included in the Europe 2020 strategy, but also any social and labour market concerns that are being addressed at national, European or international level but which do not necessarily figure highly on the current European agenda.

EU-level policy concerns and the EWCS

The economic and social policy objectives set out in the Europe 2020 strategy are not dramatically different in either purpose or scope from those adopted in the Lisbon Strategy of 2000 or even the 1993 Delors White Paper, *Growth, competitiveness, employment*. However, the latest policy framework contains some changes in terms of the policy emphasis of the strategy as well in the monitoring indicators that are used.

Moreover, while the EWCS identifies crucial evidence with regard to these broad EU policy concerns about employment and the labour market, including matters specifically subject to EU-wide legislation such as physical and mental risks or employee consultation, there are other important workplace issues. These notably concern issues of workplace organisation and innovation as well as wider relationships at work, which are treated much less directly and to a much more limited extent in European-level policy discussions. These are areas where the EWCS has the potential, albeit still somewhat underdeveloped, to lead the way in illustrating how the needs and interests of employees and their employers could be jointly pursued in more optimal ways. Examples include better adjustments to working time arrangements or through more strenuous efforts to use the skills that employees already possess.

The findings of the fifth EWCS continue the practice of highlighting important evidence on factors that can directly impact on the development of Europe-wide policies in pursuit of high levels of employment that is rewarding to both employees and employers, and that is long-lasting – that is, sustainable. However, the surveys have an even greater potential usage in terms of developing understanding regarding the links between working and non-working life, and more general societal developments.

Reports based on the fifth EWCS

Eurofound has published a range of reports following the completion of the fieldwork and assembly of the data from the 2010 survey. As with previous surveys, Eurofound has made the basic information and subsequent analyses available as soon as possible, including for its own research enquiries. However, this has meant that the initial reports were not always able to provide as full a review of the findings as later became available as a result of further research and analysis.

Subsequent research reports – termed secondary analyses – which have been prepared by external research contractors in association with Eurofound focus on a range of issues and evidence viewed from a variety of policy and analytical perspectives. This innovative approach to research development has proved fruitful in practice. In effect, the resulting reports consist of a series of scientific investigations designed to enhance understanding of various specific concerns, but which often approach subjects from different perspectives or follow different analytical disciplines. Inevitably, there

are overlaps and some occasional loose ends. Indisputably, however, all these analyses demonstrate that there is the willingness and capacity to work in ways that throw new and additional light on existing policy concerns by exploiting the latest available data.

Delivery of the secondary analyses

The timing of the delivery of the various reports based on the 2010 data is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: *Timeline of reports based on the fifth EWCS*

Date	Title
November 2010	<i>Changes over time: First findings from the fifth European Working Conditions Survey (résumé)</i>
April 2012	<i>Overview report: Fifth European Working Conditions Survey</i>
August 2012	<i>Trends in job quality</i>
December 2012	<i>Sustainable work and the ageing workforce</i>
February 2013	<i>Working time and work–life balance in a life course perspective</i>
May 2013	<i>Health and well-being at work</i>
June 2013	<i>Work organisation and employee involvement in Europe</i>
October 2013	<i>Women, men and working conditions in Europe</i>
December 2013	<i>Quality of employment conditions and employment relations in Europe</i>

Notes: The timing of the commissioning and delivery of the various reports may vary due to contractual and practical reasons, and do not reflect any hierarchy of concerns or importance.

All Eurofound publications are available at www.eurofound.europa.eu.

Three further Eurofound-supported analyses of the EWCS have been made, though insufficient information was available to be included in this analysis. These are:

- sectoral profiles of working conditions – a report and 33 sectoral information sheets aim to capture the diversity between sectors in terms of working conditions and job quality, with the selection of sectors based as much as possible on the coverage of the sectoral social dialogue committees;
- occupational profiles of working conditions – the aim was to analyse those occupations which score higher or lower on all job quality dimensions and link them to a series of factors, whether these relate to the individual, working conditions or the nature of the company;
- an analysis of convergence and divergence in working conditions.

Eurofound has also embarked on a project to develop a framework on sustainable and inclusive quality of work over the life course, building on interdisciplinary research work to date. The project is intended to identify how a dynamic approach to the achievement of a ‘sustainable quality of work and employment’ could contribute to meeting the increased employment participation rates foreseen in the Europe 2020 targets, as well as contributing to the achievement of longer working lives.

Main findings drawn from the reports **2**

The following sections summarise the main findings of each of the Eurofound reports, including the secondary analyses, from a policy perspective.

The secondary research work provides considerable additional in-depth insights into such issues as the nature of working conditions, the relationship between different aspects of work and trends over time. In these respects, the most important findings and policy messages of each of these reports are presented below. These, along with the key findings of the overview report (also presented below), form the basic material for the analysis of the policy lessons from the fifth EWCS.

Overview report

Authors: Agnès Parent-Thirion, Greet Vermeulen, Gijs van Houten, Maija Lyly-Yrjänäinen, Isabella Biletta, Jorge Cabrita

The detailed findings are presented in three substantial chapters covering:

- employment and labour market characteristics;
- workplace issues and work organisation;
- quality of work and employment.

Employment policy

The overview report provides important evidence on many of the key employment policy concerns. This includes the following.

- There are economic and social implications of the persistent differences in employment rates between Member States, including the extent of variations in part-time working as well as in the form of employment contracts. While over 80% of the EU workforce is contracted to an employer, the content and coverage of fixed-term contracts varies greatly across countries, with obvious implications for longer term employment security, as seen in the latest recession.
- Occupational gender segregation had been commented on in the fourth EWCS report. The fifth report similarly notes that, despite increased gender awareness, men and women continue to work not only in different sectors, but also in different occupations and in different sizes of companies.
- In terms of education and training, the report notes that a person's occupation is often now no longer in line with their level of educational attainment. This raises many issues concerning the relevance of different types and levels of education, the implications this has for both personal and career development, and for the overall performance of companies and economies.
- The progressive replacement of the male breadwinner household model by the dual-earner model has wide-ranging policy implications. These extend from childcare and partner responsibilities and careers, through to more general issues as diverse as transport provisions, taxation and inheritance laws.
- Self-employment is a significant feature of labour markets, averaging 15% of total employment across the EU but varying greatly between Member States. The survey highlights the complexity of this significant group, with varying profiles in terms of educational attainment, gender, sector and occupation. This makes it difficult to identify and focus on key concerns and issues.

Workplace issues

The overview report addresses workplace issues in terms of organisational change, working time developments, exposure to physical and psychological risk factors, and changes in workplace organisation and practices. The main findings are as follows.

- Over half of employees experienced some organisational change as a result of technological developments, restructuring or reorganisation in the three years up to the survey.
- There are continuing changes in the patterns and structure of working time arrangements, including employee preferences and the extent to which these are met in practice. This is making it increasingly difficult to define the frontiers between working and not working, to identify where people are working, or even to measure working hours accurately.
- Exposure to physical risks does not appear to have decreased over the years and varies markedly between countries, sectors and occupations. Psychological risks are attracting increased attention, with improved knowledge of the impact on employee health of the way work is designed, organised and managed, and the importance of the work environment generally.
- The nature of the work environment varies, including aspects such as contact with people, the use of technology and quality standards, autonomy and job design.
- Work organisation practices have changed in nature, including task rotation, teamwork and workplace innovation.

In relation to newer work organisation practices, there is growing enthusiasm for less rigid work patterns in general. However, particular concerns are raised by the report.

- Task rotation is not unambiguously positive as such. If it is purely management-led, it can result in increased monotony, while greater autonomy can raise performance and satisfaction.
- Effective teamwork tends to create higher commitment and higher output, but success depends very much on how well it is organised.

The overall conclusion seems to be that developing effective policy responses to support workplace innovation will depend on achieving a better understanding than we currently have about exactly what is going on through more detailed research.

Working time

Working time is a matter on which the EWCS has concentrated over the years, with in-depth studies of many dimensions. The overview report for the fifth EWCS continues this tradition with a particular emphasis on the changes over time in the pattern of working hours.

Changes are driven both from the demand-side – changes in employment structures, particularly with the progressive move towards a 24/7 service sector – and from the supply side, notably the increasing participation of women associated with changing household work patterns, resulting in increasingly flexible arrangements. Some of these changes are seen positively by employees, others less so.

While average working hours calculated on the basis of EWCS data have reduced by around three hours per week in the EU over the past two decades, patterns of working time still vary considerably between countries.

- Part-time work continues to raise policy concerns, with around 40% of those working part-time expressing a preference for working longer hours while nearly 30% of employees would prefer to work fewer hours.
- Long hours of work (over 48 hours per week) continue to remain a serious problem in terms of health and general work–life balance, even though those concerned may be as happy with their general working arrangements as those working shorter hours.
- Regularity in working patterns appears to be the norm for 70%–80% of employees, with little change compared with earlier surveys. At the same time, employees working atypical hours – flexible schedules, shift work and so on – appear to be 50% more likely to experience health issues than those with more routine working arrangements.

The report also provides a broad review of the findings concerning the intrinsic quality of jobs, issues of work–life balance, as well as related issues such as skills, security of employment and incomes, and general well-being. Most of these topics are addressed in greater detail in secondary analyses, but many of their findings were not initially available or not available in full for this project.

Trends in job quality in Europe

Authors: Francis Green, Tarek Mostafa

The development of our understanding of the complex nature of job quality over the past decade or more has been an important achievement, and has brought real substance to the EU’s overriding policy goal of ‘more and better jobs’ by creating a much more scientific approach, including quantification and the development of indicators.

However, while the development of fully comprehensive and comparative indicators of job quality across the EU may be the holy grail, that end is not yet in sight. If anything, the two secondary analyses that address this issue serve to stimulate further enquiry and, importantly, to expand the policy focus away from the traditional and more easily measurable factors, such as the nature of the job contract, towards factors related to the workplace environment.

This broader focus on quality includes a range of factors such as:

- the existence/absence of discrimination of various forms;
- the potential for individuals to adapt the working environment to enable them to make best use of their potential;
- the opportunity to communicate and interact with those further up the work hierarchy.

None of these factors or elements is seen as particularly easy to report upon and measure, but they are nevertheless identified as issues of importance for the well-being of those concerned.

Job quality and employment quality

This secondary analysis seeks to establish a rigorous and precise distinction between job quality and the wider concept of employment quality. It argues for the maintenance of separate indices on the critical elements it has identified – earnings, prospects, intrinsic job quality and working time quality – and argues against attempts by other analysts to produce single, integrated indices of job quality.

The analysis puts the emphasis on the extent to which a job contributes to a worker’s sense of well-being, as against broader indicators of employment quality which might include more general labour market and economic indicators, as well as the interaction between the job and the individual. It recognises that while these more general factors can impact

on job quality, they are also more likely to vary between countries and to depend on a variety of factors such as institutional arrangements and social norms.

The need to pay attention to different aspects of job quality separately is well argued, though the authors recognise that there will be relationships between aspects of job quality and broader factors which can also influence the health and well-being of workers. However, some difficulties emerge in the analysis as the authors seek to illustrate developments in job quality based on results drawn only from the EWCS, notably concerning earnings, and research work is continuing on these issues.

The report notes that the Eurofound conceptual framework in this area was based on four basic dimensions:

- career and employment security;
- health and well-being;
- reconciliation of working and non-working life;
- skills development.

The four blocks proposed in this analysis vary somewhat in that they cover earnings, prospects, intrinsic job quality and working time quality. Although this new categorisation may appear neat and tidy, the authors go on to subdivide intrinsic job quality into four dimensions (skill use and discretion, social environment, physical environment and work intensity), suggesting that the categorisation has not proved to be entirely satisfactory in practice.

Earnings as a quality indicator

The incorporation of an earnings indicator is important as it provides a reminder of how lobbying from certain Member State governments successfully led to the exclusion of such data from the original set of indicators adopted by the European Commission to measure employment quality when the subject first appeared on the European agenda. This was despite the fact that this is the primary, often sole, criteria commonly used by researchers and policymakers in the US.

However, seeking to use only EWCS data in compiling an earnings index is problematic. The data from the EWCS have been adjusted correctly to account for differences in purchasing power between countries. But this does not address the many other factors that distort raw earnings data, such as employer and employee taxes and contributions, and the counterpart employee entitlements, all of which are known difficulties in seeking to establish comparative measures of real earnings across the EU. As an example, incomes in countries where non-wage entitlements are low will look artificially high on the basis of raw earnings data compared with countries where such entitlements are high.

Despite these difficulties, the rigorous analytical approach in this report throws light on a series of important issues and offers ways forward in terms of measuring job quality. However, it is too early to conclude that the authors have produced an alternative and fully operational framework for assessing job quality within and between Member States. Indeed, the report may even raise the question of whether it is appropriate to pursue that goal in this way in so far as it tends to lead to the development of comparative league tables. National policymakers might be better encouraged to take a more nuanced, qualitative approach – seeking to tease out those aspects of working life that are ‘good’ or ‘bad’ in various respects in differing circumstances – and thereby develop more comprehensive approaches to the enhancement of job quality.

Sustainable work and the ageing workforce

Authors: Patricia Vendramin, Gérard Valenduc, Anne-Françoise Molinié, Serge Volkoff, Michel Ajzen, Evelyne Léonard

There has been strong policy interest in promoting the extension of working lives – beyond historical retirement age norms. This is in the context of:

- changing demographic structures in Europe (including increased longevity, coupled with declining birth rates in many cases);
- continuing changes in workplace conditions;
- extended periods in education;
- concerns about achieving a better balance between working and non-working life;
- concerns over the sustainability of pensions.

That increases in employment rates among older age groups in the workforce were achievable has been adequately demonstrated during the past decade, with many Member States successfully meeting post-Lisbon targets. But it is less clear whether this reflects a genuine desire to continue in employment or whether it results, in part at least, from a declining value of pensions or reduced access to social transfers.

In this context, this secondary analysis report aims to identify those workplace conditions that affect the extent to which work is sustainable, not just in later years, but over a lifetime. The aim is to enable policymakers to develop strategies and actions that support such goals, as well as determining the likely realistic limitations to such efforts. The report addresses many complex issues concerning sustainable work over the life cycle and not just the age dimension.

Factors affecting sustainability for older workers

The main factors identified as being the most relevant in terms of affecting job sustainability for older workers at the workplace are:

- night and shift working;
- tiring or painful conditions;
- working to tight deadlines;
- imbalances between work and other commitments;
- limited scope to control the work environment;
- poor social support at work;
- poor job prospects;
- job insecurity.

The study notes that average employment rates in the EU fall quite rapidly among older age groups, going from 80% for those aged 45–49 years, to 76% for those aged 50–54 years, to 62% for those aged 55–59 years, and 31% for those aged 60–64. The gender gap is also higher in the latter two age groups than in the former.

Differences between Member States are identified, with three broad groups being distinguished. These are those where the employment rate starts to fall:

- around 50 years of age and then declines steadily;
- only around 55 years of age and then declines steadily;
- around 50 years of age but only declines sharply after 60 years of age.

Considerable detail is also provided regarding differences by occupation, sector and gender, and between employed and self-employed.

Possible critical age points in the retirement decision-making process

The report considers the evidence on whether older workers will actually be able to work to the age of 60 and beyond, noting that health concerns appear to peak for those aged 50–54 but decrease significantly afterwards.

The authors suggest that the early 50s are a critical period regarding future work decisions, including possible early retirement, with almost a third of those aged 50–54 not believing they would be able to do the same job until they were 60 years-old. This proportion is highest among lower skilled workers, especially women.

The desire to leave the labour market is seen to be partly driven by concerns that work is adversely affecting their health (though this is seen to be less among those aged 55–59 who actually remain in work) but also by a desire to simply work less.

There are possible methodological difficulties in drawing conclusions from the data since it may be that employees with health difficulties will have already left the labour market by the time they reach 55, as suggested by the evidence above. At the same time, significant differences between countries demand further investigation, taking account of various factors – partly the differences in working conditions for older workers between countries, but also different social, cultural, institutional, legal and policy factors.

Policy challenges and sustainability

The main policy findings arising from the evidence are that:

- traditional systems of employee protection need to be reconsidered in the light of changing patterns of work organisation;
- shortcomings in terms of health and safety and workplace ergonomics continue to be obstacles to work sustainability;
- major differences in sustainability exist between occupations and between people at different skill levels;
- the national legal and social environment – from pension and tax regimes to wider social attitudes – has an important influence on the motivation to remain in work.

In other words, improvements in employment and job sustainability depend on many factors. There is no guarantee that narrowly focused changes in workplace conditions will automatically result in significant changes in patterns of working life, any more than will wider changes in the labour market or social policy arrangements.

The implication is that research in this area should seek to assess the relative extent to which the sustainability of an ageing workforce is influenced by the specific work environment (as particularly addressed in the EWCS) compared

with the more general national, regional or other differences in social and political attitudes and norms of behaviour at play.

Working time and work–life balance in a life course perspective

Authors: Dominique Anxo, Christine Franz, Angelika Kümmerling

This report notes the extent to which labour market arrangements have evolved in recent times while raising concerns as to how far these are coherent with changes in household structures and needs, and wider policy aspirations. It focuses on the broader issues of work–life balance, seeking to provide an understanding of the growing heterogeneity of living arrangements and preferences over the life course within Europe, and their effects with respect to general employment and social objectives.

Following a presentation of the data and methodology, the analysis addresses:

- patterns of actual working hours and the distribution of working time by characteristics and across different life phases;
- factors affecting individual and household work–life balance across the life course;
- working time preferences and gaps between actual and preferred working time;
- gender disparities across the life course including unpaid work and time devoted to domestic and care responsibilities.

Complex relationships between households, employers and the state

A starting point for the analysis is the recognition that working time regimes and configurations (across country, gender, industry and occupation) are the outcome of interactions between households, employers and the state/social partners in the framework of general economic conditions and possibilities. It is also acknowledged that the preferences and needs of men and women regarding working time arrangements vary across the life course, and that a full understanding of working time configurations and time allocations between men and women requires a life course perspective.

Gender disparities in labour market commitments and differences in the time commitments over a life course are noted, including national differences over the life course of men and women. Gender differences in working time patterns and arrangements over time may depend on many factors:

- the institutional and societal context;
- the availability and cost of childcare services;
- the characteristics of parental leave systems;
- the provision of care when older people become partially or fully dependent;
- employment regimes;
- the design of tax and family policies.

However, differences between countries and social groups may also be related to disparities in the occurrence and the timing of key events over the life cycle, such as age differences in leaving education, entering the labour market, having children, and retiring.

The time spent on domestic and care activities is also central to understanding structures and cross-country differences concerning the gender division of labour in general, the gender distribution of paid working time, and the time devoted to domestic activities.

Because of the wide range of topics it covers, the fifth EWCS sheds light not only on prevailing working conditions and working time patterns in Europe, but also on the relationship between paid employment and domestic activities, work–life balance and working time preferences across the life course.

Challenge of achieving work–life balance

Average weekly working time varies widely across the EU, with higher female employment rates tending to be correlated with shorter average weekly working hours due to women working shorter hours on average (35.4 hours per week compared with 40.2 for men). The distribution of working time is also more varied for women than men, and is strongly influenced by their life stage, especially periods of parenthood, although northern countries maintain a high share of women in work even during this phase.

It is notable that around 80% of EWCS respondents reported that their working time fits well or very well with their family or other social commitments outside work. Male employees were slightly less satisfied with their work–life balance than female ones. However, apart from the northern European cluster of countries, women in almost all other countries reported great difficulties in combining work and family life. Family-friendly working time organisation can facilitate the reconciliation of work and private life but, during the parenting phase, employees still report greater difficulties with work–life balance.

Despite the general satisfaction data, almost 40% of employees would like to change their current working time, with a preference for shorter full-time hours by both men and women. Working time preferences vary significantly across the life course, with mothers of pre-school children more inclined to seek a reduction of working time than their male partners.

In terms of time spent doing unpaid work in each life phase, employed women still spend more hours on unpaid domestic or care activities than employed men. This increases dramatically during the parenting phase, with employed women spending twice as many hours on care and household activities compared with employed men.

When entering the parenting phase, employed women reduce their paid work by four hours a week but increase their unpaid work by 25 hours, while men's unpaid work increases by 12 hours. The smallest gap in unpaid work between the sexes was found in the northern country cluster. This was attributed to active mainstreaming policies that promote gender equality and to measures intended to help parents achieve a balance between paid work and family life. Such measures included the provision of high-quality public child and elderly care facilities, and the option of flexible and reversible working time over the life course.

Inequalities of opportunity between women and men

The analysis employs a gender empowerment measure as a measure of inequalities between the opportunities for men and women. This is based on the extent of inequalities in three areas:

- political participation and decision-making;
- economic participation;
- power over economic resources.

The authors argue that there are strong reasons to believe that the time devoted to paid work and to unpaid domestic activities, the incidence of various forms of working time arrangements, and working time preferences and needs all vary during the life course of an individual. Moreover, while the traditional family life cycle approach implied a uniform sequence of household arrangements, the sequencing of life stages appears more diversified in contemporary societies. The study uses a range of household categories as a basis for making a comparative analysis, with no distinction made between married or unmarried couples provided they are cohabiting.

The typology used in this research is seen to cover more than 80% of all households forms found in the EWCS countries in 2010. This stylised household typology makes it possible to perform a cross-country comparison of paid and unpaid working hours for women and men in different life stages. Among the rich body of evidence assembled is that concerning differences in country strategies in relation to the better integration of women in the labour market. This shows that, while a higher than EU average female employment rate correlates positively with the proportion of women working part time, this can give a distorted picture of gender differences across countries and life stages.

In liberal market-oriented countries, the gender disparities in working time distribution and the gender polarisation of working time is pronounced, with nearly 25% of women working short part-time hours compared with 8% of men. The gender gap in the proportion of those working 40 hours is 10 percentage points (39% of men compared with 29% of women), while 16% of men work extremely long hours (48 hours or more) against 6% of women.

The gender gap in working time distribution appears even more pronounced in the continental and southern cluster of countries, with about 44% of women in this cluster working fewer than 35 hours a week, while more than 80% of male wage earners work longer than 35 hours. Given the low part-time rate in these two country clusters, it seems that the choice for women is either to work full-time or withdraw (at least temporarily) from the labour market. In contrast, the impact of young children on female labour supply in the Nordic countries mainly takes the form of a temporary reduction of working time with limited effect on the participation of the female labour force.

In general, the extent of labour market participation varies significantly across the life course and in particular during the parenthood phase. The gender gaps in terms of working time profiles are important, with women working fewer hours than their male counterparts at every life phase. Female wage earners also exhibit a higher variability of working time across the life course.

At all life stages, female wage earners work fewer hours than their male counterparts. Female working hours are also much more sensitive to life stages. In all country clusters, the working time of women decreases during the parenting phase and the gender gap in working time increases significantly. The variation in the working time of women across the life course is stronger in both the northern countries and the liberal market-oriented countries than in others, as is the gender gap in terms of working time.

Economic and social benefits of a good work–life balance

The importance of achieving a well-balanced relationship between work and private life is increasingly acknowledged, not only by employees but by their employers and in relation to the economy generally. Employees whose work demands fit with their private life obligations are seen to display lower sickness absence, higher work motivation and greater loyalty to their employer.

In these respects a majority of wage earners reported themselves satisfied with their work–life balance, with women somewhat more satisfied than men (87% for women against 83% for men). However, this may partly reflect the fact that women are more likely to choose occupations, industries and sectors where it is easier to combine work with domestic commitments.

The length and scheduling of working time is important, with longer working hours and atypical hours being negatively associated with work–life balance. In this respect, however, female employees report a significantly lower likelihood of being able to take an hour or two off to cope with urgent family or personal matters compared with men, with high-skilled workers having a higher probability of doing so.

Self-employed workers report a lower work–life balance (overall 76%, with women higher than men) than wage earners. A large majority of lone mothers (81%) report a good balance, in line with women as a whole. However, the situation appears less satisfactory in continental and southern countries. In general, predictable working time and working time autonomy are also associated with positive work–life balance outcomes, whereas working time flexibility set by employers and atypical working hours are associated with adverse outcomes.

Policy and institutional arrangements

In policy terms the report suggests that, in most countries, the parenting phase remains a critical period for integrating women into the labour market. This suggests that increasing female labour force participation requires policy measures favouring a better balance between work, family and other social commitments, particularly in countries with low female employment.

Working men and women living in northern countries appear to be at a significant advantage in these respects given their institutional arrangements. This implies that policy measures to reduce the overall gender gap in the EU need to address issues of paid work and unpaid domestic activities, with family-friendly, flexible and reversible working time options across the life course.

Health and well-being at work

Authors: Chiara Ardito, Angelo d’Errico, Roberto Leombruni, Lia Pacelli

The relationships between health and safety issues and employment and social concerns have been central to the development of the EWCS since its inception. However, the range of concerns has broadened in recent years, with issues related to mental as well as physical stress, and the impact of changing patterns and systems of work attracting increased attention given the focus on job quality and employment sustainability. Such concerns have also been reflected in the adoption of joint policy positions by the European social partners and national authorities.

This analysis investigates the relationships between the well-being and health of European workers and their working conditions. The evidence presented highlights huge differences in the level of health and well-being across countries and across individual and job characteristics, with a detailed analysis of the drivers and consequences of those differences.

The analysis uses a comprehensive set of indicators of the psychosocial work environment to identify some of the most important risk factors, not just at the workplace, but in society more generally. Among the several measures of health, specific health conditions such as musculoskeletal diseases and mental health conditions are addressed, along with occupational injuries. The possible determinants investigated include individual characteristics (age and gender), human capital endowment (education, tenure, training), formal definition of the job (industry, company size, job contract, occupation, hours worked), physical hazards, and factors related to work organisation and the psychosocial work environment.

As such, this analysis represents an important new usage of EWCS data linked to existing research to underline the importance of ‘work’ for the well-being of individuals with, for example, the psychological well-being of individuals being strongly correlated with how they evaluate their own health status.

Dimensions of well-being

The analysis is built around five dimensions:

- health and well-being across Europe;
- psychosocial work environment;
- determinants of well-being;
- work environment and health;
- absenteeism and presenteeism (that is, working even though someone might be considered too sick to be at work).

These dimensions have a number of subheadings, some of which are linked to other sections.

In terms of well-being in general, the findings show a clear relationship with several indicators of quality of work and employment. Non-monetary measures of quality are prominent, with the employability of workers being seen as a key determinant, particularly in times of recession, when subjective perceptions of job security are at their lowest.

A negative relationship between quality levels and variations in well-being are found consistently: once very good quality conditions are achieved, individuals have high levels of well-being with few exceptions. Conversely, when faced with a bad quality of work and employment, large differences emerge in the capacity of people to cope.

Subjective versus objective indicators of insecurity

An important finding is that the formal definition of a job does not appear to have a significant impact on most health outcomes once account is taken of its physical, psychosocial and organisational dimensions. At the same time, job insecurity is a risk factor for musculoskeletal diseases among white-collar workers. Likewise, while the actual nature of the job contract (temporary or none) does not appear to have an impact, the subjective perception of job insecurity does. Likewise, inter-country differences also tend to vanish after controlling for different factors, reinforcing the notion that it is the job content that determines physical health, more than its formal setup or even the institutional environment.

Psychosocial factors appear to be highly important determinants of outcomes and not just in terms of anxiety or depression. For example, high ‘psychological demand’ increases musculoskeletal diseases among white-collar workers, high ‘skill discretion’ decreases them among all workers and ‘decision authority’ increases them for both blue-collar and white-collar workers.

Likewise, rewards emerge as a protective factor for all health outcomes and reduce the incidence of work accidents among all groups of workers. Moreover, work accidents – together with musculoskeletal disease – also show clear associations with many physical hazards that can be measured in the EWCS such as environmental hazards, awkward postures and travelling for work.

The analysis includes a detailed investigation of the psychosocial work environment, which the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) has identified as one of the most important risk factors for the health and well-being of workers. The focus is on work-related stress, defined as a pattern of reactions occurring when workers experience prolonged exposure to work demands that are not matched to their knowledge, skills or abilities, and which therefore challenge their ability to cope.

Factors related to stress at work

Stress at work is associated with a number of negative physical and psychological effects for the individual such as cardiovascular diseases, musculoskeletal diseases and immunological problems, as well as mental health problems (anxiety and depression). In this context, the report indicates that while most individuals can handle some short-term pressure in a positive way, they often have much greater difficulty coping with prolonged exposure to intensive pressure.

In these respects four categories of jobs and work situations are identified:

- active jobs (high demands and high control);
- high-strain jobs (high demands and low control);
- low-strain jobs (low demands and high control);
- passive jobs (low demands and low control).

However, the psychosocial work environment covers not only job demand and control factors, but also issues related to work organisation and job content, the type of production and tasks, and interpersonal relations. In these respects, the analysis draws on EWCS data to establish 12 indices organised in four broad areas:

- job demands;
- work organisation and work content;
- interpersonal relations and leadership;
- the specific work interface for the individual.

Gender and occupational differences

The analysis produces a complex range of findings concerning the types of challenges. For example, it highlights a number of gender differences of the kind that do not commonly figure in labour market discussions, such as that women show higher levels of emotional demands as well as demand for hiding emotions, while men are more exposed to cognitive and psychological demands. These findings are seen to hold for all age groups, even if differences decrease with age. Overall, however, middle-aged male workers are seen to face the most demanding situations at work.

Regarding interpersonal relations at work, women report a slightly better working climate and better support from managers than do men. In general, while satisfaction with social relationships at work increases as workers age, the rewards dimension decreases. At the same time, and perhaps paradoxically, conflicts between the demands of work and family life are seen to be slightly greater for male workers than women.

In terms of occupations, psychological demand at work is seen to be highest among craft workers, plant and machine operators, while levels of emotional demand are higher among professionals (especially women), managers and agricultural workers. The need to hide emotions affects managers, professionals and service workers in particular.

In terms of the reward dimension of work, the worst situations are faced by employees without contracts or on atypical contracts, and by the self-employed without employees. However, the possibility of reconciling work and life objectives is higher among the self-employed without employees, while employees without permanent contracts face the greatest difficulties.

Quality of work and well-being

The analysis indicates that the quality of work clearly affects individual well-being, despite the difficulty of actually defining quality. The ‘needs’ approach to quality covers the basic needs that people seek to fulfil through work, which includes the need for survival (pay, security), social needs (the need for interpersonal interaction, membership, friendship), individual needs (need for self-esteem and autonomy) and ‘self-actualisation’ needs.

In this respect the analysis makes use of the established Eurofound four-part quality framework (career and job security, the health and well-being of workers, competence development, and combining work and non-working life) as well as the notion that a ‘good job’ is one that allows workers to achieve well-being and to achieve a range of personal goals.

Three main findings are highlighted by the analysis.

- All indicators show a clear positive relationship between well-being and quality.
- The aspects that are more effective in shaping worker well-being are intrinsic job quality and employment quality.
- There is a negative relationship between quality and well-being, in that increases in quality are associated with reductions in the variability of well-being.

The analysis acknowledges the complexity of the relationship between job quality and earnings, and recognises that ‘the relation between monetary income, satisfaction of needs and well-being is not always clear-cut’ with several theories being proposed to try to disentangle this relationship.

In this context, the richness of the fifth EWCS data is seen as enabling new light to be shed on the subject since it provides both subjective and objective views on respondents’ incomes. The findings tend to confirm a generally positive relationship between incomes and well-being, albeit with differences between those at different levels and differences between countries.

Impact of unemployment and recession on well-being

The analysis notes that research has consistently demonstrated that not having a job when you want one reduces well-being more than any other factor, including divorce or separation. It also notes that, although the effects of unemployment on well-being are not directly observable in the EWCS, the effect of the risk of unemployment may be studied and that previous research has suggested that this effect is also of considerable importance.

The 2010 data enable some light to be shed on the initial impact of the current recession. As expected, the likelihood of losing one’s job is seen to have increased since 2007 with ‘very unlikely’ answers having fallen sharply and ‘likely’ and ‘very likely’ responses having increased. On this basis the research suggests that the well-being loss due to job insecurity in 2010 has increased more than three times compared with 2007 in the case of workers who reported that they were ‘likely’ or ‘very likely’ to lose their job.

Moreover, while the well-being losses were quite similar among different worker groups in 2007, in 2010 the more insecure a worker was, the higher was the loss of well-being. Likewise, reductions in employability – the prospect of individuals finding or retaining employment – may also affect well-being as a result of the fear of becoming unemployed.

Health outcomes in relation to the work environment

The analysis aims to identify whether, once controlling for the job and individual characteristics, there are specific predictors for health and safety outcomes resulting from aspects of the psychosocial work environment. In this context the crucial determinants of health and safety at the workplace are seen to include:

- individual characteristics (age and gender) as they are naturally linked to health;
- human capital endowment (years of education, experience and tenure, training spells), measuring a worker's level of general as well as job-specific knowledge;
- general job characteristics (industry, company size, job contract, occupation) as catch-all features of working conditions.

In addition to these determinants, EWCS data are used to observe and analyse the impact of factors relating to work organisation as well as the psychosocial work environment. Factors relating to work organisation are defined as:

- hours of work: number of hours, unsociable working hours (such as during the night, evenings, on Sundays) and variability in the hours worked;
- pace of work: factors such as the presence of frequent and disruptive interruptions and the effects of piece-rate pay;
- physical factors: working outside, environmental hazards (such as exposure to chemicals, cold) or posture-related hazards (such as working in awkward postures, lifting, standing);
- specific features: need to travel for work (work at client, patient, customer premises, or in a car), work with clients, coping with the introduction of new processes or restructuring;
- other challenges such as a second job, whether the work is occasional or not.

The findings reveal that the prevalence of three or more health problems is higher among women than men once they are considered as if they are holding the same kind of job as men. In other words, their prevalence is higher not because they hold jobs of a specific kind, but because of some specific feature that it is not possible to observe.

The EWCS makes it possible to deepen the analysis further. It emerges that it is not the number of hours worked that adversely affects general health, but rather working unsociable hours or facing variable working hours, as well as facing disruptive interruptions. Crucially, it appears that the psychosocial work environment has a significant impact on the general health of workers. The prevalence of three or more health problems increases among those facing high demands at work and job insecurity, but also those in high level decision-making positions. Health problems decrease, on the other hand, where there is discretion over the use of skills, good interpersonal relations and a good work–life balance. Several of these associations are reported to exist also in relation to physical and mental health.

Job requirements/environments and health

The formal definition of the job (company size, contract, public/private legal setup) and even occupation has no significant impact on the prevalence of backache or muscular pains once a division is made between blue-collar and white-collar jobs. Also, no significant differences emerge between industries, apart from a few specific exceptions. This is seen as an important research finding, made possible by the EWCS data, since most datasets only observe industry, company size, contract and occupation.

Looking specifically at job requirements, the following points emerge.

- Environmental hazards increase backache or muscular pains significantly for all workers. Piece-rate pay is associated with the prevalence of backache or muscular pains among blue-collar workers (the only group facing the possibility of this pay setting), but no other aspects of work organisation change the prevalence of backache or muscular pains among them.
- Psychosocial work environment issues are decisive in explaining the prevalence of backache or muscular pains, confirming that the health outcomes are both physical and psychological.
- Among determinants linked to job organisation, environmental hazards stand out, creating double the risk for manual workers compared with non-manual workers. Conversely, positive rewards reduce the prevalence of work accidents among all groups of workers, as does good work–life balance.

Existing research has identified a gender dimension to depression and anxiety, and this analysis therefore treats all workers together and then separates them by gender. Workers are further separated by occupation to fully recognise the different nature of manual and non-manual tasks.

The evidence shows that gender differences in the prevalence of depression and anxiety are much larger among manual than non-manual workers. Significant factors affecting men and women across occupations include the effect of introducing new processes or restructuring, and facing disruptive interruptions, all of which increase depression and anxiety significantly. In particular the ability to determine one's own pace of work reduces the prevalence of depression and anxiety among women.

As expected, psychosocial work environment factors are crucial determinants of mental health. The effect of exposure to high demands on the risk of depression and anxiety appears particularly relevant, but with some differences between women and men.

Absenteeism and presenteeism

The analysis also addresses the issue of absenteeism and presenteeism. Several of the factors associated with absence through sickness apply equally to men and women, including poor general or mental health, seniority in the company and being a permanent employee.

Among men, however, sickness absence is significantly increased by exposure to discrimination and high emotional demand, again highlighting the crucial role of psychosocial factors. Among women, sickness absence is higher among workers in the public sector and lower among fixed-term contract workers. It is also higher among women reporting job rotation and lower for those enjoying high skill discretion. In other words, psychosocial dimensions are as crucial for women as they are for men.

In terms of presenteeism, there are strong associations with those working in high-level occupations. However, such behaviour can also be associated with high work intensity, verbal abuse or discrimination, and unfavourable working conditions.

Work organisation and employee involvement in Europe

Authors: Duncan Gallie, Ying Zhou

The EWCS is seen as an important – and in many respects unique – source of information on work organisation. The data it collects have been critical in identifying, categorising and quantifying the alternative workplace and organisational relationships that exist. These can significantly affect the quality of working life of employees, as well as the efficiency of the company or organisation involved.

This secondary analysis focuses particularly on the extent to which workplace organisational arrangements provide employees with opportunities to make, or participate in, decisions concerning their jobs. In terms of the general determinants of employee involvement, it draws on evidence on:

- the characteristics of the work tasks;
- company flexibility policies;
- company human resource capacity;
- information and consultation arrangements;
- type of company ownership;
- national employment regulation regime.

Differences in employee involvement by type of company, country and over time

In terms of employee motivation, the analysis focuses on two relatively independent factors – commitment to the task and commitment to the organisation – for which there are two and three questions respectively in the EWCS, with a strong positive relationship with appropriate organisational types. In both cases, however, significant differences are found between groups of Member States. On this basis the report distinguishes four organisational types, ranging from high involvement on both dimensions to low involvement on both dimensions.

The report indicates that a little over a quarter of employees are in organisations that can be categorised as ‘high involvement’ with the remainder split between intermediate and low, with positive outcomes for employees likely to be associated with higher levels of involvement.

However, major differences appear to be associated with national practices and traditions – with a rather conventional split between Nordic countries at one end of the spectrum and southern countries at the other. There are also sharp distinctions in the new Member States between the higher involvement Baltic States compared with their larger and southern neighbours.

At the same time, the report underlines not only the importance of national differences, but also the importance of more structural economic and labour market factors – not least the degree of sophistication or technological advancement of the workplace and its skills – both of which are positively related to higher levels of involvement.

While longitudinal data are scarce, the report notes the evidence of some modest positive development over time in the EU based on the measurement of ‘task discretion’. However, a separate analysis of the newly unemployed since the onset of the recession suggests that this progress is essentially limited to southern and eastern Member States. A further proviso is that this may well be due to a short-term compositional change – namely, a reduction in the number of low-skilled, low-discretion, jobs in those countries as a consequence of the recession – rather than any longer term trend improvement.

Policy implications

From a policy perspective, the evidence indicates both some of the limits to what we know about the relationships under review, but also the extent to which it seems to be possible to identify what might be done, at least in general terms, to encourage high-level involvement practices across the board.

While the report talks positively about the EU's legislative initiatives with respect to information and consultation, it also underlines the importance of factors such as a strong human resource capacity in companies. This may or may not be associated with the full use of more formal institutional channels of communication, which tend to be more developed in large rather than medium-sized enterprises. In this respect there is also a high correlation between employee involvement and trade union membership, with the latter seen as encouraging an organisational culture based on dialogue.

Overall, a feeling is left that there is much more to be understood about the effectiveness, from both an employee and employer perspective, of different types of work organisation. This could suggest potentially fruitful research linking the EWCS to other company-derived data such as the European Company Survey.

Women, men and working conditions in Europe

Authors: Mark Smith, Agnieszka Piasna, Brendan Burchell, Jill Rubery, Anthony Rafferty, Janna Rose, Laura Carter

This report analyses data on gender differences in employment and working conditions from the fifth EWCS and considers their importance in terms of understanding labour market and working conditions. In particular it demonstrates the persistence of a high level of sectoral, occupational and workplace segregation, and considers the complex links between horizontal and vertical segregation. It also looks at more general patterns of association between gender segregation and various dimensions of working conditions.

Factors determining gender differences in working conditions

The research demonstrates why such a study is complex due to three sets of factors.

- Gender effects vary across life stages so that disaggregation in this way provides better insights into how and why gender gaps emerge, and how the relationships between employment, working conditions and aspects of well-being can be addressed.
- Gender differences in aggregate indices of working conditions or job quality conceal variations in the individual components of the indices. For example, men often experience poor working conditions in terms of working hours and poor intrinsic job quality, even though some may consider the higher pay and better prospects associated with these negative aspects of male-dominated work as compensatory.
- There are many differences between countries in the pattern of gender relations overall and across key life stages. For instance, working time patterns across life stages change more in some countries than others, as do the relative levels of segregation within occupations and the gender gaps in well-being across the life stages. These various effects mean that countries do not easily fit into common classifications or groupings when all the dimensions of working conditions are taken into account.

The study also highlights the fact that the public sector plays an important role in raising job quality standards for women due to the overrepresentation of women in public sector jobs (although men working the public sector also benefit from lower work intensity and better working time. For women, the public sector displays greater access to jobs, offering higher intrinsic job quality, including greater use of skills and discretion in the work.

In terms of segregation, the analysis in the EWCS demonstrates how subtle processes inside and outside the labour market reinforce gender differences, especially regarding the type of work performed by women and men. It highlights segregated outcomes at different levels in the labour market and shows up national differences in the way jobs are socially constructed.

While the effects of the public sector on gender segregation vary within and between countries, female-dominated occupations are more concentrated in the public sector and women are, anyway, more likely to be in particular occupational groups, whether in the public or private sector. In terms of vertical segregation, women are underrepresented in managerial positions even though their performance as supervisors, as rated by employees, tends to be at least as good as that of men.

Well-being and harassment at work

Men experience a significantly higher level of well-being, on average, than women, even though the factors determining well-being seem generally similar. For both men and women, well-being is higher for white-collar workers and younger workers. It is also associated with working in mixed gender occupations and in jobs with high intrinsic job quality or good job prospects. Working for a boss of the opposite sex also improved well-being.

In contrast, well-being is low for those working more than 40 hours per week, with a particularly strong negative effect for women working more than 48 hours per week. It is also low for those working alone. For women, life stages play a role in shaping well-being, with women who leave paid work completely during child-rearing having lower well-being than women who remain in the workforce.

Harassment at work is higher when men or women are employed in occupations dominated by the opposite sex. However, women face a greater risk overall, possibly due to more frequent contact with customers and patients in female-dominated occupations.

The complex differences between countries with respect to changes in job quality over life stages also reveal how conventional classifications of countries do not always seem to apply when working conditions are examined on a comparative basis.

Working conditions and job quality

In terms of working time, men are more at risk of working extremely long hours, just as women are more likely to have short-hours jobs. Again, occupational and public sector effects play an important role in shaping these gender differences. Although men in the private sector are at a much greater risk of working long hours, for women the prevalence of short hours is fairly similar between private and public sectors. Given this situation, it is perhaps not surprising that women tend to express a desire for longer hours and men a desire for shorter hours.

In terms of job quality, the analysis builds on previous work by Eurofound and sees the job quality index as providing a valuable conceptual tool for exploring the relationship between gender issues and working conditions. However, the report suggests that further disaggregation and refinements can help develop a fuller picture of gender differences, including revealing gender 'trade-offs'.

In this respect, women, particularly mothers, work shorter and less unsocial hours, presumably to provide time for caring, while men have greater control over their schedules. Supervision by a female boss has a positive association with enhanced job quality for all, and also with better prospects for women. Again the study finds that the public sector offers better quality jobs for both sexes, particularly higher level positions for women.

Trends in gender differences in job quality are affected by longer term changes on both the demand and supply sides of the labour market, but also by the impact of the current crisis. The report notes that it is not possible to establish with certainty the extent to which changes in job quality and working conditions over this period reflect the impact of recession and government austerity programmes (at least up to 2010) against longer-term trends.

However, changes in gender gaps in the analysis of varying dimensions of job quality demonstrate the shifting patterns of inequality within countries, and the fact that patterns of change do not appear to be uniform either across countries, or between public and private sectors.

In this respect, one of the difficulties in comparing working conditions by gender from the EWCS is the fact that it only includes people who are employed or who are paid for work, and this excludes more women than men. Moreover, the employment characteristics of women outside the labour market are likely to vary considerably from one country to another.

The report suggests that links with other sources of data might be sought and specifically sees a need to investigate differences arising from gender relations in different national labour markets and welfare and family arrangements when addressing issues of job quality and working conditions. The importance of developing a critical perspective on various self-reported measures of job quality, satisfaction or well-being is also mentioned, given that these may be shaped by gender norms and national institutional and social arrangements.

Policy implications and actions

The analysis of the gendered outcomes in relation to working conditions touches on the full range of policy domains related to the labour market and the report argues that no single policy, or even group of policies, is likely to address the disparities it highlights. Furthermore, country differences are seen to demonstrate the need for country-specific responses to address particular problems and challenges.

In terms of addressing segregation, the report argues that measures are required to:

- open up jobs for women in male-dominated areas and for men in female-dominated occupations;
- address the undervaluation of occupations that tend to be female-dominated;
- address vertical segregation and barriers to women's progression in occupational hierarchies.

However, the report argues that a focus on the labour market alone will not reduce segregation and that policy needs to be more broadly conceived, including strategies to help shape the potential of girls and boys in future professional careers.

In terms of addressing working time inequalities, the report argues that measures are required to:

- limit labour market gender inequalities across the life course;
- promote a more even time balance at home and at work;
- promote a change in the behaviour of men in the home to avoid women working 'double shifts' of paid work on the labour market and unpaid work at home;
- limit women's involvement in very short-hours jobs which reinforce gender divisions in job quality, restrict promotion opportunities and reinforce gender divisions in the home;
- reduce the exposure of men to long hours of work, particularly in male-dominated jobs.

The report notes that opportunities for reconciling paid and unpaid work are clearly beneficial at particular life stages, but adjustments to working time should be preferably short term and reversible to avoid lifelong penalties.

In terms of addressing gender gaps in job quality, measures are seen to be required to:

- open up supervisory positions for women across the workplace, sector and occupation hierarchies;
- more closely monitor and assess poor physical environments to prevent poor job quality and increase well-being in male-dominated sectors and occupations, particularly in terms of work intensity and long hours;
- promote job creation at the lower end of the job market to boost employment opportunities, while taking into account working conditions and intrinsic job quality.

In terms of addressing gender gaps in well-being, measures are required to address wider inequalities, particularly gender differences in terms of well-being, and to further promote well-being through gender desegregation and through limits to long working hours.

Future policy issues

In terms of key issues for the future, the authors argue that policy needs to be sensitive to the impact of the economic crisis and the public expenditure-related austerity measures on labour markets and gender relations, especially if better quality jobs for women decline within the public sector.

Austerity may be clawing back social policies or services that support higher levels of participation or longer hours of employment for women, such as childcare support, limiting the choice of jobs available to working mothers.

For men, a key issue is whether they can expect to experience a potential convergence with women's employment experiences, at least for those who are lower skilled, with more men engaged in temporary or part-time employment and receiving pay at lower rates.

Positive convergence implies wider opportunities for women in the labour market and greater opportunities for men to pursue different mixes of work and non-wage work activities. Negative convergence implies a levelling down of the opportunities for men, particularly those who are less skilled.

Another issue for women will be whether the prolonged crisis will lead to a reversal in the patterns of increasing integration in employment due to reduced employment opportunities and reduced childcare support, or whether the squeeze on family budgets may lead to women offering more labour market time even when support for care decreases. The next EWCS will be particularly important for monitoring the extended impact of this crisis on what have been relatively well-established trajectories towards some degree of upward convergence in men's and women's working conditions and labour market experiences in Europe.

Quality of employment conditions and employment relations in Europe

Authors: Joan Benach, Christophe Vanroelen, Alejandra Vives, Hans de Witte

The basic starting premise of this wide-ranging analysis is that, within the European policy framework, good quality jobs and employment are an important precondition for:

- safeguarding sustainable working careers;

- worker motivation;
- productivity;
- minimising work-related disability and occupational accidents;
- improving occupational health.

The report argues that the measurement of the quality of a job is a complex task and notes that the terms quality of ‘work’, ‘jobs’ and ‘employment’ are often used interchangeably. This is even though the subject matter may range from the intrinsic characteristics of jobs to much more wide-ranging factors, including employment status. This analysis is specifically addressing quality of employment.

To address these issues, the analysis measures the quality of employment on the basis of a set of 12 indicators representing four subdimensions of employment conditions (contract security, income and rights, working time, and employability) and two subdimensions of employment relations (employee representation and employee empowerment). These indicators were then used to calculate an overall employment quality index as well as to develop a new typology of jobs based on a cluster analysis.

Employment arrangements at different levels

The researchers used the standard employment relationship as a baseline for assessing existing employment arrangements, with the quality of employment analysed at three levels:

- individual characteristics (micro);
- company and sector characteristics (meso);
- country (macro).

At the micro level of individual workers, the following are noted.

- Women more frequently have low-waged jobs and part-time jobs, while men work longer hours, have more opportunities to determine their working hours, and receive higher wages and more non-wage benefits.
- Young workers are seen to have the highest percentage of jobs without a contract, low-waged jobs and insecure jobs, while older workers receive less training (either paid or provided by the employer or on-the-job training).
- Workers with lower educational attainment more often work without a contract, are in low-waged jobs and have a high perception of job insecurity, along with lower workplace empowerment, as judged by poor communication and participation with their superiors.
- In contrast, workers with higher levels of educational attainment tend to have more permanent contracts, receive higher wages and more non-waged benefits, have better communication and participation with superiors, receive more training and have a better perception of their future employability.

At the meso level, the following is noted with regard to occupation.

- Workers with an elementary level of educational attainment have the worst levels of quality of employment indicators, with fewer permanent contracts and more no-contract jobs, in addition to higher perceived job insecurity. Moreover, while they work at more regular times, they tend to have low-waged jobs, and are offered less training and less participation and communication opportunities with their superiors.

- Other low-skilled blue-collar employees, such as plant and machine operators and assemblers, report long working hours and a high perception of job insecurity. Few service, shop and market-sales workers (low-skilled, white-collar workers) have permanent contracts and many have no contract at all; and in general these are low-waged jobs.
- Among high-skilled blue-collar workers, there are some groups with poor employment conditions, as is the case for agricultural and fishery workers, with fewer permanent contracts, more no-contract jobs, less training, and not being well informed about health and safety issues. Craft and related trades workers, despite high regular working hours, have a high perception of job insecurity.
- In contrast, highly skilled white-collar workers have the most satisfactory employment indicators, except for long working hours, as is also the case for legislators, senior officials and managers who also have to work during their own time on occasion.

At the meso level, with regard to sectors of activity, workers employed in the agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing sectors frequently do unpaid overtime work on Sundays and have long working hours. Those employed in industrial sectors report highly regular working hours, but also high job insecurity. Civil servants and those in other service sectors tend to have more involuntary part-time jobs.

Different categories of jobs

To categorise jobs, a cluster model was built covering five categories of jobs with similar characteristics. These are labelled as follows:

- high-quality standard employment relationship-like jobs;
- instrumental standard employment relationship-like jobs;
- precarious extensive jobs;
- precarious unsustainable jobs;
- portfolio jobs.

The first cluster is the most frequently found (34%) and characterised by rather beneficial employment conditions and relations. Employees in this job cluster have a high probability of:

- being in stable employment with high regularity;
- receiving non-wage benefits;
- having control over their work schedules;
- having access to an employee representative;
- having training opportunities from their employers.

As such they are unlikely to have a low income, be engaged in involuntary part-time work, have uncompensated flexible working times, or low communication and participation with superiors. There is also a low probability of them working long hours, or of being ill-informed on occupational health and safety. In short, this job cluster closely resembles the typical standard employment model as described in the literature.

The second cluster covers the second most prevalent type of job in Europe (29%) and is characterised by rather favourable scores in terms of:

- high proportion of permanent or longer fixed-term contracts;
- low probability of long working hours;
- few involuntary part-time workers;
- few low-waged jobs;
- a high regularity and low probability of experiencing uncompensated flexible working times.

However, employees in this cluster have a rather low probability of receiving non-wage benefits, of being able to determine their work schedules, of having good opportunities for communication and participation with superiors, of having an employee representative, of being provided with training opportunities by the employer, or of being well informed on occupational health and safety. In other words, these types of jobs offer good basic stability being full-time jobs that guarantee a sustainable income with relatively regular work of low or moderate intensity in terms of working times. However, these are also jobs with limited expectations of additional rewards (in the form of non-wage benefits or training opportunities) or of being able to participate in decisions over when and how their work should be performed. This type of employment arrangement appears to represent a basic market transaction between an employee and employer, with little further involvement.

The third cluster (precarious extensive jobs) covers some 16% of employees and is characterised by rather adverse employment conditions and relations, and is similar to the fifth cluster (precarious unsustainable jobs). These two job types have the most adverse scores in terms of employment quality indicators, with adverse employment conditions and relations resembling the situation of ‘precarious workers’. There is also evidence of generally more adverse working conditions, poorer intrinsic job quality, and the lower socioeconomic position of these employees. However, in contrast with the precarious unsustainable job type, the precarious extensive cluster has a high probability of long working hours and uncompensated flexible working times. Jobs in this cluster are predominantly full-time.

The fourth cluster (portfolio jobs) covers 11% of jobs and is characterised by beneficial employment conditions and relations, but long working hours and uncompensated flexible working times. These jobs resemble the category of highly flexible, high-skilled and independent workers who belong to the core labour market, but they are most adversely affected by work intensification.

The fifth cluster (precarious unsustainable jobs) covers 10% of jobs, and is characterised by overall adverse employment conditions and relations. However, a distinguishing characteristic of this cluster is the high probability of involuntary part-time employment and low income, which relates to employment unsustainability – in other words, being incapable of generating a sustained and viable living wage from this job without additional (family) income.

Employee characteristics and employment relationships

In terms of individual characteristics, the high-quality standard employment relationship-like cluster is more frequently associated with employees with a high level of educational attainment, professionals and technicians and associate professionals, public sector employees and among workers employed in big (more than 50 employees) and very big (more than 500 employees) organisations. Young workers, employees in elementary occupations, and skilled agricultural and fishery workers have a particularly low probability of holding a job in this cluster. The results for men and women are similar, although there are small differences across occupational groups.

Instrumental standard employment relationship-like jobs are less prevalent among employees with a high level of educational attainment and among legislators, senior officials and managers and professionals. This job type is overrepresented for men in craft and related trades and among skilled agricultural and fishery workers and, for women, in craft and related trades and among plant and machine operators and assemblers. Such jobs are also more prevalent among employees working in the industrial sector. Again, the results for men and women are similar.

In the precarious extensive type of job, the following groups of workers are overrepresented: younger workers, employees working in the agricultural sector and employees working in a (very) small organisation (fewer than five employees). For men, the occupational categories with the highest prevalence are service workers and shop and market sales workers, followed by employees in elementary occupations. For women, skilled agricultural and fishery workers, plant and machine operators and assemblers are most likely to be found in the precarious extensive job type. Highly educated workers and professionals are rarely found in this cluster.

In the portfolio cluster there are higher proportions of highly educated workers, legislators, senior officials and managers, and employees working in very big organisations (more than 500 employees). This job type is also more prevalent among employees working in the services or public administration sector. Among men in this job type, there is a slight overrepresentation of middle-aged employees, which is not the case for women.

Finally, the cluster of precarious unsustainable jobs is more present among women, all younger workers as well as older women, service workers, and shop and market sales workers, as well as employees in elementary occupations. The prevalence of this cluster decreases with the size of the employing organisation. Employees who work alone are most overrepresented in this regard. For women, there is also a clear overrepresentation of employees with a low level of educational attainment and employees working in the service sector

Country differences

There are clear country differences regarding the prevalence of the five job types. The prevalence of the high-quality standard employment relationship-like jobs is lowest in Italy, Malta and Latvia. The prevalence of this type of job is also rather low in the UK and Croatia. In contrast, the highest prevalence can be found in Sweden, the Czech Republic, Finland and the Netherlands. In most northern and north-western European countries, over 40% of jobs fall into this category.

Instrumental standard employment relationship-like jobs are most prevalent in Italy, Cyprus, Croatia, Malta and France. The probability of holding a job that belongs to this cluster is lowest in the Czech Republic and the Netherlands. When comparing the country distribution of the high-quality standard employment relationship-like jobs, against the instrumental standard employment relationship-like type of jobs, the latter can be seen (in some countries) as a 'less-complete' version of the high-quality standard employment relationship-like job type.

The precarious extensive cluster is most prevalent in Latvia and least prevalent in Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland and Ireland. Without exception, northern European countries show a low prevalence for this job type, while a higher prevalence is seen in most eastern European and southern European countries.

The probability of holding a job belonging to the portfolio cluster is highest in the Czech Republic, Denmark, the UK and Norway. The countries with the lowest probability of belonging to this cluster are Italy, Lithuania, Croatia and Cyprus.

The precarious unsustainable cluster is most prevalent in the Netherlands, the UK, Ireland, Norway and Denmark. A rather high prevalence for this cluster can also be seen in Germany. The lowest probability of holding a job that belongs to this cluster is found in Croatia and Cyprus.

Variations in quality of employment

The research also shows that there are large differences in the various sub-dimensions of the quality of employment in the EU according to the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of workers, organisational level characteristics and countries.

By and large, the quality of employment is more favourable for middle-aged and older workers, skilled professionals and technicians, office clerks, managers and, more generally, workers with a high level of educational attainment and those employed in large companies. Indicators related to working time flexibility and highly intensive work schedules are an exception to this pattern, being more common for men, employees from very small companies, highly skilled white-collar workers and managers.

Overall, a high quality of employment is more common in men, older workers and workers with a high educational status. Employees in service and elementary occupations have the lowest average scores, while professionals and supervising occupations have, on average, the most favourable position in terms of employment quality. Employees working in smaller organisations and organisations with activities in the primary and service sector also have, on average, less favourable scores of employment quality.

The overall employment quality score shows strong associations on the country-comparative level. A clear pattern in the distribution of mean scores for overall employment quality according to countries can be seen with the Nordic countries (Finland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway) having the highest level of employment quality, and eastern and southern countries (Bulgaria, Romania and Greece) having the lowest.

Job quality and employment quality

The new typology of jobs created in this study reflects the structure of the European labour market according to the distribution of the indicators of quality of employment. Five main types of jobs or clusters are identified. The jobs with the highest levels of employment quality are labelled high-quality standard employment-like jobs (34%) and instrumental standard employment-like jobs (29%), with the former reflecting the most beneficial situation and the latter being a less beneficial situation (in terms of non-wage benefits, training and participation) but still fairly stable (in contracts and pay).

A third category of jobs are the so-called portfolio jobs (11%), which reflect the combination of relatively advantageous quality of employment together with high levels of work intensity and uncompensated flexible working times. The last categories can be identified as precarious jobs and have the lowest levels of employment quality.

The research also distinguishes between precarious unsustainable jobs (10%) with the most adverse employment situation, being additionally characterised by part-time and low pay, and precarious extensive jobs (16%), with overall adverse employment conditions and relations, and most of all characterised by high flexibility and intensive working times. The clusters are strongly related to socioeconomic characteristics of the employees, and vary across countries.

The most favourable types of jobs are more prevalent in the Nordic countries, followed by central European, Anglo-Saxon, southern European and eastern European countries. The job types are also related to positive outcomes for employees such as job satisfaction, the ability to do the same job until the age of 60, take sick leave and have good health and well-being.

Overall, jobs that differ significantly from the standard employment job type show less favourable results. Respondents in precarious extensive jobs, precarious unsustainable jobs and, to a lesser extent, instrumental standard employment relationship-like jobs, have high levels of perceived job insecurity, poor general and mental health, low levels of job

satisfaction and low perceived ability to do the same job until the age of 60, compared with high-quality standard employment relationship-like and portfolio jobs.

Policy challenges

Despite some methodological limitations, this report assesses the quality of employment in ways that transcend approaches that simply distinguish ‘standard jobs’ from ‘atypical contracts’. However, some indicators are limited – the entitlement to employee rights or collective representation – with only rough proxies of the concepts in other cases. Hence it is argued that the important improvements that have taken place in the latest EWCS need to be supplemented with additional information and further expanded.

It is notable that the standard employment contract – with indefinite employment, sustainable wages and fairly balanced employment conditions – is still predominant across Europe, with 34% of the labour force in the beneficial standard employment type and 29% in the relatively beneficial instrumental jobs type. However, this also indicates that more than a third of the labour force is employed either in the very flexible and intensive portfolio types of jobs, or in one of the two precarious types of employment. For the latter two groups, it holds that, apart from their disadvantaged employment position, these employees are particularly exposed to an adverse general work environment and have less, or much less, favourable outcomes on important issues such as general satisfaction, the ability to stay in employment, and health and well-being related complaints. It is important to stress that the latter conclusion holds even when taking into account general working conditions and other characteristics of work tasks.

As a consequence, objective attributes of these workers’ employment situation (such as type of contract, training, number of working hours, working time organisation and collective representation) have a clear impact on key aspects of importance for maintaining a sustainable labour force in the long term. This poses a challenge given the evidence of a continuing polarisation of the labour force between the highly time-flexible highly-skilled part of the labour market and the poorly rewarded and low-skilled segment.

In this context, the report argues that policies that impose more flexibility on the European labour force should also take into account the possible consequences for the well-being, health and satisfaction of the employees affected, which may reduce their productivity and jeopardise their ability to stay in employment until a late age.

Another policy-relevant implication concerns the low number of European employees (50%) who undergo training, with especially low figures for women, older workers, lower-skilled workers, workers in small companies, and workers in southern and eastern European countries. This is also reflected in the low percentage (32%) of employed workers in Europe reporting good employability prospects (being able to find a job with a similar salary in the event of losing or quitting their current job). In other words, employability indicators are relatively low – especially in the segments of the labour force that are most vulnerable to flexible and highly volatile jobs. It is therefore argued that policymakers should focus on ways of improving the employability of those in the most unstable labour market positions.

Finally, the opportunity for workers to communicate and participate with their superiors about work-related issues remains low with fewer than half of EU salaried workers (45%) having an employee representative at their workplace. These tend to be in larger organisations and in the civil service, and cover mainly older, higher educated, high-skilled white collar workers.

Policy usage of the fifth EWCS 3

Documentation and review

Documentation of the use made of the EWCS findings, notably in EU-level policy documents or policy-related research documents, is based on the detailed work of the Eurofound information office that tracks survey usage. A recent report provided detailed information on EWCS usage from 2010 through to the end of 2013, covering over 150 policy reports or working documents. An additional review identified some 50 or more academic articles published during the same period.

In terms of policy usage, the evidence indicates that EWCS material was used by a wide range of bodies at EU level during the period from 2010 to 2013 (Table 2).

Table 2: *Policy usage of EWCS material at EU level*

Type of body	Organisations
European Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) • Directorate-General for Enterprise and Industry (DG ENTR) • Directorate-General for Health and Consumers (DG SANCO) • Directorate-General for Internal Market and Services (DG MARKT) • Directorate-General for Justice (DG JUST) • Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD) • Eurostat (Statistical Office of the European Union) • Joint Research Centre (JCR)
European Parliament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment and Social Affairs Committee (EP EMPL) • Industry, Research and Energy Committee (EP ITRE) • Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee (EP FEMM)
Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment Committee (EMCO)
European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (EESC-CCMI) • Employment, Social Affairs and Citizens (EESC-SOC)
European agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) • European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) • European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)
European social partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BusinessEurope • Business and Professional Women Europe (BPW Europe) • Council of European Professional and Managerial Staff (Eurocadres) • European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (UEAPME) • European Centre of Employers and Enterprises providing Public Services (CEEP) • European Hospital and Healthcare Employers' Association (Hospeem) • European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) • European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) • Joint (BusinessEurope, UEAPME, CEEP, ETUC)
European policy and research bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) • Council for European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) • CSR Europe (European business network for corporate social responsibility) • European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA) • European Federation of Public Service Union (EPSU) • European Network against Racism (ENAR) • European Policy Centre (EPC) • European Social Observatory (OSE) • European Social Watch (Eurostep) • European Youth Forum (YFJ) • Friends of Europe • Gallup

Type of body	Organisations
International policy and research bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Labour Office (ILO) • International Organisation for Migration (IOM) • International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) • Institute for the Study of Labour (IZA) • Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) • United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) • The World Bank

The usage made of the EWCS data has been reviewed in this report under the following broad policy headings:

- employment recovery and growth;
- labour market modernisation;
- demographic ageing;
- gender equality;
- working time;
- employability and skills;
- job quality and employment;
- innovation and restructuring;
- stress at the workplace;
- work–life balance and family;
- health and safety;
- working conditions and representation;
- social inequalities and concerns;
- young people.

In this context, there are a number of important annual reports that address many of the above issues each year at European or wider level, using data from the EWCS. These are:

- *Employment and social developments in Europe* – European Commission
- *Employment outlook* – OECD
- *Benchmarking working Europe* – ETUI
- *Social developments in Europe* – OSE/ETUI

A number of other reports and research outputs focus more specifically on particular policy issues. With respect to usage of the EWCS data, the Eurofound review indicates that these notably include reports and policy documents on three particular issues:

- gender equality;
- health and safety at work;
- working time.

These are all areas where the EWCS has, since its inception, made a major contribution to both research and policy development.

With respect to gender, for example, DG JUST has recently drawn on the EWCS in assessing the role of men in gender equality, as has EIGE in the construction of its Gender Equality Index. The European Parliament has used it in addressing issues concerning women approaching retirement.

In terms of health and safety at work, DG EMPL has undertaken an evaluation of the European strategy drawing extensively on EWCS data, while EU-OSHA also uses EWCS findings extensively in its work.

In terms of working time, DG EMPL and the European-level social partners continue to draw extensively on EWCS data on developments in working time in their analytical work and policy discussions.

Identifying new emerging policy concerns

Although the EWCS continues to contribute basic data in the policy areas identified above, many policy issues are no longer treated in isolation. A number of broader and overlapping areas of concern have been identified. These range from the numerous family, labour market, health, education and other issues relating to the raising and education of children through to the costs and benefits of pursuing alternative ways of ensuring financial coverage in later life through differing balances between pension investments and longer and more flexible working life patterns.

Almost all the possible policy actions to address these types of concerns draw on EWCS findings to a greater or lesser degree. The survey's coverage and the nature of its household-based material are particularly suitable when seeking to research and advise on complex policy concerns in a multidimensional way.

Such work includes policy reports linking employment prospects, not just to demand-side economic growth prospects and productivity trends in the traditional way, but also to supply-side prospects, notably demographic. In this light, a particular policy concern is to maintain and enhance the employability of older workers as well as ensure a better and more balanced use of both the female and male workforce potential more generally. Such issues have been addressed in the European Commission by both DG EMPL and DG RTD, as well as by Eurostat, with all of this work drawing heavily on EWCS data.

In terms of these mixed policy themes, much greater attention is now being paid to the links between work and family life, with an emphasis on achieving a better work–life balance for all household members, with links to a range of other related issues, notably working time, job quality, gender equality and working conditions generally. For example, the European Commission's DG EMPL has drawn on the EWCS in the development of a work–life balance index, while both ETUI and BusinessEurope have used EWCS findings to address concerns about job quality and job satisfaction.

While the issue of the intrinsic quality of jobs and wider issues of employment quality remain high on the policy agenda, there is concern from a social and labour market perspective about issues of stress and mental health in the workplace, including those that result from bullying or violence, given the perceived links between such concerns and factors such as absenteeism. The EWCS evidence has played an important role in identifying the scale of the problem and a report by the European Commission's DG SANCO has drawn on the EWCS data to promote mental health and well-being in the workplace.

Attention also continues to be paid in the EU to a range of labour market policy issues, embracing broad long-term objectives such as achieving an appropriate balance between flexibility and security at work and concerns over the growth of precarious employment, or issues of discrimination. These are also areas where international bodies such as the OECD and the ILO have, in their different ways, drawn extensively on EWCS data in their work in these areas.

More generally, and in the expectation of a progressive economic recovery in the EU, there is a renewed focus on promoting innovation, managing restructuring, and raising productivity and skills levels generally, with greater awareness of the importance of the workplace environment, including the quality of human relationships, especially levels of trust, representation and participation. The European Commission's DG ENTR has used EWCS data to contribute to scoreboard indicators of skills and productivity, and to demonstrate why the promotion of workplace innovation needs to be recognised as a core EU policy issue. CEDEFOP has drawn on EWCS findings for its work on learning and innovation.

An element that appears to be rather absent at the moment, however, is that of young people. Despite the dramatic increase in the already high levels of youth unemployment in most Member States, the issue does not appear to have attracted the level of policy attention that might be expected, at least not at European level. With respect to the use of the EWCS, there are limitations to its short-term contribution – the infrequency of the reports, the timing of the latest one with respect to the crisis, and the fact that it covers the experiences of those actually in work, rather than seeking work. However, the problem of ensuring an effective transition from education to employment remains a structural economic and societal issue that has, so far, received insufficient analytical or policy attention and where the EWCS could make a useful contribute to a more broadly-based reflection.

Apart from the analytical work directly linked to policy development and the work of policy-related agencies, extensive use is made of EWCS data by the research community at all levels – national, European and international. It is beyond the scope of this report to provide a comprehensive review of all the research work undertaken by institutes or individual researchers based on the 2010 survey or the historical series of EWCS data.

However, a trawl of research citations from 2012 to 2014 for published research by independent academics that included references to the EWCS was undertaken by Eurofound at the beginning of 2014. This revealed a very different pattern of data usage so far compared to that of EU-level policymakers or research centres, as described above. Of the 55 or so citations, just under a third (15) relate to stress at the workplace, just under a third (15) relate to health and safety concerns such as musculoskeletal disorders, just under a third (15) relate to a range of labour market issues (working time, notable shift working, job quality, labour market modernisation, demographic ageing and gender), and the remaining 10 cases relate to working conditions, work–life balance and workplace innovation.

The cause of this bias towards issues of physical and psychological health is not clear. It may reflect the fact that some of these issues, notably concerning stress and bullying, represent relatively new research territory and therefore attract larger numbers of researchers keen to expand their research publications. It is also a testament to the singularity of the EWCS data in addressing these particular issues. Equally, though, it could simply reflect delays in getting more in-depth policy-related research papers into academic journals covering broad economic and social concerns.

Overall, this evidence suggests that there is scope for Eurofound to further promote the usage of its EWCS data as a basis for comparative research at national level based on the important findings from its secondary analyses, and from the multiple uses made of the data by the European Commission and other European-level bodies.

User assessments of the value of the EWCS

During this project, a number of interviews were held with key people involved in policy development and related research, especially at EU level, notably within the European Commission, the main social partner bodies and major research centres.

These wide-ranging interviews did not, perhaps disappointingly, result in the discovery of significant new uses being made of the EWCS findings, or produce any major suggestions in terms of new areas of possible survey or research development.

Possible hopes or expectations in these respects may perhaps reflect a basic misunderstanding of the complex and far from linear way in which policy development actually takes place. In practice policymakers are continually drawing upon a wide range of concepts, notions and influences – some of which will be research based, and some of which will be derived much from political initiatives that may, or may not, be the result of the discovery of relevant research evidence.

In these respects, by far the most important overall finding from these various discussions is simply that the EWCS surveys and their findings are highly, and equally, valued by all policymakers, social partners and research centres. They are seen not only as an important general resource, but also as a distinctive source of comparative information with respect to the central issues that they address.

The value of the survey is seen to be particularly high in:

- helping to highlight trends, convergences and divergences through the development in practice and in relation to policy performance of indicators with respect to particular concerns such as the quality of jobs or workplace risks, whether physical or psychological;
- providing new insights and understanding of the changing relationship between developments at the workplace, and between the workplace and the household, through innovative multidisciplinary research.

In general, however, the first group of results are most appreciated by those involved in day-to-day policy monitoring processes at European level. Here there has been increasing use of comparative indicators at EU level for all Member States to monitor policy performance and convergence or divergence, more generally.

This is an important role, and much appreciated by governments and their representatives as a means of improving performance by setting clear targets, even though it can be subject to the risk that it encourages governments and other actors to focus on improving their performance against the particular factor monitored in the index – possibly at the expense of the broader issues that it may be intended to represent.

Moreover, such indicators tend to focus attention on individual factors at a time when research is increasingly suggesting that there can be a high degree of interaction, even interdependence, between policy dimensions. This is seen through many of the in-depth secondary research analyses undertaken for Eurofound as well as in research undertaken independently.

As a result, those working on policy development within bodies such as the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council or consultative committees are starting to pay much more attention to the more exploratory dimension, as outlined above, because of its potential to identify new approaches to policy development in areas where current practices do not appear to be producing very effective results. This can be said to be the case with respect to many aspects of employment, social and industrial relations policies at the present time.

In effect, it is to be expected that the kind of in-depth multidisciplinary research now being undertaken using EWCS data, as reviewed in this report, will provide strong incentives for the development of successful policy directions and solutions in so far as they are seen to be both conceptually sound and empirically supported. However, it would be naïve to expect progress from discovery to action to be direct or rapid. In effect there are always likely to be numerous ‘intervening variables’ between the development of policy-relevant findings and their adoption by decision-makers.

Despite the very encouraging use of the EWCS data and the universal support for its continuing development, there are areas where users see scope for more mundane, albeit practical, improvements and developments. The main concerns are as follows.

- The infrequency of the surveys and occasional delays in the publication of comprehensive results limit their policy value to some degree, even though it is generally recognised that the surveys provide structural rather than conjunctural indicators.
- Survey sizes are sometimes found to be too small for researchers to perform the more sophisticated analyses that are currently yielding the most interesting comparative findings.
- Some translation inconsistencies have been noted in some national questionnaires, which can lead to misleading results, and call for care and attention.
- Changes or modifications to questions from one survey to another may answer short-term political demands or improve the quality of the response, but they nevertheless tend to reduce their long-term continuity value.
- The presentation of the EWCS findings can be seen by some observers as biased in the sense that they highlight poor or disappointing results rather than offering a more neutral presentation, while recognising that part of the purpose of the survey is to focus on issues such as poor performance in protecting against dangerous or unhealthy working conditions.
- Very detailed enquiries can be made of the database using the research tools provided – a procedure compared very favourably with that offered by Eurostat – but the lack of a simple tabular presentation of the main results, Eurostat-style, would also be welcomed by everyday users. This could help to extend the audience.

There are valid responses to these points.

- The first three weaknesses – frequency of publication delays, sample sizes and translation weaknesses – are common to all transnational surveys, and Eurofound has probably done more than most agencies to try to address these issues.
- Delays in producing research findings are partly due not so much to delays in producing data, but to the time that it takes to carry out the complex analyses of the kind that are now bringing valuable policy insights such as are presented in the secondary analyses.
- With respect to the specific issue of sample size, users do appreciate that Eurofound has been successful in persuading some Member States provide co-funding to increase sample sizes.

- The issue of changes to questionnaires is difficult and complex, but more could perhaps be done to explain why and how changes have been made, and to ensure that the questionnaire development team takes these concerns fully into account.
- The presentation issue is more complex given that Eurofound is tasked with identifying poor practice as well as presenting a balanced assessment of the situation. This is a difficult challenge to address and could possibly be met through clear editorial guidelines.
- The possibility of providing a more general presentation of overall survey results in easily accessible form, and not just through the present procedure, needs to be actively considered. It should be based initially on information on data downloads from the data archives and the requirements of representative EU-level bodies, notably the social partners.

However, it has to be repeated that usage of the survey, and appreciation of its content by policymaking authorities and research bodies, has increased strongly over time. There is now a universal acknowledgement that the EWCS provides invaluable policy-relevant Europe-wide data on working conditions in the widest sense which is not available from any other source.

Policy lessons from the fifth EWCS 4

Given the breadth and depth of the fifth EWCS coverage and the variety of policy concerns addressed either directly or indirectly in the above reports, the findings and policy implications need to be viewed from a very broad perspective. These have been broken down into two main groups:

- evidence from the EWCS concerning existing areas of policy concerns;
- areas where the EWCS highlights issues of policy concern and potential policy development.

Evolving world of work

A number of the findings reported in the overview report signal the ways in which the world of work is evolving. These have implications for the ways in which policymakers may need to consider their responses. Such findings can be summarised as follows:

- **household working arrangements:** most workers live in households in which both partners work, although one may be part-time;
- **work–life balance:** some 20% of workers report poor work–life balance essentially related to difficult working arrangements, with some 30% saying they would like to work fewer hours;
- **physical and psychological risks:** exposure to physical risks is a serious and long-standing concern which is often associated with psychological risks that, in turn, impact on the physical and mental health of employees;
- **gender segregation at work:** only around 20% of men and women work in gender-mixed occupations;
- **work autonomy:** the degree of autonomy at work varies by level of skill, sector of work and occupation, albeit in reasonably predictable ways;
- **skill and creativity:** twice as many workers consider that they could perform more demanding tasks with their existing skills than feel they need more training, although some 80% consider their work allows for some creativity or initiative;
- **worker representation:** a little over half of all employees have a workplace representative.

In these respects, the secondary analyses highlight many of the elements that reflect the complex and evolving changes taking place at the workplace and within households, and which will have increasing importance in terms of policy development in the future. These include, in particular:

- the strong and significant relationships between workplace characteristics and overall employment and welfare performance;
- the importance of national institutional, cultural and economic conditions in determining economic and social performance;
- the extent of changes in the roles of women and men in the labour market, and in the often related changes in working-time arrangements;
- the ways in which patterns of work activity have changed markedly over the past decade, but with major differences nevertheless remaining between countries;

- the fact that relatively little change is observable in terms of patterns of work organisation despite this being seen as a major factor in innovation and productivity development;
- the fact that EU country categorisations – north versus south, east versus west and so on – are undergoing significant changes and that it can often be misleading to continue to use them.

Policy implications of workplace and social changes

The findings outlined above offer a broad, and important, policy conclusion, namely that public policies need to take much greater account of the links and interactions that exist between what happens at the workplace and what is happening in society more generally if policy interventions are to be effective.

Policy content

In terms of policy content and the pursuit of the EU's broad employment and social objectives, this suggests the following.

- Success in achieving Europe's overall employment goals depends on achieving better workplace arrangements and better work–life balance for the actual and potential workforce, as well as improvements in the effective functioning of external labour markets.
- Success in addressing social inequalities need to include actions to tackle extensive inequalities at work – which tend to cluster in terms of skill, sector, occupation, age and so on – as well as inequalities in society more generally.
- In all of the above, gender imbalances are not only a continuing concern in social terms, but also involve significant economic costs, with uncertainty as to whether improvement can be maintained or re-established as the EU emerges from recession.
- There are serious economic as well as social costs of stress and abuse at work, reflected in part in evidence of absenteeism, early retirements and other exits from the labour market.

Policy development

In terms of policy development, all of the above implies much greater policy interaction, not only between economic policies on the one hand and employment and social policies on the other, but also between employment policies and social policies. This is especially important in terms of taking account of what goes on at the workplace and the decisions made within households.

In practice, the European Commission has already made some progress in pursuit of such a fusion with:

- analytical work on employment and social policies having been brought together within the same directorate with DG EMPL;
- policy research findings being made available in a common publication, the *Employment and social developments in Europe* reports, for the last three years.

However, policy execution remains in separate directorates within DG EMPL, with no strong evidence of an overarching common workplace–household–labour market agenda of the kind that the research based on the EWCS evidence has highlighted. The prospect of promoting developments in this way in the new Commission would seem to be an important point of discussion between Eurofound and the European Commission.

The basic findings presented above reinforce the basic policy message from previous years that, despite progress, there are many challenges still to be addressed regarding working conditions in the EU given its overall policy objective of more and better jobs.

However, the detailed research results from the latest secondary analyses serve to broaden the agenda further and provide new points of focus for policy. The research findings demonstrate that it is no longer sufficient to address workplace issues and concerns in isolation, and that the factors affecting the working lives of EU citizens need to be viewed and understood in a much broader social context than is the case at present.

New paradigms emerging

The evidence suggests that the pursuit of a better work–life balance is not some idealistic but unrealistic dream that overlooks the harsh reality of people having to earn a living. It is actually a central principle around which policy needs to be organised to ensure not only that our societies are better places in which to live, but also that our economies make the best possible use of our human resource potential.

The evidence from the fifth EWCS, as identifiable in the findings of the various reports summarised above, shows that:

- there are many working conditions issues where there are causes for concern;
- countries wishing to achieve long-term economic and social success need to address labour market, workplace and household concerns and objectives in a more comprehensive way than is commonly the case at present.

There is a need for policymakers to recognise that many individual policy elements are part of interrelated and interdependent socioeconomic systems, embracing everything from the factors that enable households to provide the best possible support for themselves and any dependents, to the ways in which positive, mutually reinforcing policies and practices can best be organised and deployed.

The EU rightly prides itself on its overall economic and social performance when measured against global standards. Nevertheless, the EWCS evidence demonstrates the extent to which human productive potential in the EU is still underused and underemployed – whether it is the result of gender or other forms of discrimination, thoughtless or inept management, negative or obstructive worker responses, or inadequate or inappropriate public policies that fail to provide appropriate and universal support for such fundamentals as education and training.

Moreover, while the EU as a whole is recognised as being at the forefront of progressive thinking in terms of employment and social policies generally, the differences in policy performance between Member States are considerable and outcomes often disappointing. Political authorities and their representatives tend to promote their strong points and ignore their weaknesses, and to fail to exploit the potential for win–win outcomes across their economic, labour market and social policies through mutual trans-European learning.

Part of the problem may lie in the way in which policy action is commonly formulated, with the focus of employment and labour market policies tending to be on individuals rather than on households of differing size and complexity.

Likewise, social policies are too often conceived in terms of financial responses for household in difficulties rather than more fundamental and long-term, investment support. Short-term assistance is vital, but it will ultimately prove insufficient if public authorities fail to:

- adapt to the evolving needs of households and individuals over their lifetime;
- fail to recognise the extent to which all public institutions – and not just education, health, safety – impact on long-run well-being.

Methodological challenges

Statistics of employment performance are invaluable in measuring overall achievements and in identifying strengths and weaknesses within different national systems. However, they can sometimes disguise rather than reveal underlying weaknesses that need addressing if they fail to take account of differences in the working lives of women and men, differences in hours worked and differences in pay. High employment rates are not necessarily a guarantee of avoiding in-work poverty if they are based on high rates of part-time work and low average levels of pay.

In all these respects, the ‘lifetime’ approach to life and work, as advocated by Eurofound and as documented in some of the secondary analyses, is clearly a fundamental principle to be fully integrated into future social and employment policy development. For the moment, however, it may appear as somewhat abstract. One approach might be to present the arguments in a broad socioeconomic, rather than a purely sociological, framework. By paying greater attention to crucial issues such as income and expenditure flows across the life cycle, the concept stands a much better chance of becoming embedded in mainstream policy thinking.

In effect the basic elements of the life cycle approach reflect the relationship between individual and household aspirations and obligations over a lifetime as against income flows from work and savings. As such it encompasses a range of decisions and trade-offs that affect the short- and long-term decisions within households, ranging from the cost of raising children at one end of the spectrum to the adequacy of pensions at the other, with much else in between.

The elements that appear to be lacking in the policy debate and action framework are the appropriate linkages between the various dimensions. This may partly reflect the fact that the typical focus of employment and labour market policy is on employees and employers, and their interactions. This largely ignores the wider decision-making processes at work in the household and at the workplace; both of these encompass highly complex relationships and are subject to a range of legal as well as societal norms.

New data requirements

The EWCS is a unique source of matched information on households and work practices. It also remains a crucial source of data and indicators on concerns such as health and safety, and hours of work. However, there are still some important gaps, particularly about the extent to which organisational systems are changing, in what direction, and with what consequences. By one means or another, more information will be needed if policymakers are to be better guided to actual and potential innovative practices in the workplace on which economic progress in the long run is often considered to be significantly dependent.

Much of the information about the world of work that is derived from the EWCS is unique in that it is not collected at all, or in anything like the same depth, elsewhere. Moreover, it is possible to reliably link data from the EWCS with that from other sources such as the European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) or the European Union Statistics on

Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) surveys, thereby enabling an even wider range of policy concerns to be addressed in a comprehensive way.

The review of the policy contribution of the fourth report on the EWCS concluded that it contributed to almost all areas to some degree, with its most important and distinctive contribution found in relation to the organisation of working life, both at work and between home and work. Other areas that were specifically identified were quality of work, job satisfaction and employability. At the same time, the EWCS was seen to contribute much less in the areas of mobility and skills and learning,

For the fifth EWCS, the balance of policy interest has developed somewhat, including a particular concern to identify, if at all possible, the extent to which the financial and economic crisis has affected the pursuit of overall employment or unemployment targets. EU policy has traditionally focused on the external labour market and on specific social issues such as youth, gender and disability. Policy involvement in internal labour market matters and workplace concerns has been limited to industrial relations legislation on a restricted, albeit important, range of issues alongside a general encouragement of social dialogue at various levels. This has evolved somewhat over time with the rising agenda of structural change and adjustment to which Eurofound analysis has contributed significantly. It will be important to see how far the consequences of the recession will merely heighten these concerns or create opportunities for policy lessons from the fifth EWCS to be deployed to develop policy responses that not only address current critical concerns, but shift attention towards the pursuit of the long-term strategic goal of promoting a generalised improvement in living and working conditions.

