



Working conditions and quality of life in Spanish workplaces

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This report is available in electronic format only.

The Sixth National Survey on Working Conditions reveals that almost one quarter of workers consider that their work is affecting their health, and almost three quarters suffer from musculoskeletal disorders. In addition, 71% consider that they are exposed to some kind of risk in the workplace. In general, the most affected occupational groups from more demanding working conditions are healthcare staff, construction workers, farmers, drivers, stockbreeders and fishermen. On the other hand, the 2007 survey on Quality of Life in the Workplace shows that 70.6% of Spanish workers are either satisfied or very satisfied with their job. The survey also reveals that significant differences remain between the sexes in caring activities with children.

Introduction

The Sixth National Survey on Working Conditions ([VI Encuesta Nacional de Condiciones de Trabajo](#)) was published in 2007 by the Spanish National Institute of Safety and Hygiene in the Workplace ([Instituto Nacional de Seguridad e Higiene en el Trabajo, INSHT](#)), a subsidiary body of the Spanish Ministry of Labour and Immigration ([Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración, MTIN](#)). The main goal of the study is to assess working conditions and provide an overview of [health and safety](#) conditions in Spanish workplaces.

In addition, the 2007 survey on Quality of Life in the Workplace ([Encuesta de Calidad de Vida en el Trabajo](#)) aims to assess the situation of workers at work. It provides data on the activities that workers carry out and the relationships that they have at work, along with workers' own perceptions regarding these issues. This survey has been carried out on an annual basis by MTIN since 1999 (except in 2005).

This report highlights the main findings from the two surveys. The National Survey on Working Conditions examines issues such as: health effects; risk prevention; workplace safety and environmental conditions; workplace design; physical and mental demands; or psychosocial factors. Meanwhile, the survey on Quality of Life in the Workplace covers the following topics: satisfaction in the workplace; employment status; working hours and benefits; training and career development; job mobility; and [work-life balance](#).

Key findings of National Survey on Working Conditions

Following the survey structure, this section outlines the main findings on the eight key topics covered by the survey. This includes health effects, risk prevention, health and safety conditions, environmental conditions, workplace design, physical demands, mental demands and psychosocial factors.

Health effects

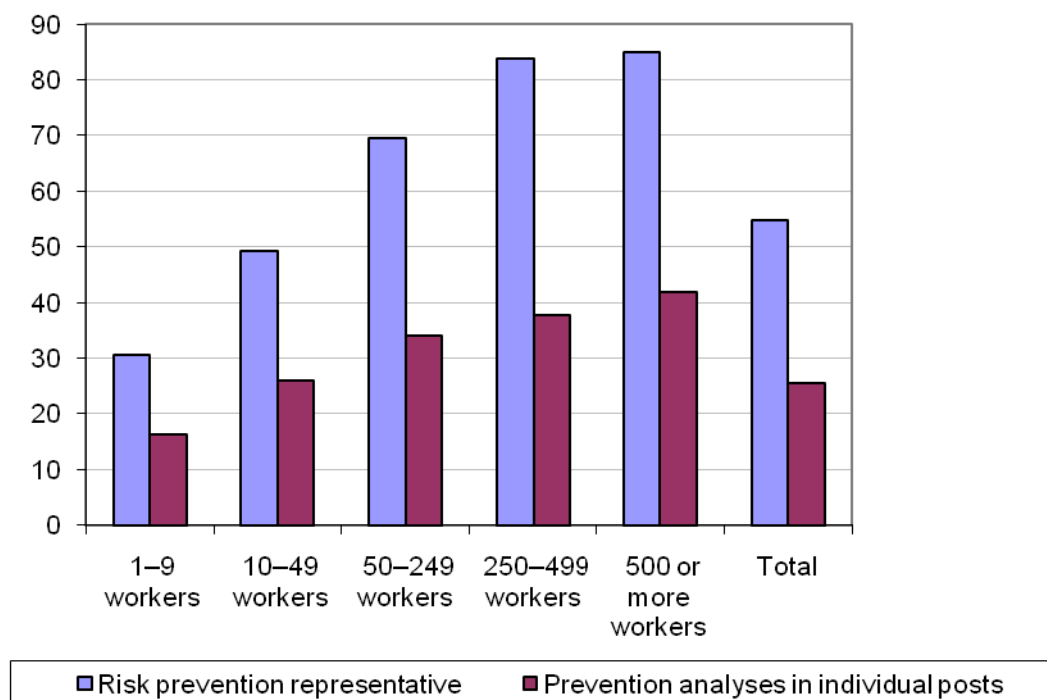
Some 22.5% of workers indicate that their work is affecting their health. According to the survey results, the most affected occupational groups include drivers, craftspeople, mechanics, and healthcare personnel. The most frequently reported ailments are back pain, followed by neck pain and stress: of those workers who indicate that work is affecting their health, 57.6% of workers suffer from back pain, 28.1% from neck pain and 27.9% from stress.

Risk prevention

With regard to a Risk Prevention System, 55% of the Spanish workers confirm that there exists a risk prevention representative in their enterprise, although this percentage is higher in larger companies (Figure 1). In addition, risk prevention analyses have been carried out in about a quarter of the working posts (25.5%), and once again, this proportion increases in larger

companies and among manufacturing companies, especially in the metalworking and chemicals sectors. On the other hand, more than half of Spanish workers (52%) underwent a medical examination in the previous year, while 8% decided not to have one despite having the option to do so. Moreover, almost 40% of workers were not even offered the chance to have a medical examination, with the percentage of workers in this group being higher among temporary agency workers, women or those younger than 25 years of age, especially if they work in micro enterprises.

Figure 1: Companies with a risk prevention representative and prevention analyses in individual posts, by company size (%)



Companies with a risk prevention representative and prevention analyses in individual posts, by company size (%)

Note: Data regarding the presence of a risk prevention representative in companies with 1-9 employees only covers enterprises with a number of staff between 6 and 9 people.

Source: INSHT, Sixth National Survey on Working Conditions, 2007

Health and safety conditions

Some 71% of Spanish workers indicate that they are exposed to some kind of risk in their workplace, in particular those working in the construction sector, notably drivers, builders and welders. In these occupational groups, the most common risks relate to cuts and splinters (29%), knocks against immobile objects (26%), falls at the same level (19.3%), falls from a height (15.8%), being hit by a projected or falling object or tool (13.3%) and traffic accidents (12%).

Environmental conditions

In 2007, 27.5% of Spanish workers indicated that they handle dangerous substances or inhale hazardous or toxic dusts and smokes at work, particularly in the construction and industry sectors, mainly in manufacturing. Among these workers, 13.4% confirm that they do not know the potential harmful effects of these substances on their health. Furthermore, 24.4% of workers who do not work outdoors estimate that the temperature in their workplace is uncomfortable, especially among agricultural and construction workers. Some 37% of Spanish workers stated that they are exposed to high or very high levels of noise in their workplace.

Workplace design

Almost a third (30.7%) of Spanish workers believe that their workplace design is lacking quality in some way. Some 42% of workers indicate that their normal working position mainly involves standing but that they also have to walk frequently, while 22.4% of workers just stand at their work station without having to walk. The most arduous working positions affect farmers, stockbreeders, fishermen and sailors in particular; in all of these professions, 15.4% of workers carry out their work with a bent back.

Physical demands

Regarding the most common physical demands, doing repetitive movements with the hands or arms and maintaining the same posture over a long period of time are those aspects that received the highest proportion of answers, with 55.4% and 52.4% respectively. Looking at the distribution of physical demands by occupation, the highest proportions of workers affected are in traditional industries, craftwork and automated industry production, where movements are highly repetitive.

Meanwhile, 74.2% of workers suffer from musculoskeletal disorders. The most frequently cited problems refer to pain in the lower back (40%), neck (27%) and upper back (26%). In general, healthcare personnel, farmers, stockbreeders, fishermen, sailors and drivers are the occupational groups most affected by musculoskeletal problems.

Psychological demands

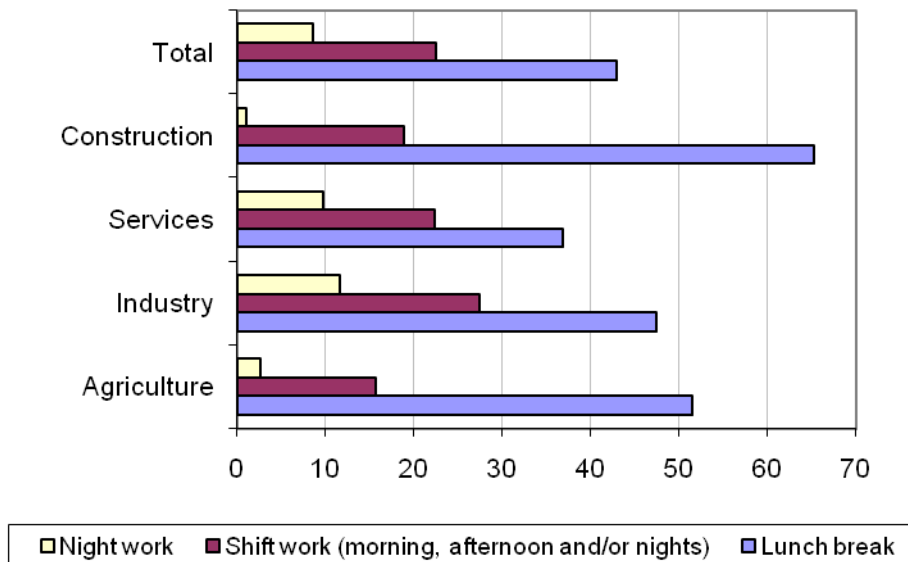
Concerning the required psychological demands in the workplace, 44.7% of Spanish workers have to deal with people during all of their working time or most of it. Some 41% of workers have to keep a high or very high level of attention on a continuous basis during their work, while 22.1% of workers must execute highly repetitive, short-duration tasks. Specifically, workers in the industry and agricultural sectors are more highly affected by these repetitive and short-duration tasks (25%), with workers in industry required to maintain the highest levels of attention during their work tasks (44.2%).

Psychosocial factors

According to the 2007 survey results, 21.4% of Spanish workers are not free to choose the period when they wish to take their holidays, 23.8% cannot change the way they work, 23.5% cannot modify the distribution or duration of breaks, 21.9% cannot modify the order of tasks and 11.7% do not have the opportunity to put their ideas into practice. On the other hand, 67% of Spanish workers easily receive help from work colleagues, and 54.9% of workers indicate that they have learning opportunities at work.

The average number of weekly working hours amounts to 39.9 hours. Some 42.9% of Spanish workers have a working day including a lunch break, 22.5% work shifts and 8.6% work at night. The services and industry sectors are those economic sectors where shift work is generally common, especially night shifts (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Distribution of weekly working time, by sector (%)



Distribution of weekly working time, by sector (%)

Source: INSHT, 2007

About one third (33%) of workers surveyed stated that they work Saturdays, and 17.2% work Sundays and bank holidays. Almost half of the workers (45.3%) indicated that they work overtime, with 26.8% of them receiving some kind of compensation for it and 18.5% having no compensation at all. Only 7% of Spanish workers argue that their working time does not fit with other commitments, such as family responsibilities.

Key findings of Quality of Life in Workplace survey

The main findings of the 2007 survey on Quality of Life in the Workplace can be grouped under six major topics: general satisfaction with work; satisfaction in the workplace; employment status, working time and benefits; training and career development; job mobility; and work–life balance.

General satisfaction with work

In 2007, 70.6% of Spanish workers indicated that they are either satisfied or very satisfied with their job. Regarding the average degree of satisfaction in the workplace – on a scale ranging from 0 to 10 – it reached 7.2 points in 2007, confirming an upward trend in job satisfaction since 1999 (when the degree of satisfaction reached 6.6 points on the scale). These results, however, should be interpreted with care, due to methodological changes in this edition of the survey.

Overall, the most satisfied workers are female entrepreneurs with employees (8.4 out of 10 points) and men earning a monthly income higher than €3,000 (8.2 points), followed by managers

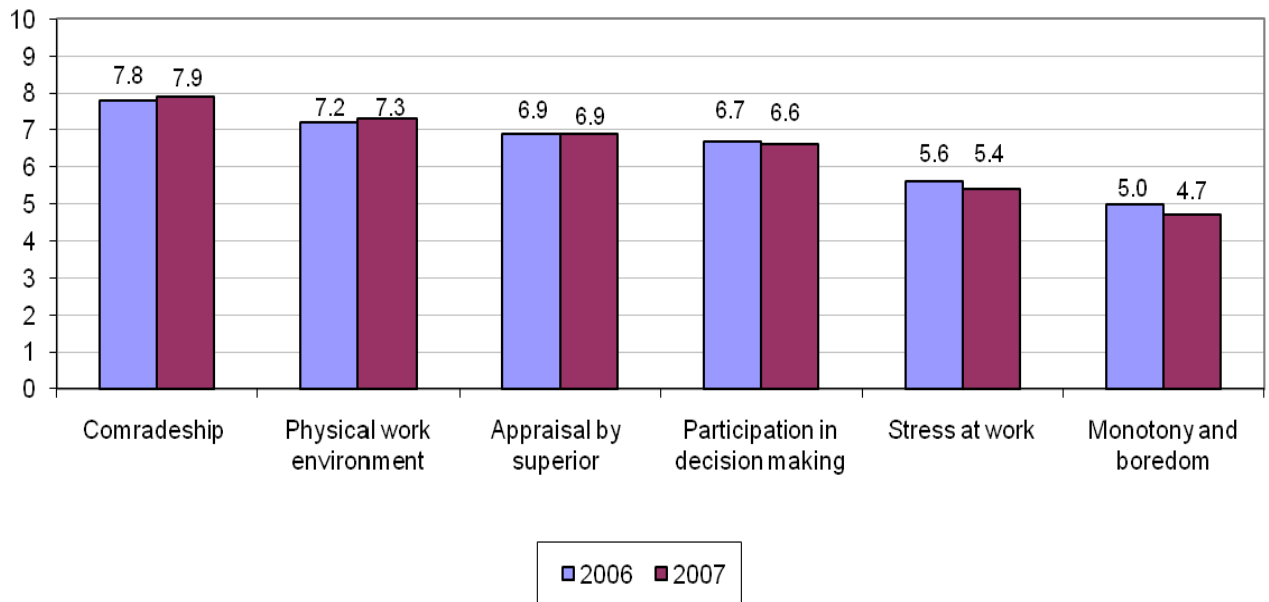
in private companies or public administration and women working in the education sector (7.9 points in both cases).

Satisfaction in the workplace

According to the 2007 survey results, the highest average levels of satisfaction in the workplace relate to comradeship (7.9 points) and activities developed in the workplace (7.7 points) on the same scale ranging from 0 to 10. The following four issues reach an average rating of 7.3 points – that is, autonomy, personal development, physical work environment, and health and safety in the workplace.

On the other hand, the average level of satisfaction stands at 6.7 points for the existing work organisation and 6.6 points concerning the degree of participation in decision making. Meanwhile, the level of satisfaction among the workers surveyed with training opportunities provided by the company and existing job promotion possibilities are 5.6 and 5.1 points, respectively, using the same 10-point scale. Interestingly, the average levels of satisfaction in the workplace remained stable in comparison with the 2006 survey results, and the ranking of items influencing workers’ level of satisfaction in the workplace is the same for both years (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Workplace satisfaction indicators as perceived by workers, 2006 and 2007



Workplace satisfaction indicators as perceived by workers, 2006 and 2007

Note: Results show average values of particular satisfaction indicators for the entire population sample. The items are evaluated on a scale of 1–10, whereby 1 = ‘very dissatisfied’ and 10 = ‘very satisfied’.

Source: MTIN, Quality of Life in the Workplace surveys, 2006 and 2007

The average level of stress in the workplace is set at 5.4 points on the 10-point scale, while the level of monotony and boredom is a little lower at 4.7 points. Specifically, stress at work is more common among entrepreneurs (6.7 points), managers (6.4) and university graduates (5.8). Moreover, 70.7% and 58.5% of Spanish workers regard as good or very good their existing relationships with their comrades and their bosses, respectively.

Employment status, working time and benefits

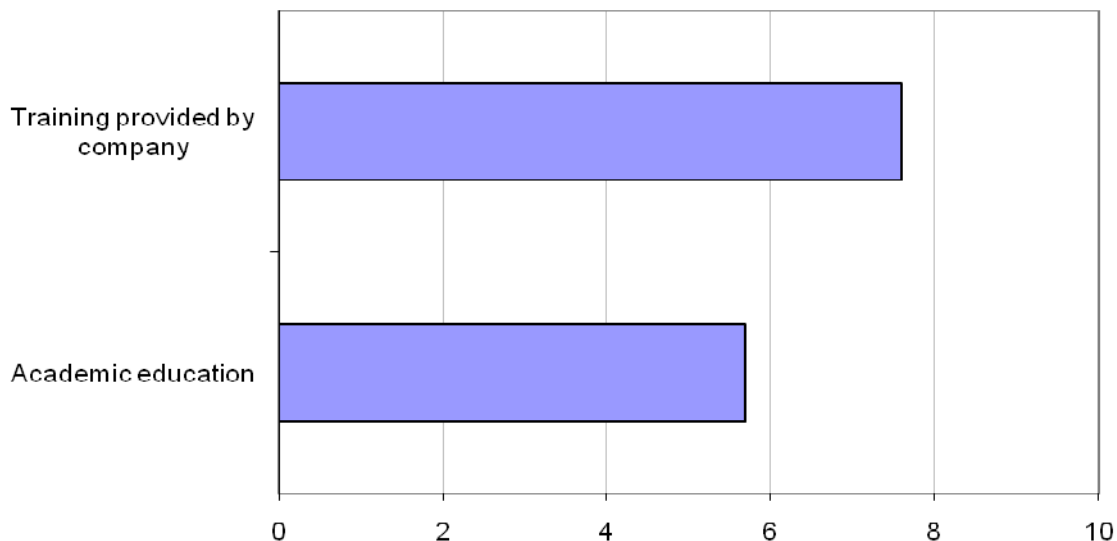
Using the same 10-point scale, the average level of satisfaction concerning employment status stands at 7.3 points, while the average satisfaction level for both annual leave and working time reaches 6.9 points. Lower satisfaction levels have been reported for the following aspects: flexible hours (6.6 points), breaks during working hours (6.4 points), salary (6.2 points), collective agreement (5.8 points) and social benefits (4.2 points).

Specifically, employees in the public sector enjoy more social benefits than those working in the private sector. In the public sector, workers receive benefits for education and training (42.4%), education for relatives (34.3%) and healthcare (30.9%). On the other hand, in the private sector, the most frequently granted benefits to workers include those for transport (21.9%), food (19.8%) and education (19.7%).

Training and career development

Concerning training and career development, workers assessed the level of usefulness of their academic education for their everyday work, on average, at 5.7 points on a scale ranging from 0 to 10. Almost five out of 10 workers (48.3%) believe that their academic education is useful or very useful for their work. Meanwhile, the average level of usefulness of training provided by the company is reported at 7.6 points, and 77.4% of employees consider that the training offered by their companies is useful or very useful for developing their work tasks (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Usefulness of academic education and vocational training for everyday work



Usefulness of academic education and vocational training for everyday work

Note: The items are assessed on a scale ranging from 1–10, whereby 1 = ‘very dissatisfied’ and 10 = ‘very satisfied’.

Source: MTIN, 2006 and 2007

Job mobility

Two thirds (67.5%) of workers whose current job is not their first one ended voluntarily (at their own initiative) their previous employment contract. The most common reason for changing jobs

seems to be related to better financial conditions, with 58% of workers indicating that an increase in salary would strongly influence their decision to change jobs. Other reasons for seeking another job such as improved working time arrangements or greater job stability are less important, obtaining 40.5% and 38.2% of workers' responses, respectively. It is also worthwhile mentioning that 82.6% of survey participants work in the same region where they were born.

Work–life balance

In families where both parents work, most of the children under three years of age are looked after by a specialised service (such as a nursery school) during working hours – this is the case for 41.4% of families. Other childcare options for children under the age of three years include relatives or friends without any remuneration (27.2% of cases), the partner (22.9%) or a salaried person who is not a relative or friend (8.6%). In the case of children aged between three and 14 years, mainly relatives, neighbours and friends, who do not receive any remuneration, look after these children while the parents are at work. Some 33.5% of women indicate that they are responsible for looking after their dependent children after working hours, whereas only 6% of men do so.

Nonetheless, the average level of satisfaction in terms of balancing family and private life reaches 7.8 points on the 10-point scale concerning the existing household conditions. Furthermore, the average satisfaction level regarding the household's place of residence is set at 7.7 points, followed by that concerning their private life at 7.6 point and the workplace location is at 7.5 points. The items for which the workers surveyed indicated average satisfaction levels lower than 7 points are the time they have available for their children (6.9 points), the economic situation of the household (6.4 points) and the available free time (6.1 points).

Commentary

The Sixth National Survey on Working Conditions represents a well-established research tool for analysing the existing working conditions in Spain. It focuses primarily on workers' health issues. The new methodology that was implemented in the 2007 edition of the survey allows for examining a different, more complete population sample, including young persons, women, migrants, self-employed people, workers on leave or those without an employment contract. The new survey approach also offers a more critical analysis of working conditions in Spain. Unfortunately, it makes it more difficult to compare data with the survey findings of previous years. Basically, the main survey results show that 22.5% of Spanish workers estimate that their work is affecting their health; some 74.2% of these workers suffer from musculoskeletal disorders and 71% of these workers state that they are exposed to some form of risk in their workplace. In general, healthcare personnel, farmers, stockbreeders, fishermen, construction workers and drivers are the most affected occupational groups from more demanding working conditions.

Meanwhile, the Spanish survey on Quality of Life in the Workplace is a valuable tool for complementing the results obtained from the National Survey on Working Conditions. According to the survey results, Spanish workers generally show reasonable levels of satisfaction with their job. However, the methodological changes introduced in the survey in 2005 must be taken into account when interpreting and comparing data from different years, as it is difficult to assess the actual evolution of job satisfaction levels in Spain.

Considering together the results from both surveys leads to a somehow paradoxical conclusion: on the one hand, many Spanish workers seem to be still exposed to tough and even hazardous and stressful working conditions, with unfavourable consequences for their well-being (either physical or psychological), while, on the other hand, there are many additional factors associated

with the work environment (such as comradeship, autonomy and personal development) that, on average, allow workers to be quite satisfied with their jobs.

Annex: Methodology

It should be noted that the methodology of the Sixth National Survey on Working Conditions has been modified compared to previous survey editions. Until 2004, the overall study consisted of two different surveys, one of which was carried out among employers and the other one among workers. Both surveys were conducted in the workplace. However, according to the new methodology, data are collected only among workers and interviews take place in the worker's home.

The main methodological aspects of the Sixth National Survey on Working Conditions are set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Methodological details of the Sixth National Survey on Working Conditions, 2007

Survey name	Sixth National Survey on Working Conditions (<i>VI Encuesta Nacional de Condiciones de Trabajo</i>)
Organisation in charge	Spanish National Institute of Safety and Hygiene in the Workplace (Instituto Nacional de Seguridad e Higiene en el Trabajo, INSHT), a subsidiary body of the Spanish Ministry of Labour and Immigration (Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración, MTIN)
Frequency	This is the sixth issue of the working conditions survey. The frequency of this survey has varied, with the first one having been carried out more than 20 years ago and the following issues being published in 1983, 1987, 1993, 1997, 1999 and 2004.
Geographic coverage	The survey covers the entire country, with the exception of the Spanish territories in northern Africa, Ceuta and Melilla.
Surveyed population	Working population, both employees and self-employed workers across all sectors of economic activity.
Sample	11,054 interviews were carried out. The sampling strategy is based on economic sector, company size and regional quotas. Sampling error +/- 0.95%, at 95.5% confidence level, with p=q=50%.
Interviews	Face-to-face interviews at the interviewees' home.
Date of fieldwork	Between 12 December 2006 and 11 April 2007.

Source: *INSHT, 2007*

The main methodological aspects of the 2007 survey on Quality of Life in the Workplace are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Methodological details of the survey on Quality of Life in the Workplace, 2007

Survey name	Quality of Life in the Workplace (<i>Encuesta de Calidad de Vida en el Trabajo</i>)
Organisation in charge	Spanish Ministry of Labour and Immigration (Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración, MTIN)
Frequency	Annual survey, with a first edition in 1999 and the last edition in 2007. The survey was not carried out in 2005.
Geographic coverage	The survey covers the entire country, with the exception of the Spanish territories in northern Africa, Ceuta and Melilla.
Surveyed population	Working population (aged 16 years or older), both employees and self-employed workers.
Sample	8,974 working persons. Sampling strategy is based on regional quotas.
Interviews	The interviews are carried out by phone, using the Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) system. Interviews are only carried out in person, using the Computer-Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) system, if it is impossible to contact the interviewees by phone.
Date of fieldwork	Last quarter of 2007.

Source: MTIN, 2007.

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