



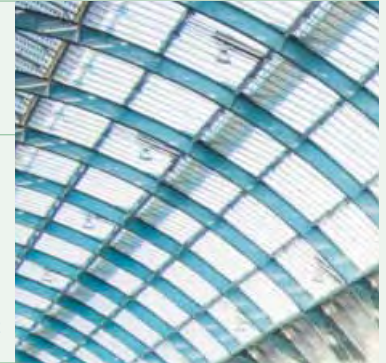
European Foundation for the
Improvement of Living and
Working Conditions



Other service activities: Working conditions and job quality

'Work plays a significant role in people's lives, in the functioning of companies and in society at large. But what is work? How can we describe it? Is it changing, and if so, is it for better or for worse? Is it fulfilling the numerous and at times conflicting expectations we have of it? How can we take steps to improve work for the well-being of all?'

Eurofound, *Fifth European Working Conditions Survey: Overview report, 2012*



This report gives an overview of working conditions, job quality, workers' health and job sustainability in the other service activities sector (NACE 94 to 96).¹ It is based mostly on the fifth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), which gathers data on working conditions and the quality of work across 34 European countries. Additional information on the structural characteristics of the sector is derived from Eurostat data. The other services activities sector is quite heterogeneous as it encompasses the activities of membership organisations such as trade unions and religious or political organisations (NACE 94), repair of computers and personal and household goods (NACE 95), and other personal service activities, such as hairdressing and dry-cleaning (NACE 96). The fifth EWCS contains responses from 1,235 workers in this sector. The report compares aspects of work in the sector with the EU28 as a whole.

Structural characteristics

In 2010, 5,323,100 European workers worked in other service activities, which corresponds to 2.4% of the EU28 workforce (Source: EU-LFS). Employment in the sector decreased by 1.6% between 2008 and 2010, and by a further 0.8% between 2010 and 2012 (Eurostat, 2013).

Countries where the other service activities sector is a relatively large employer are France (2.8%), Germany (2.9%), Finland (3%) and Italy (3.4%). The sector has relatively little prominence in Slovenia (1.5%), Croatia (1.4%), Slovakia (1.3%) and Romania (1.2%) (Eurostat, 2013). A very large proportion of workers in other service activities (80%) work in

micro-workplaces (1–9 employees), compared to 42% in the EU28. Consequently, workers in small and medium-sized workplaces (SMEs, 10–249 employees) and large workplaces (250+) are significantly underrepresented in the sector in comparison to the EU28, as they only make up 18% and 2% respectively of the workforce compared to 42% and 12% in the EU28 as a whole. Given the small number of respondents in the sample working in large workplaces (250+ employees), it is not possible to report the results for this category.² The sector is female-dominated, with 66% of workers being women and 34% being men (Eurostat, 2013). Young workers (under 25 years of age) make up a relatively large share of the workforce in the sector (12% of the sector's workforce compared to 9% in the EU28 as a whole), and 36% of the workforce in the sector is aged between 25 and 39.

As Figure 1 indicates, indefinite contracts are less common in the sector (73% of the workforce) than in the EU28 (80%), while fixed-term contracts are more widespread (15% of workers in other service activities compared to 12% in the EU28). Apprenticeships and other training contracts are twice as common among men in the sector than among men in the EU28, and the sector is also characterised by a higher proportion

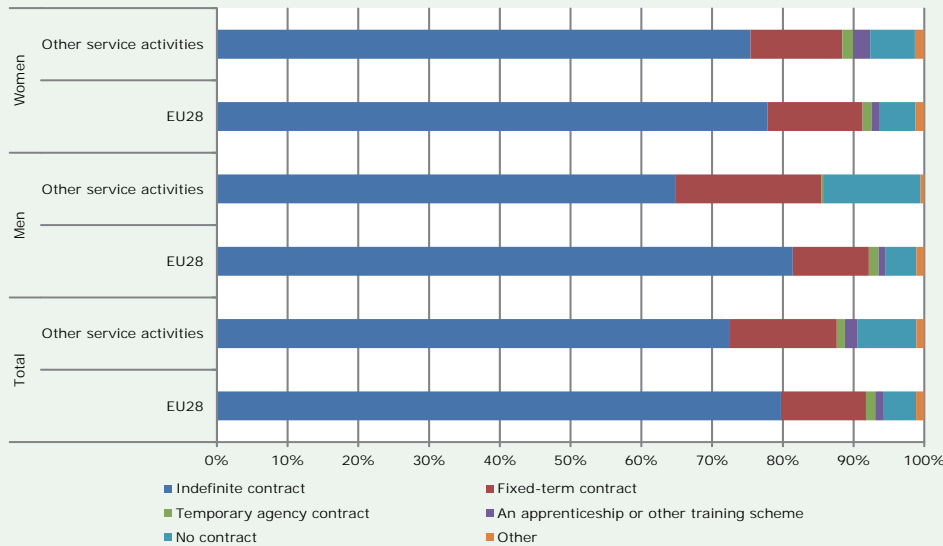
Other service activities in a nutshell

- The sector is female-dominated, women making up 66% of the workforce
- The proportion of workers, particularly men, without a formal contract in the sector is very large
- Men in micro-workplaces work a large number of atypical hours
- The percentage of workers who report they have received training is lower than in the EU28 for both men and women
- Workers are relatively well informed about health and safety risks at the workplace

¹ Nomenclature statistique des activités économiques dans la Communauté européenne (statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community).

² When a breakdown category contains less than 30 cases, no reliable estimates can be calculated. As a consequence, some graphs will have bars missing.

Figure 1: Employment status by gender



of workers without a formal contract (8% compared to 5% in the EU28). The proportion of workers with no formal contract in other service activities is particularly high for men, 14% of whom report having no formal contract compared to 4% in the EU28.

Part-time work is considerably more prevalent in the other service activities sector than in the EU28, especially for men: 42% of women and 30% men in the sector work 34 hours or less, compared to 38% of women and 13% of men in the EU28.

Working conditions

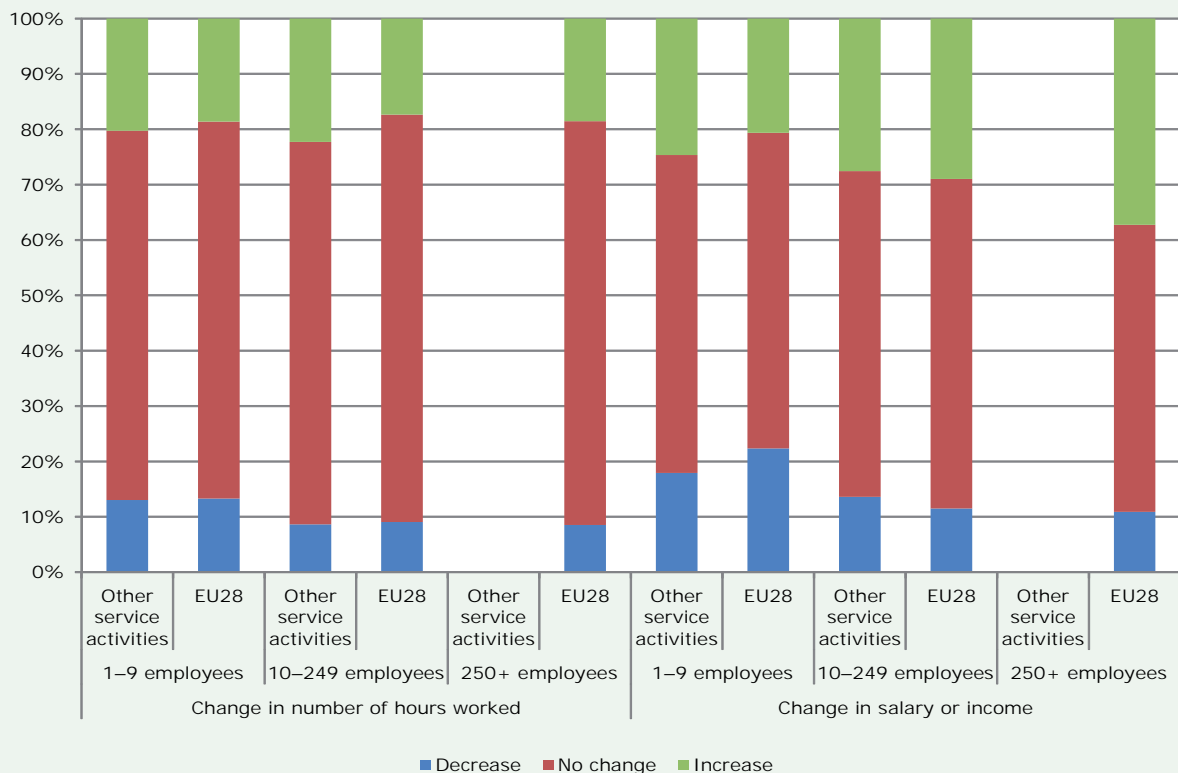
Changes since the crisis

Figure 2 shows that workers in the other service activities sector did not differ significantly from the EU

average for reported changes in hours worked. As in the EU28, more workers in the sector reported an increase in working hours in the year prior to the survey than a decrease. In both micro-workplaces and SMEs in other service activities, however, the proportion who reported an increase in hours worked was slightly higher than in corresponding workplace sizes in the EU28.

Both in the other service activities sector and in the EU28 in general, workers more frequently reported changes in salary or income than changes in hours worked. Employees in micro-workplaces more frequently than workers in SMEs reported wage cuts. Across both workplace sizes, the proportion of employees reporting a decrease in salary is smaller than that reporting an increase, but while this proportion is lower than in the

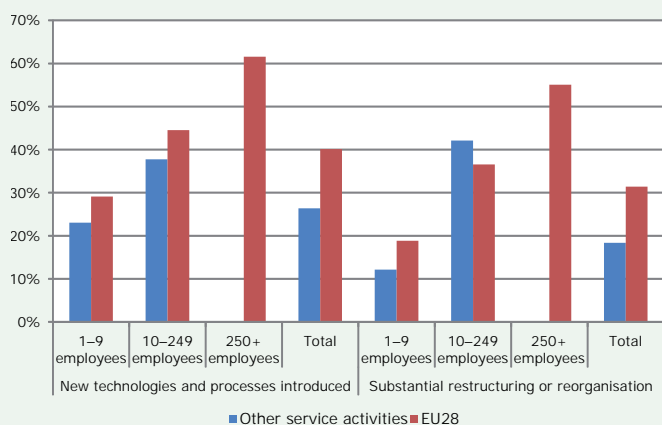
Figure 2: Percentage of employees reporting changes in number of hours worked and salary or income in past year, by workplace size



equivalent EU28 workplaces for workers in micro-workplaces in the sector (18% compared to 22% in the EU28), it is higher for workers in SMEs in other service activities (14% of whom report a salary decrease compared to 11% in the EU28). Conversely, salary increases were more common among workers in micro-workplaces in other service activities (25%) than in micro-workplaces in the EU28 (21%).

In terms of restructuring and the introduction of new technologies, workers in other service activities were slightly less affected by these phenomena in the three years prior to the survey than the EU28 average (Figure 3). The only exception to this trend is workers in SMEs in the sector, who more frequently reported restructuring or reorganisation than their counterparts in the EU28. The share of employees reporting restructuring or the introduction of new production processes and technologies increases with workplace size.

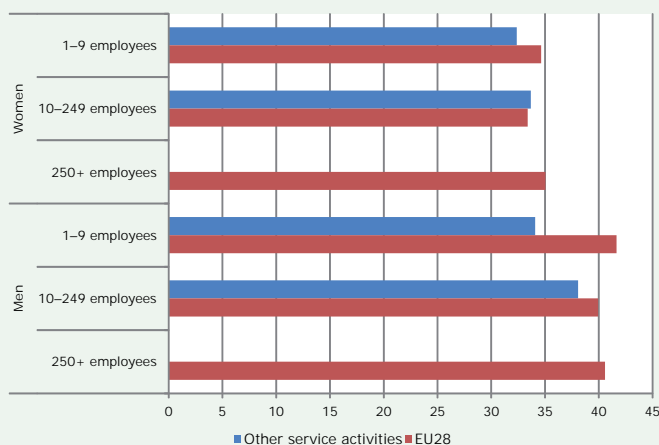
Figure 3: Restructuring and introduction of new technologies in past three years, by workplace size



Working time and work-life balance

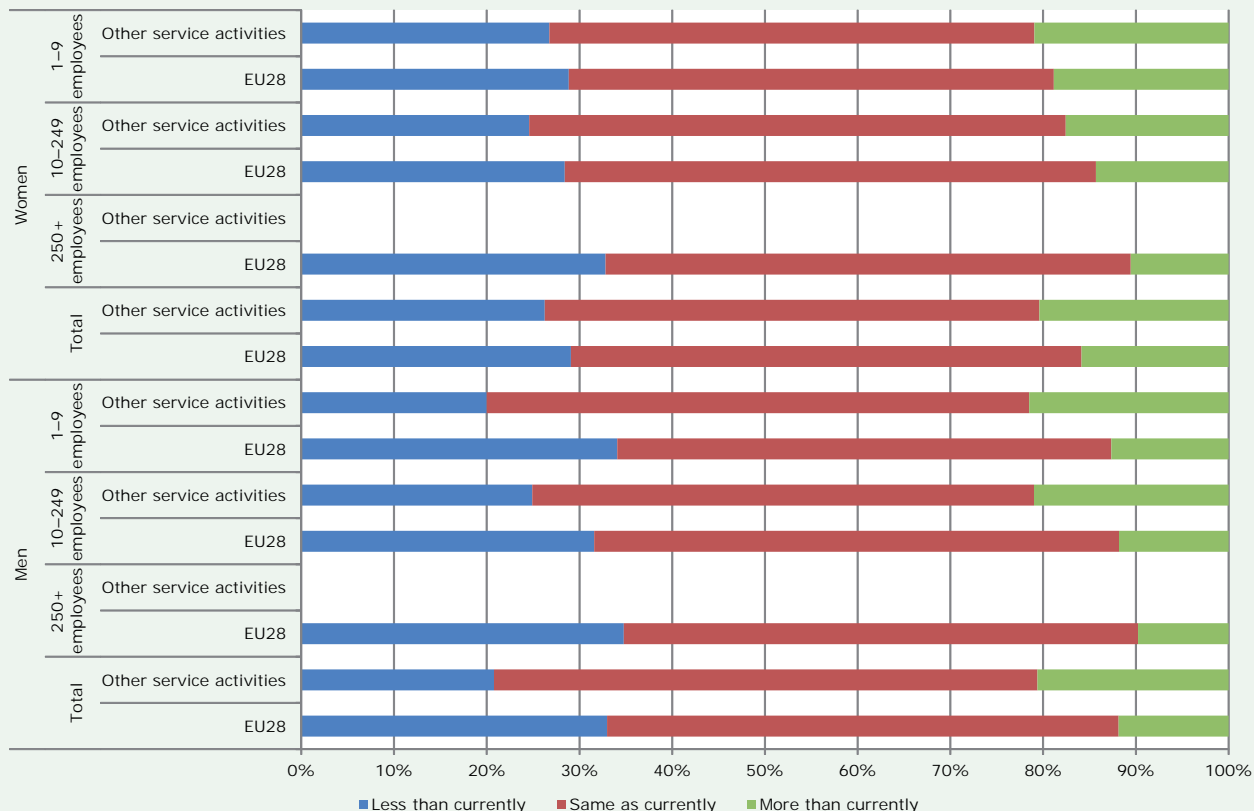
Workers in other service activities work on average 33 hours a week compared to 38 hours in the EU28. This difference is largely explained by the high incidence of part-time work in the sector. As in the EU28, men in the other services sector tend to work more hours than women (Figure 4). However, while working hours for men are below the EU28 average for equivalent sizes of workplaces, the average working hours of women in SMEs in the sector are slightly above the corresponding EU28 average (34 compared to 33). Average working hours, as in the EU28, increase with workplace size.

Figure 4: Average working hours, by gender and workplace size



Both men and women across all workplace sizes in the sector are more likely than their EU28 counterparts to report a preference for working more

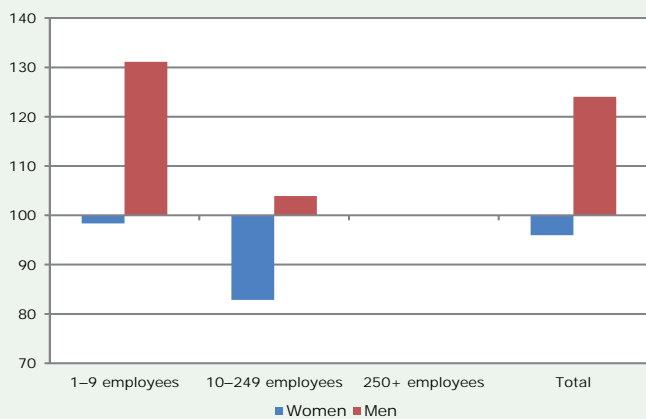
Figure 5: Working time preference, by gender and workplace size



hours than at present. Among women, however, the share of workers who report a preference for working fewer hours than currently is higher than those who would like to work more hours, while for men the two proportions are equal. It is striking that among men working in the other service activities sector, almost twice as many report a preference for working more hours than currently (21%) as in the EU28 as a whole (12%), while only 21% would prefer to work fewer hours, compared to 33% in the EU28.

Figure 6 shows that marked gender differences exist in the other service activities sector for working atypical hours (weekends, evenings and/or nights): it is less common for women in the sector than for women in the EU28 as a whole, but more common for men. Men in micro-workplaces in the sector are much more likely to work atypical hours than their EU28 counterparts.

Figure 6: Index of working atypical hours (EU28=100), by gender and workplace size



When looking at the regularity of working time (working the same number of hours every day and the same number of days every week), overall, women in the other service activities sector do not differ from the EU28 average, whereas men in the sector report substantially lower levels of regularity. The difference for men is similar in micro-enterprises and SMEs, but women in SMEs report more regularity than women in micro-workplaces in the sector and than the EU28 average.

Figure 7: Index of regularity of working time (EU28=100), by gender and workplace size

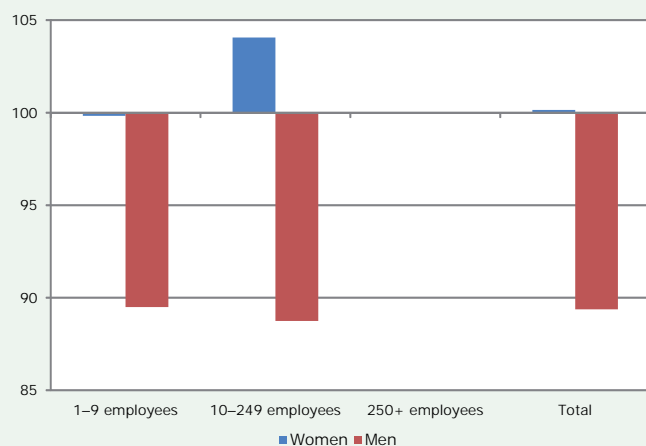


Figure 8 shows that work-life balance (the fit between working hours and family or social commitments) is better for those working in the other service activities sector than in the EU28 as a whole. Indeed, across all workplace sizes in the sector, both men and women are less likely to report poor a work-life balance than workers in the EU28 as a whole. The difference is particularly striking for men working in micro-workplaces.

Figure 8: Poor work-life balance, by gender and workplace size

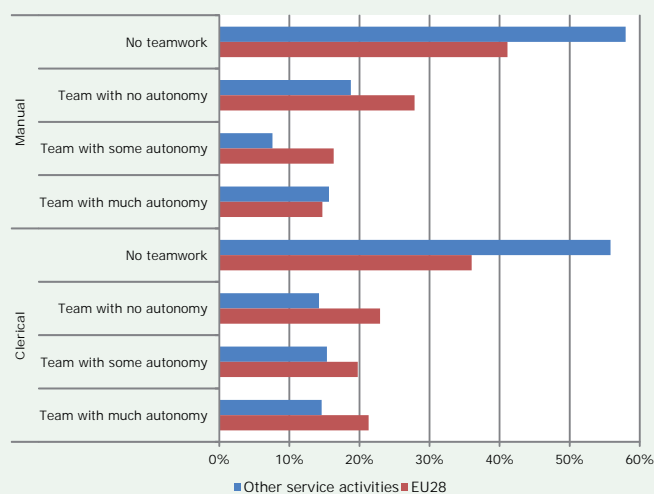


Work organisation

Teamwork

Teamwork has been proposed as an alternative to work organisation models based on high levels of labour division. As teamwork reflects a variety of practices, it can also assume a variety of forms. Different types of teamwork can be identified using the EWCS by looking at the level of autonomy within the teams.

Figure 9: Teamwork and team autonomy, by occupational category



Overall, teamwork is less common in the other service activities sector than in the EU28 as a whole, with only 44% of the sector's workforce working in a team of some kind compared to 63% in the EU28 (Figure 9). The pattern is broadly the same for manual and clerical workers in the sector. All forms of teamwork are less widespread in the sector than in the EU28. Teamwork without autonomy is the most common form of teamwork among manual workers, while teamwork with some autonomy is the most widespread form among clerical workers in the sector.

Task rotation

Task rotation is also an important feature of work organisation. Depending on how it is implemented, task rotation may require different skills from the worker ('multiskilling') or may not ('fixed task rotation') and is either controlled by management or by the workers themselves ('autonomous'). Task rotation has been shown to be beneficial for workers' well-being, and autonomous multiskilling systems in particular are associated with higher worker motivation as well as better company performance. The percentage of workers in other service activities working in a task rotation system (38%) is lower than in the EU28 as a whole (47%; Figure 10). The difference is particularly marked in micro-workplaces, in which the proportion of workers who report not working in any task rotation system (66%) is higher than in micro-workplaces in the EU28 as a whole (61%), while it is lower for SMEs in the sector (47%) than in the EU28 (50%).

Management-controlled multiskilling is the most common form of task rotation across all workplace sizes, but SMEs in other service activities have an above-average incidence of autonomous multiskilling and management-controlled fixed task rotation in comparison to equivalent workplaces in the EU28.

Female bosses

As other service activities is a female-dominated sector, it is not surprising that the proportion of workers who report having a female boss (53%) is considerably higher than the EU28 average (28%). Both the proportion of women (65%) and men (21%) working in other service activities who report having a female boss is higher than the corresponding EU28 averages of 47 and 12% respectively, although the fact that the share of women with a female boss is three times higher than that of men could indicate that occupational gender segregation is widespread in the sector.

Skills and training

Overall, the majority of workers in other service activities say that their present skills correspond well with their duties (Figure 11): across all age groups the share of workers who report being 'over-skilled' for their current duties is higher than that of workers who report being 'under-skilled'. Differences emerge across age groups within the sector, however. While workers under 35 and between 35 and 49 are slightly more likely than their EU28 counterparts to report being under-skilled for their current job, workers above 50 years of age in the sector are considerably less likely than workers of the same age in the EU28 to report being under-skilled, and considerably more

Figure 10: Prevalence of task rotation, by workplace size

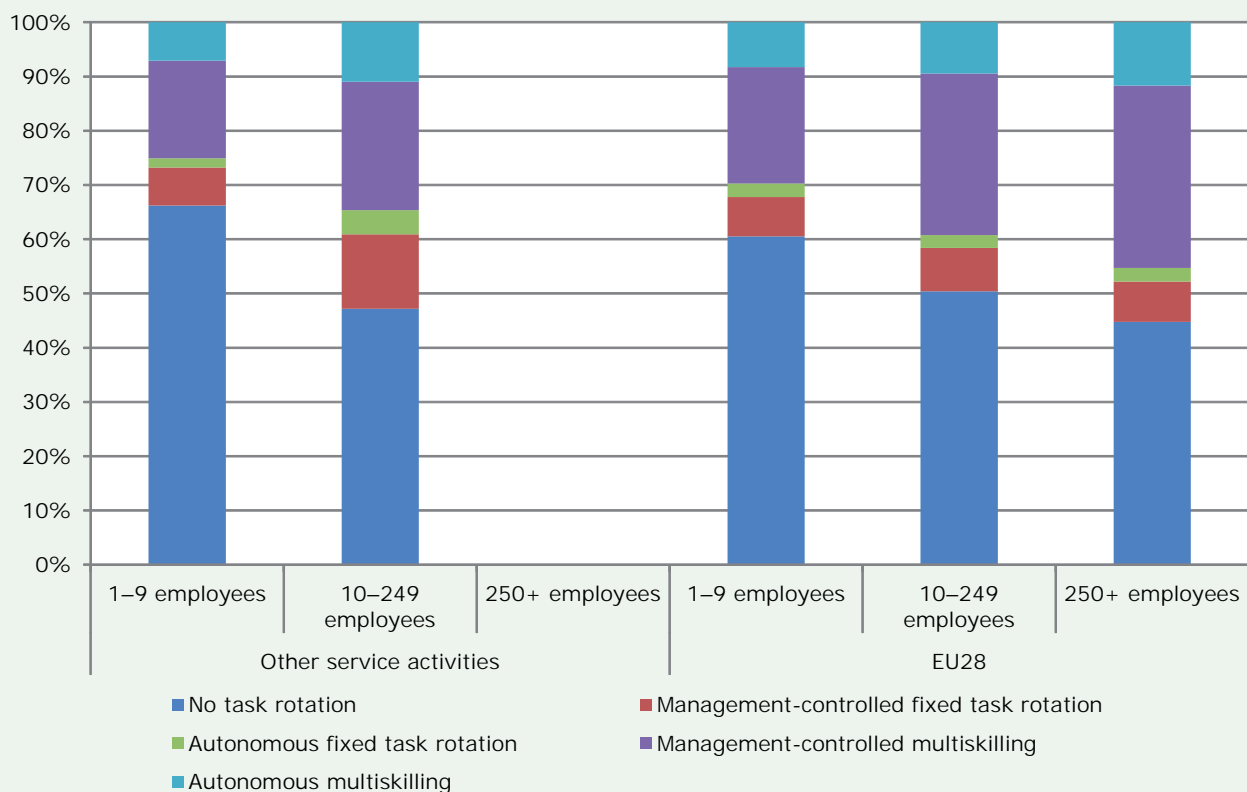
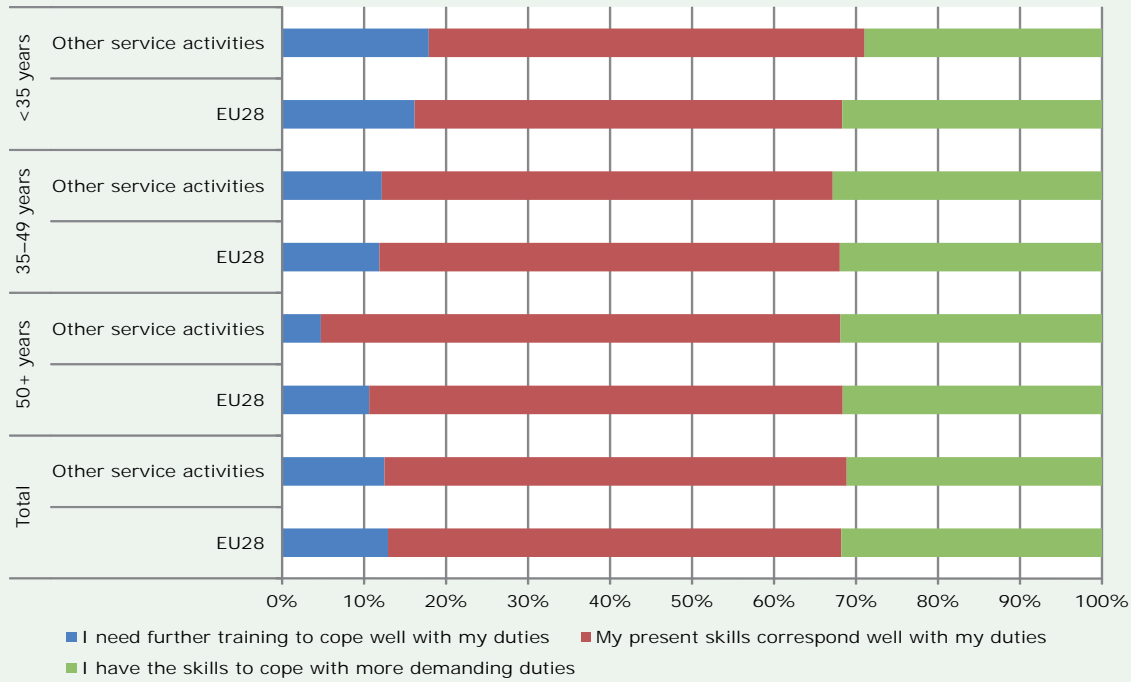


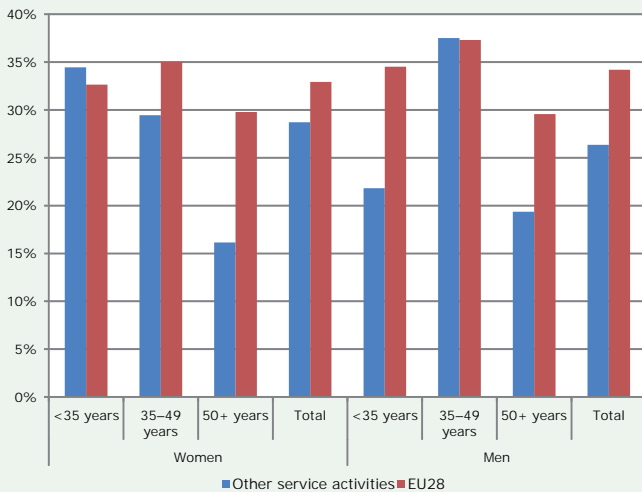
Figure 11: Match between skills and tasks, by age



likely to report that their skills correspond well with their duties.

The percentage of workers in other service activities who say they have received training from their employer is lower than in the EU28 for both women and men (Figure 12). Exceptions to this pattern are women under 35 and men aged between 35 and 49, who report similar incidences of employer-paid training as their EU28 counterparts. While the share of workers who have received training clearly decreases with age among women in the sector, this is not the case for men.

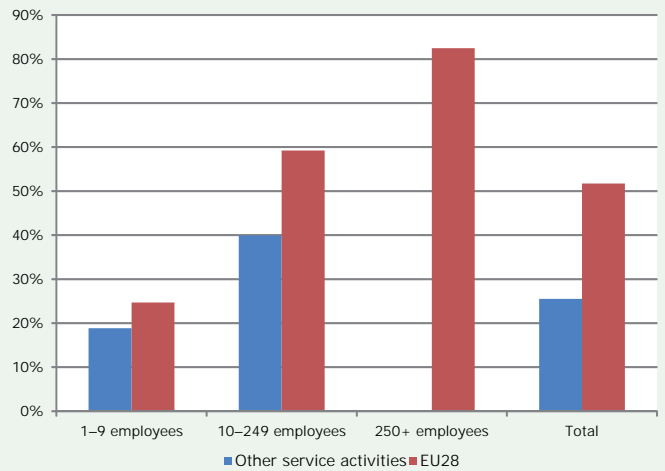
Figure 12: Employer-paid training, by gender and age



Employee representation

The EWCS contains fairly limited information on formal employee representation. It asks whether an employee representative is present at the workplace and whether workers have raised an issue with an employee representative in the past year. Figure 13 shows the combined results of these questions (an employee representative has been considered to be 'available' if they are present at the workplace or when an issue was raised).

Figure 13: Availability of an employee representative at the workplace, by workplace size



In 2010, only 26% of employees in other service activities reported that an employee representative was available compared to 52% of workers in the EU28. As in the EU28, the larger the workplace, the higher the probability of having an employee representative, indicating that the low prevalence of employee representatives in the other services sector is partially due to the small proportion of large workplaces in the sector. However, for both micro-workplaces and SMEs in the sector, the availability of employee representation is lower than for corresponding workplaces in the EU28.

Psychosocial and physical environment

Job autonomy and work intensity

The psychosocial and physical environment impacts heavily on workers' well-being. According to the job demand and control model of the American sociologist Karasek (1979), workers are more likely to suffer from work-related stress when they are faced with a high level of demand while being limited in the control they have over the way in which they carry out their job.

Figure 14: Distribution of groups of workers by average levels of job autonomy and work intensity (only includes workers in micro-, small and medium-sized workplaces)

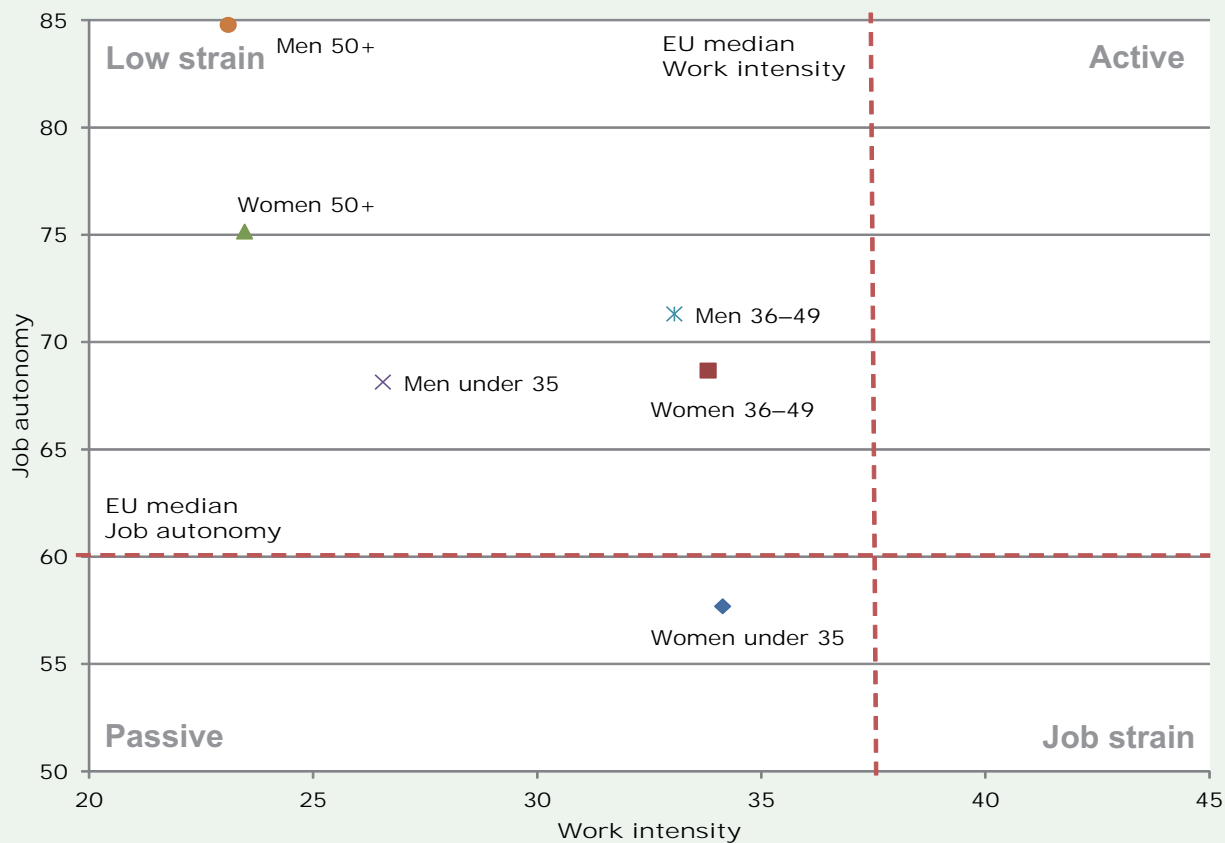


Figure 14 shows the likelihood of workers in other services suffering from work-related stress. Groups of workers are plotted along two axes: job autonomy and work intensity.

Overall, the other service activities sector is characterised by below-average levels of work intensity, as the averages for all groups of workers fall in the quadrants on the left hand side on the graph, below the EU28 median for work intensity. The bottom left quadrant in Figure 14 contains the averages for women under 35 in other service activities. These workers are likely to be in so-called 'passive' jobs, characterised by low levels of work intensity and low levels of job autonomy. The risk of stress is low in these jobs, but there are risks of frustration and low motivation as the jobs are not very challenging and workers have little control over what they do in their job and how they do it.

All other groups of workers in other service activities (men of all age groups and women above 35 years of age) are predominantly in 'low strain' jobs, characterised by relatively low levels of work intensity and high levels of job autonomy. 'Low strain' jobs pose a low risk of stress, but workers are less likely to suffer from frustration and loss of motivation than those in passive jobs, as they have greater control on how they carry out their tasks. They might, however, not be challenged to realise their full potential.

Due to the low average levels of job intensity in the sector, both the top and bottom right quadrants in the graph are empty in the other service activities sector. The top right quadrant refers to 'active' jobs, with high levels of work intensity and high levels of job autonomy.

Although their jobs can be very demanding, workers in the 'active' quadrant have enough control over the way they do their job and can develop coping strategies through active learning. Finally, the most problematic category is 'job strain' in the bottom right quadrant, which is again empty in the other service activities sector. The jobs of workers falling in this category are characterised by high levels of intensity and low levels of autonomy, posing the risk of unhealthy stress levels and unresolved strain, and consequently a range of stress-related illnesses such as cardiovascular disease and mental health problems.

Figure 15: Index of good social environment (EU28 = 100), by gender and workplace size

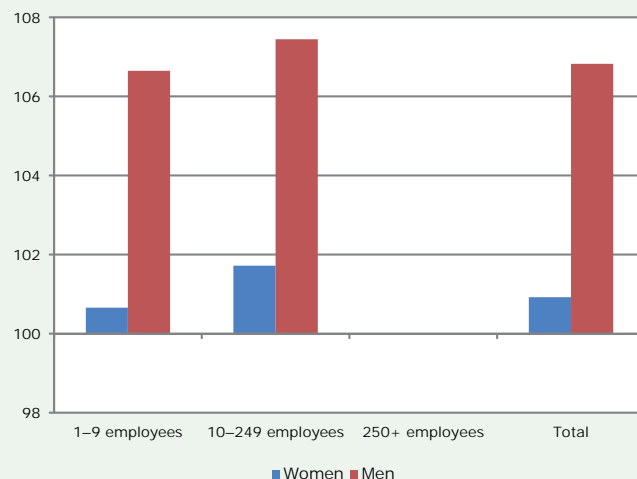
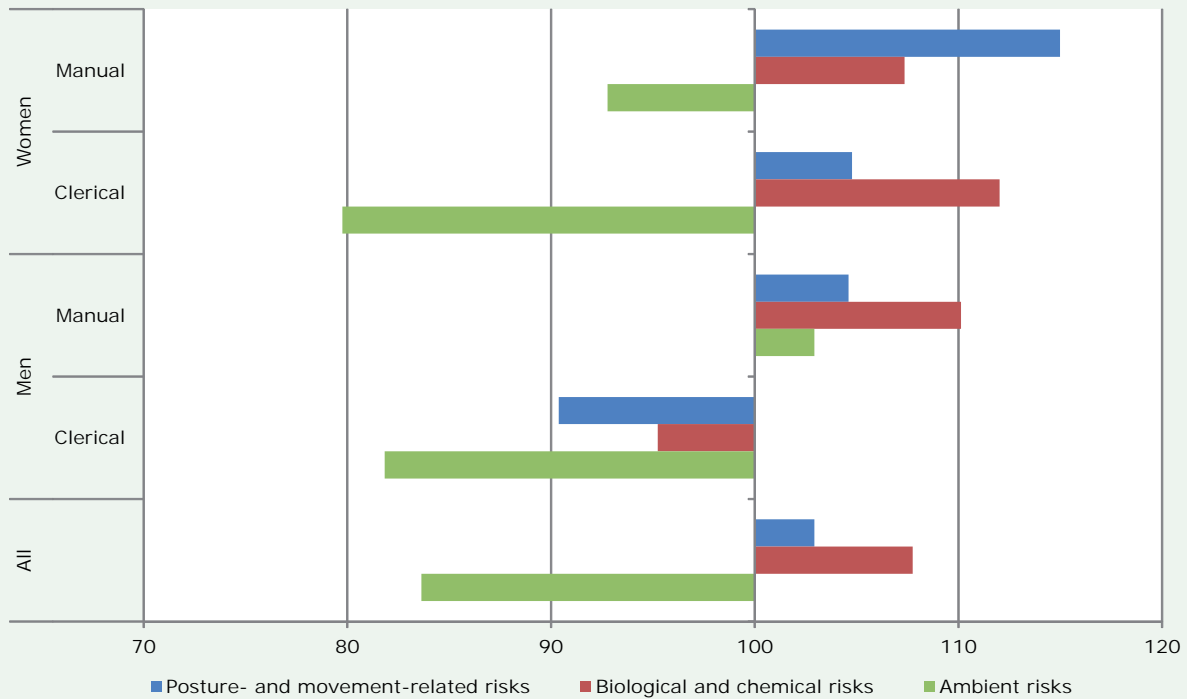


Figure 16: Indices of exposure to physical risks (EU28 = 100), by gender and occupation



Social environment

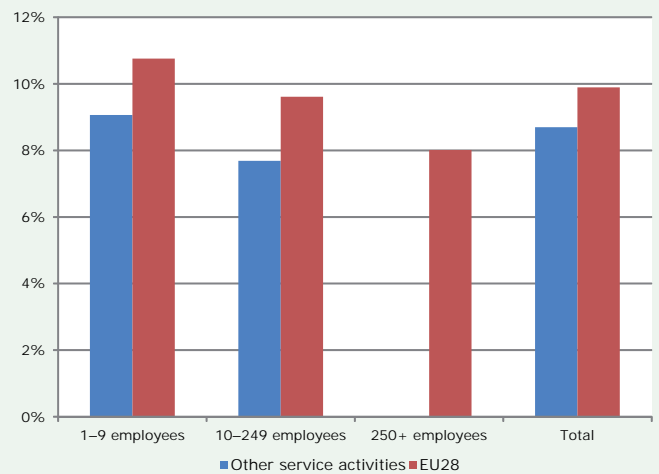
A good social environment is characterised by the existence of social support and the lack of abuse at work. Social support can help workers deal with high levels of work intensity. A good social environment is characterised by the existence of social support and the absence of abuse at work. High levels of social support can compensate for high levels of job strain. Overall, the scores for a good social environment in the other service activities sector do not differ much from the EU28 average (Figure 15). In both micro-workplaces and SMEs, men report a slightly better social environment than women in the sector and than the EU28 average.

Physical risks

Exposure to biological and chemical risk is the most prevalent physical risk in other service activities as a whole, followed by posture and movement-related risks (Figure 16). While levels of exposure to these two types of physical risks in the sector are above the EU28 average, exposure to ambient risk is considerably below average. The same pattern applies to women in manual and clerical occupations and men in manual occupations; however, men in clerical occupations report below average levels of exposure to all three types of risks.

In the other service activities sector as a whole, 9% of workers report they were not very well or not at all well informed about work place risks, compared to 10% in the EU28 (Figure 17). The percentage of workers not sufficiently informed decreases with workplace size, but it remains below the corresponding EU28 average for both micro-workplaces and SMEs in the sector.

Figure 17: Not very well or not at all well informed about health and safety risks at work, by workplace size

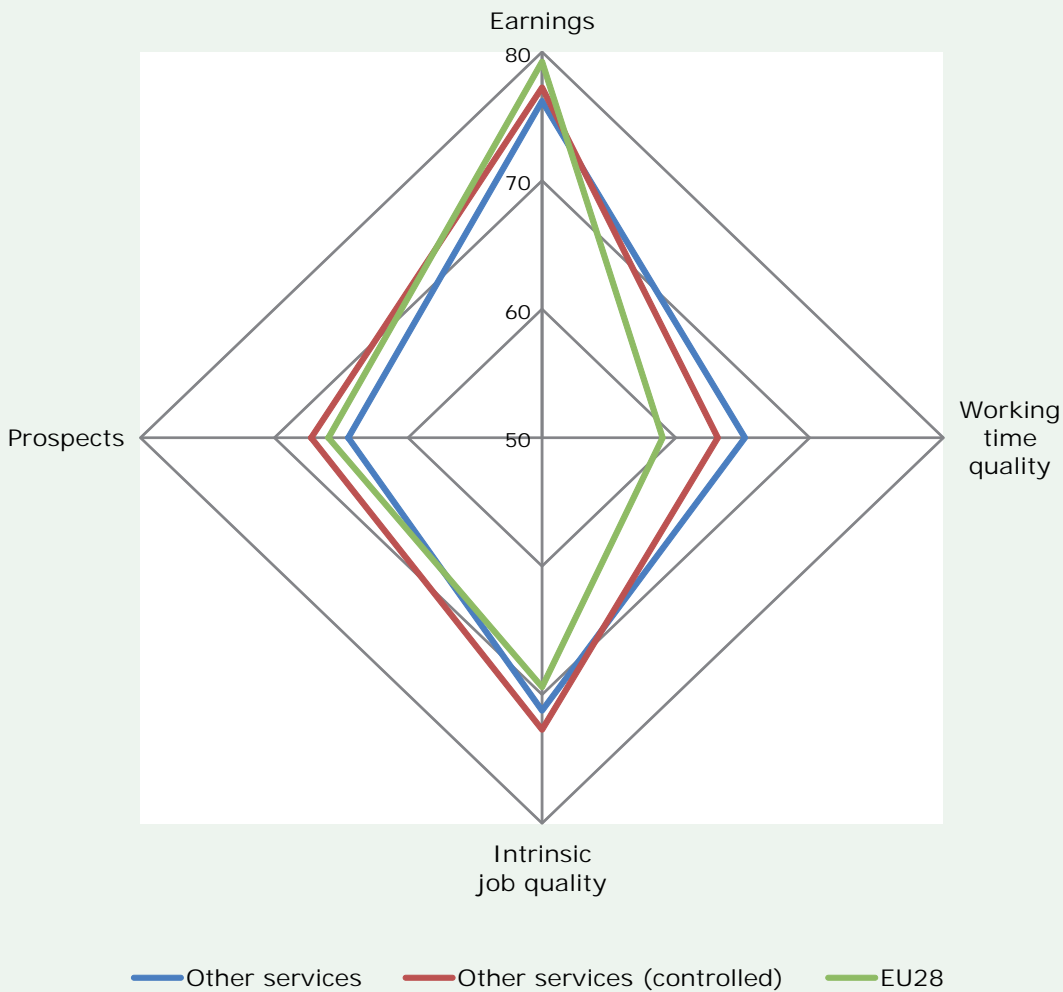


Job quality

In the report *Trends in job quality in Europe*, the authors constructed four indices of job quality: earnings, prospects, intrinsic job quality and working time quality. The indices are built using job characteristics that are unambiguously associated with workers' well-being.

Figure 18 summarises job quality in the other services sector. It shows the average score for the sector on each of the indicators, with and without controlling for the structural characteristics of the sector's workers (age, gender, workplace size, education level and country), and for the EU28. All four indicators range between 0 and 100.

Figure 18: Job quality in the other services sector compared with the EU28



Note: Scores on all four indicators range from 0 to 100

The picture of job quality in the other service activities sector that emerges is mixed. Workers in the sector tend to report higher than average working time quality and higher intrinsic job quality. However, scores for earnings and prospects for workers in the sector are lower than the EU28 average. When controlling for structural characteristics of the workforce, the differences for earnings and working time quality between the sector and the EU28 are reduced but still remain significant. The difference for intrinsic job quality actually increases, suggesting that workers in other service activities are better off in this respect than workers with similar background characteristics working in other sectors. Finally, after controlling for structural background factors, the difference between the sector and the EU28 for prospects is no longer statistically significant.

Health and sustainability of work

Working conditions can impact both positively and negatively on the health of workers and on the sustainability of their jobs.

Figure 19 shows that other service activities compares favourably to the EU28 for health and sustainability outcomes. The proportions of workers who report having poor self-reported health, that their health is at risk because of work, and that work affects their health negatively are lower in the other service activities sector than in the EU28. The proportions of workers in the other service activities sector reporting absenteeism due to a work accident, working when sick and being able to do the job at 60 are similar to the EU28 average. When controlling for the structural characteristics of the workforce in the sector (age, gender, establishment size, education and country distribution), all the differences between the sector and the EU28 remain statistically significant.

Figure 19: Health and sustainability of work

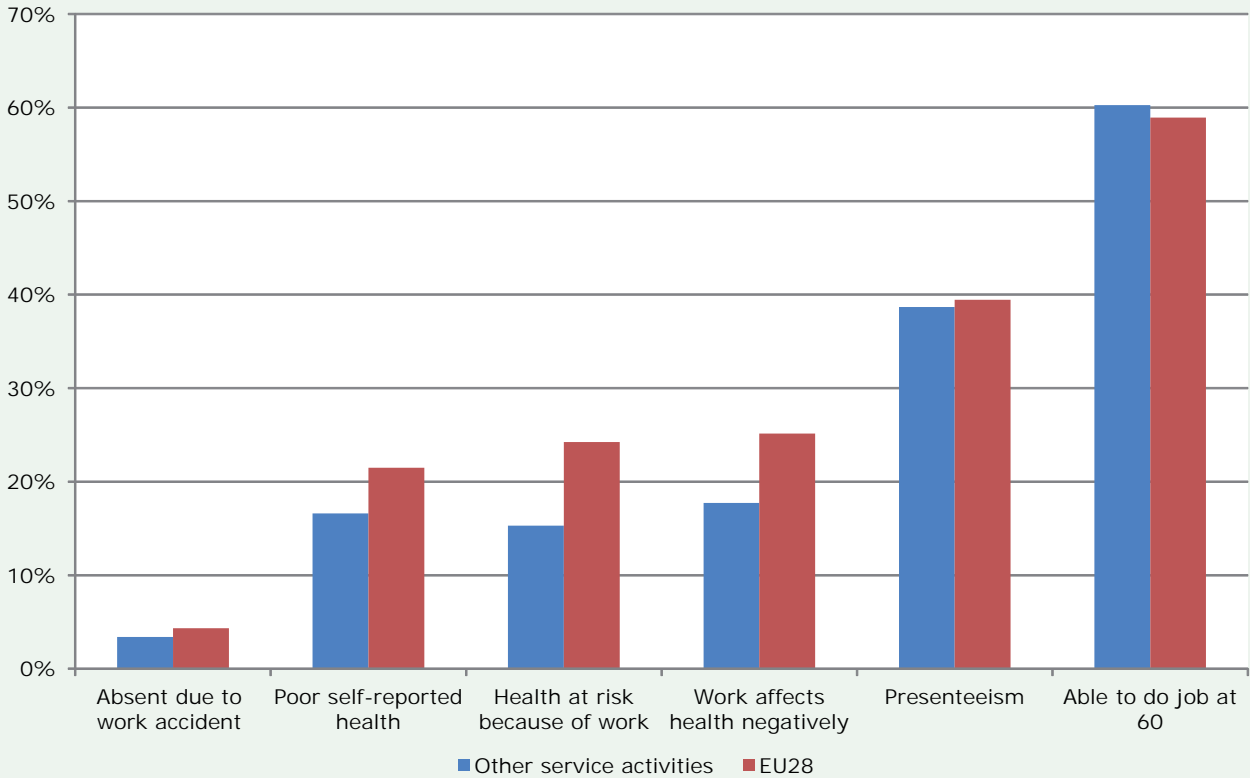
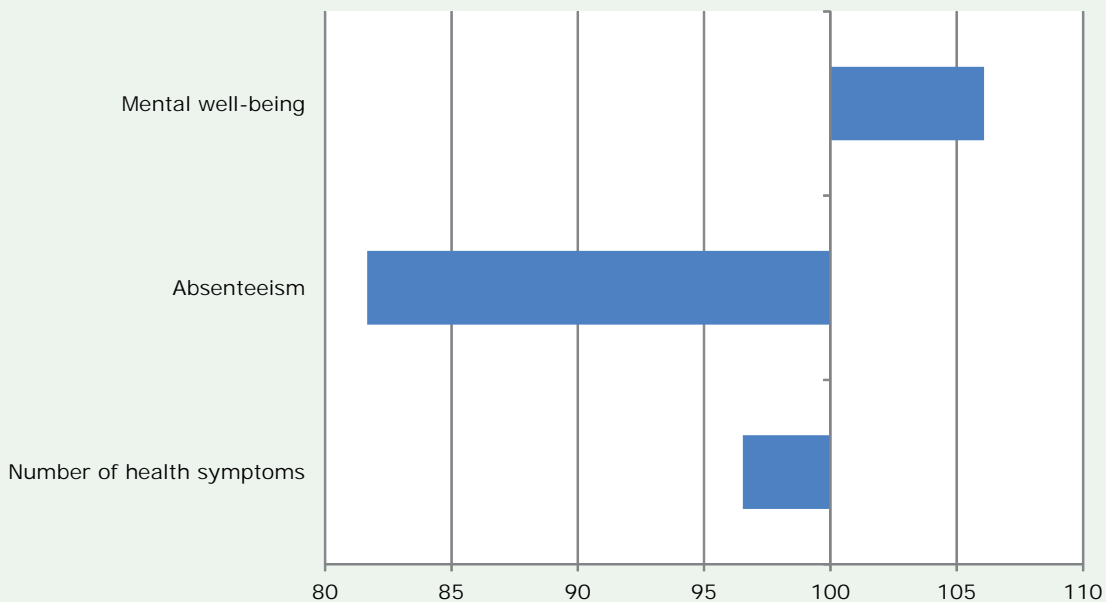


Figure 20 again shows a positive picture of the other service activities sector, with mental well-being scores slightly above, levels of absenteeism considerably below, and the number of health problems slightly below the EU28 average. The difference for better average mental health scores and lower number of reported health symptoms is still observed when controlling for gender, age, education, workplace size and country.

It is important to keep in mind that the impact of work on health is a very gradual process that can take a long time and cannot be fully captured in a cross-sectional survey. The results in this section are likely to underestimate the often negative health effects that physically and psychologically strenuous working conditions can have.

Figure 20: Indices of health symptoms, mental well-being and absenteeism (EU28 = 100)



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European Working Conditions Survey

Eurofound developed its European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) in 1990 in order to provide high-quality information on living and working conditions in Europe. Five waves of the survey have been carried out to date, enabling long-term trends to be observed and analysed.

The EWCS interviews both employees and self-employed people on key issues related to their work and employment. Fieldwork for the fifth EWCS took place from January to June 2010, with almost 44,000 workers interviewed in their homes in 34 countries – EU28, Norway, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo. The 5th EWCS was implemented by Gallup Europe, who worked within a strong quality assurance framework to ensure the highest possible standards in all data collection and editing processes.

The questionnaire covered issues such as precarious employment, leadership styles and worker participation as well as the general job context, working time, work organisation, pay, work-related health risks, cognitive and psychosocial factors, work-life balance and access to training. A number of questions were included to capture the impact of the economic downturn on working conditions.

For more information on the EWCS, see <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/ewcs/index.htm>

Sectoral analysis

The report *Working conditions and job quality: Comparing sectors in Europe* and the series of 33 sectoral information sheets aim to capture the diversity prevalent across sectors in Europe in terms of working conditions and job quality. The report pinpoints trends across sectors in areas such as working time and work-life balance, work organisation, skills and training, employee representation and the psychosocial and physical environment. It identifies sectors that score particularly well or particularly poorly in terms of job quality and sheds light on differences between sectors in terms of health and well-being.

For more information, see <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/ewcs/2010/sectorprofiles.htm>

Further information

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