



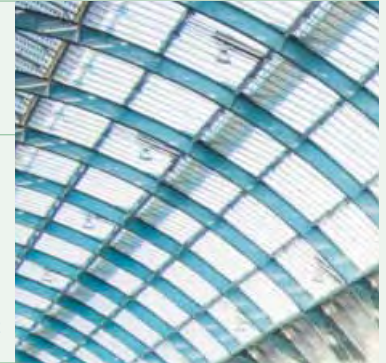
European Foundation for the
Improvement of Living and
Working Conditions



Households as employers: 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 activities of households as employers of domestic personnel sector (NACE 97), referred to here as the households as employers sector.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 fifth EWCS contains responses from 541 workers in this sector. The report compares aspects of work in the sector with the EU28 as a whole.

Structural characteristics

In 2010, 2,557,000 European workers worked in the households as employers sector, representing 1.2% of the EU28 workforce (1.1% in 2008 and 1.2% in 2012 respectively). Employment in the sector increased by 1.3% between 2008 and 2010, and by a further 2.1% between 2010 and 2012 (Eurostat, 2013).

Countries where the households as employers sector is a relatively large employer are Italy (2.4%), Portugal (2.9%), Spain (4.1%) and Cyprus (5.6%). The sector is virtually absent in Malta, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia (Eurostat, 2013). The vast majority of workers in the households as employers sector (93%) work in micro-workplaces (1–9 employees), compared to 42% in the EU28. Consequently, workers in small and medium-sized workplaces (10–249 employees) and

large workplaces (250+) are significantly underrepresented in the sector in comparison to the EU28, making up respectively 6% and 1% of the workforce compared to 42% and 12% in the EU28 as a whole.² The sector is largely female-dominated, with 90% of the workers being women and 10% being men (Eurostat, 2013). Older workers (50 years and older) make up a relatively large share of the workforce in the sector (33% compared to 27% in the EU28 as a whole), and 30% of the workforce is aged between 40 and 49, compared to 27% in the EU28. Consequently, younger workers are relatively underrepresented.

Self-employment without employees is equally common in the sector (12%) as in the EU28 as a whole (11%), while standard employment is less common (68% compared to 82%). The proportion of

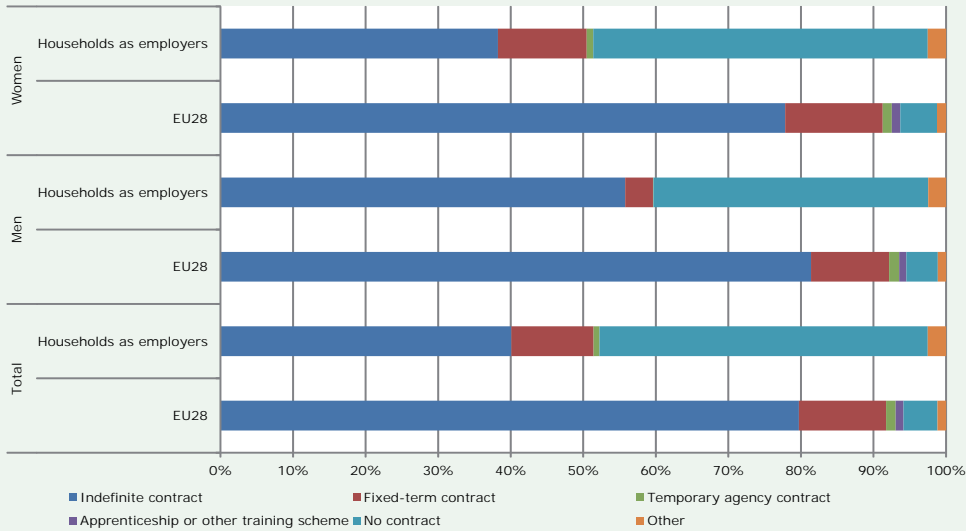
Households as employers in a nutshell

- The sector is characterised by a very large proportion of workers with no formal contract
- The vast majority of workers in the sector (93%) work in micro-workplaces and teamwork is virtually non-existent
- Workers in the sector are more likely to consider themselves to be 'over-skilled' than workers in the EU28 as a whole
- Availability of employee representation is lower than in the EU28 as a whole
- The percentage of workers in the sector who say they have received training from their employer is markedly lower than the EU28 average

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

² Due to the small number of respondents in the sample for workers in large workplaces, results are not reported for this category.

Figure 1: Employment status by gender



workers in the sector who report being in ‘other’ types of employment (20%) is, conversely, much higher than in the EU28 (3%). Consequently, indefinite contracts are considerably less common in the sector (40% of the workforce) than in the EU28 (80%), while fixed-term contracts are equally widespread (11% of workers in the sector compared to 12% in the EU28). The sector is, however, characterised by a disproportionately high share of workers with no formal contract (45% compared to 5% in the EU28). Women in particular report having no formal contract (45% in the sector compared to 5% in the EU28).

Part-time work is considerably more prevalent in the households as employers sector than in the EU28, with 72% of women and 49% of men in the sector working 34 hours or less, compared to 38% of women and 13% of men in the EU28.

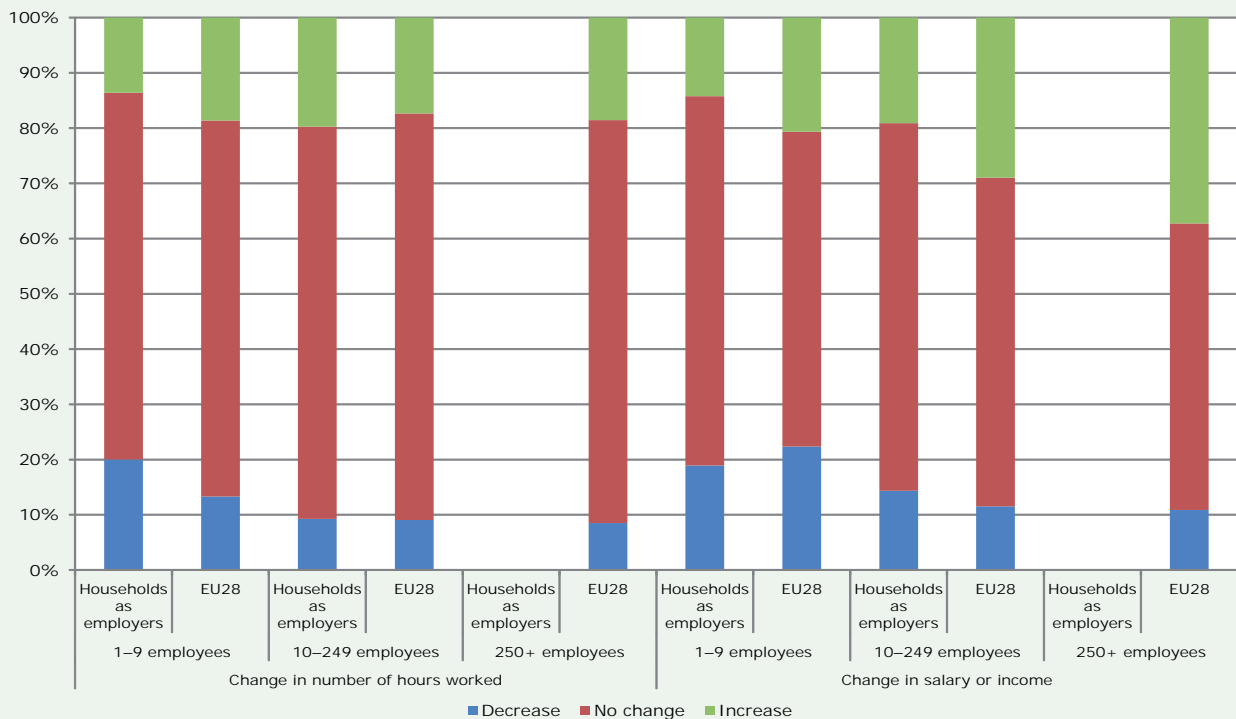
Working conditions

Changes since the crisis

Figure 2 shows that workers in the households as employers sector were more affected by changes in their hours worked in the year prior to the survey than workers in the EU28 as a whole. The proportion of workers in the sector reporting a decrease in their working hours was greater than those reporting an increase. The differences were particularly marked in micro-workplaces, where 20% reported a reduction in working hours compared to only 13% in equivalent workplaces in the EU28. Only 14% experienced an increase in working hours compared to 19% in the EU28 as a whole.

Again, in contrast to the EU28 average, more workers in the sector reported a decrease than an increase in

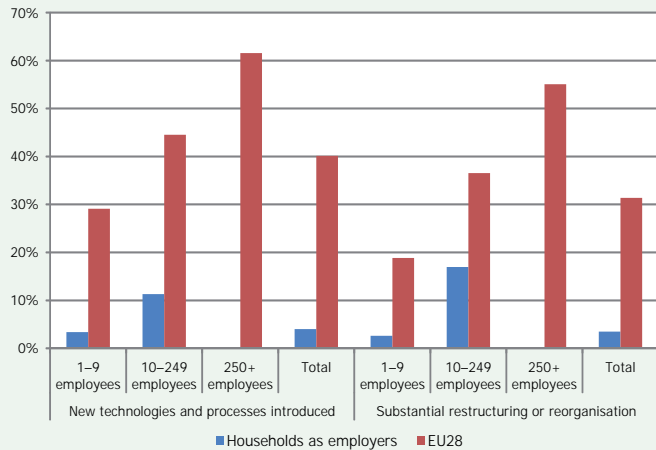
Figure 2: Percentage of employees reporting changes in number of hours worked and salary or income in past year, by workplace size



salary in the year prior to the survey. The share of workers in the sector reporting no change to their salary is higher than the corresponding EU28 averages. Workers in SMEs were more affected by salary reductions than their EU28 counterparts, and less likely to have had a salary increase, but more likely to report no change.

Workers in the households as employers sector overall were considerably less affected by restructuring and the introduction of new technologies and processes than the EU28 average (Figure 3).

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

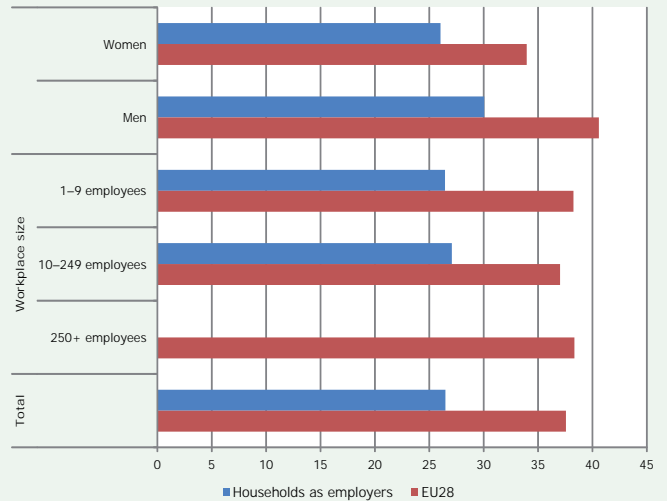


Working time and work-life balance

Workers in the households as employers sector work on average 27 hours per week, compared to 38 hours in the EU28. This difference is largely explained by

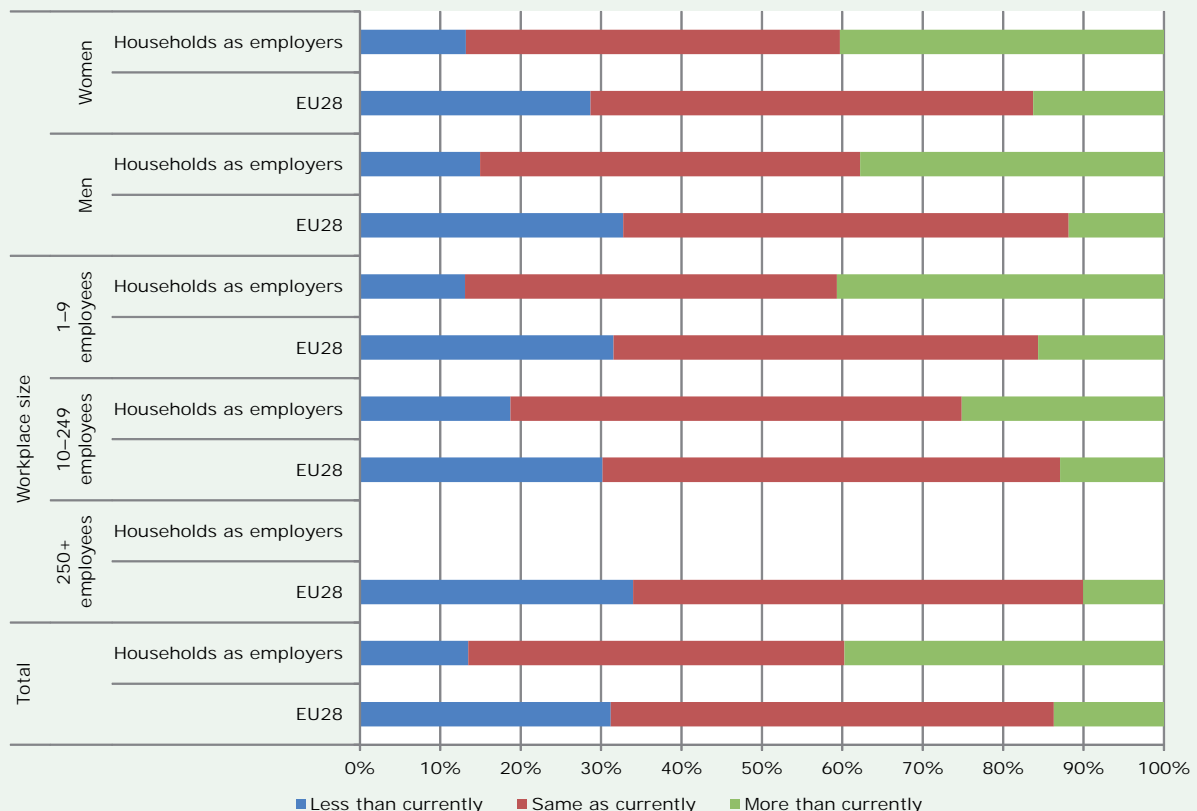
the very high incidence of part-time work in the sector. As in the EU28, men in the sector tend to work more hours than women but the averages for both genders and workplace sizes are well below the corresponding EU28 averages (Figure 4). There are no significant differences in average working hours between different workplace sizes.

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



Both men and women and workers across all establishment sizes in the households as employers sector are considerably more likely than their EU28 counterparts to express a preference for working more hours than currently, and much less likely to prefer working fewer hours. The share of workers within the sector who express a preference for

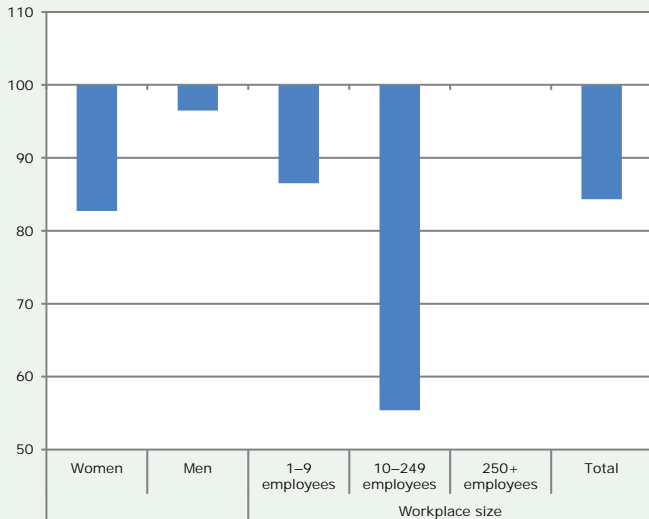
Figure 5: Working time preference, by gender and workplace size



working more hours than currently (40%) is also much higher than those declaring a preference for fewer working hours (14%).

Figure 6 shows that working atypical hours (weekends, evenings and/or nights) is less common for workers in the sector than in the EU28 as a whole. Within the sector, women are less likely than men to work atypical hours, and workers in SMEs are considerably less likely than workers in micro-workplaces to work atypical hours.

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



There are significant differences regarding the regularity of working time (working the same number of hours every day and the same number of days every week) across genders in the households as employers sector compared to the EU28 average (Figure 7). While women are more likely than the EU28 average to have regular working hours, the opposite is true for men. Workers in both workplace sizes, however, report more regular working hours than their EU28 counterparts.

Figure 7: Index of regularity of working time, by gender and workplace size

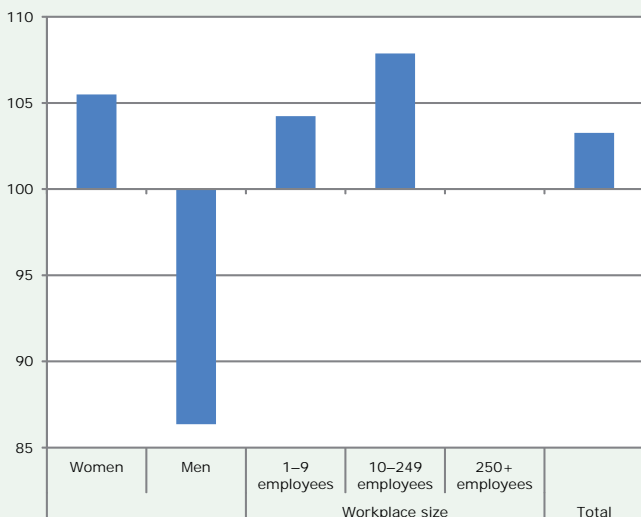
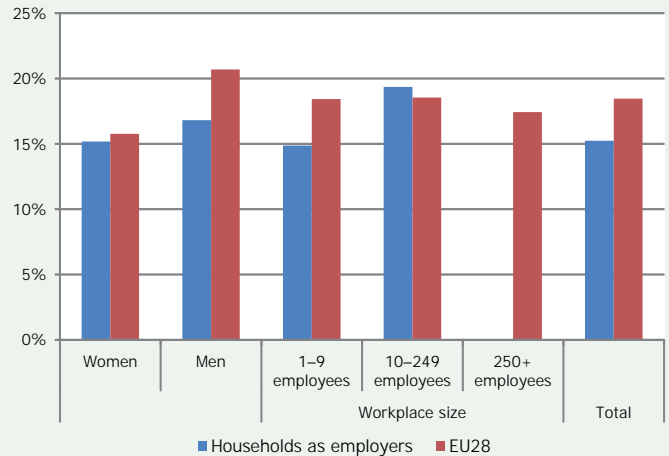


Figure 8 shows that work-life balance (the fit between working hours and family or social commitments) is better overall for those working in the households as employers sector than in the EU28 as a whole. Men in the sector report lower levels of poor work-life balance than men in the EU28. The degree of poor work-life balance among women in the sector is similar to women in the EU28. Workers in SMEs in the sector, however, report higher levels of poor work-life balance than their EU28 counterparts.

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

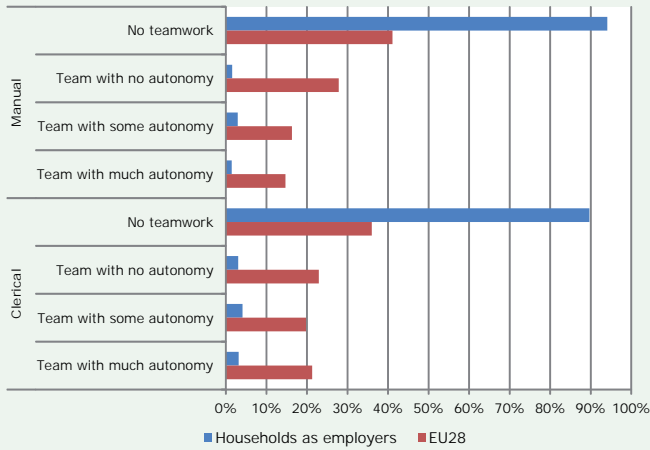


Work organisation

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. Overall, teamwork appears to be much less common in the households as employers sector than in the EU28 as a whole, with only 7% of the sector's workforce working in a team of some kind compared to 62% in the EU28 (Figure 9). The pattern is broadly the same between both manual and clerical occupations in the sector, as both manual and clerical workers are considerably less likely to work in a team than their EU28 counterparts, and all forms of teamwork are virtually absent in the sector.

Figure 9: Teamwork and team autonomy, by occupational category



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 the households as employers sector working in a task rotation system (9%) is considerably lower than in the EU28 as a whole (47%; Figure 10). The difference is particularly striking in micro-workplaces in the sector, where the

proportion of workers who report not working in any task rotation system (95%) is one third higher than in micro-workplaces in the EU28 as a whole (61%); the difference is less pronounced for SMEs in the sector (56% report 'no task rotation' compared to 50% in the EU28).

Management-controlled multiskilling is the most common form of task rotation in SMEs in the households as employers sector. SME workplaces with task rotation are, however, characterised by an above average incidence of both management-controlled and autonomous fixed-task rotation in comparison to similar workplaces in the EU28, while autonomous multi-skilling is less common.

Female bosses

As the households as employers sector is female-dominated, it is not surprising that the proportion of workers who report having a female boss (72%) is considerably higher than the EU28 average (28%). It is interesting to note, however, that while a higher proportion of women working in the sector report having a female boss (79%) than the corresponding EU28 average (47%), the proportion of men with a female boss in the sector (7%) is below the EU28 average (12%).

Skills and training

Overall, the majority of workers in the households as employers sector 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 much higher than that of workers who report being 'under-skilled'. Workers across all age groups are correspondingly more likely than their EU28 counterparts to consider

Figure 10: Prevalence of task rotation, by workplace size

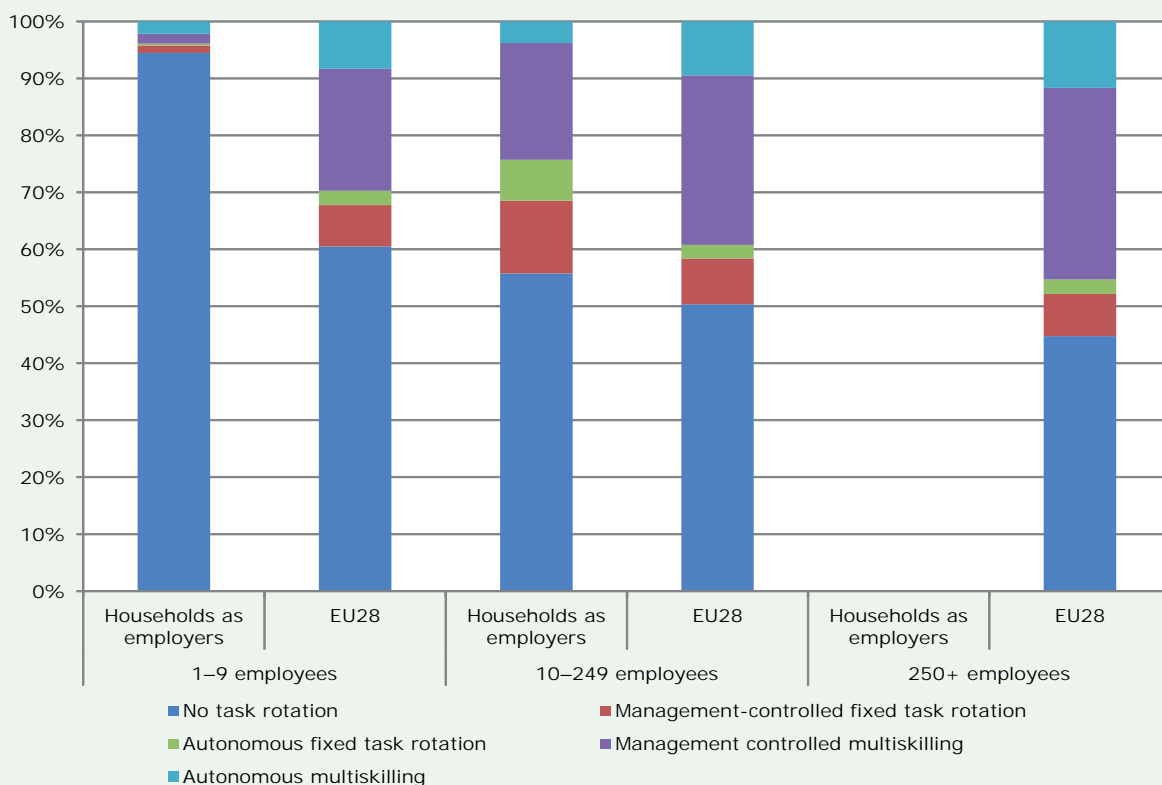
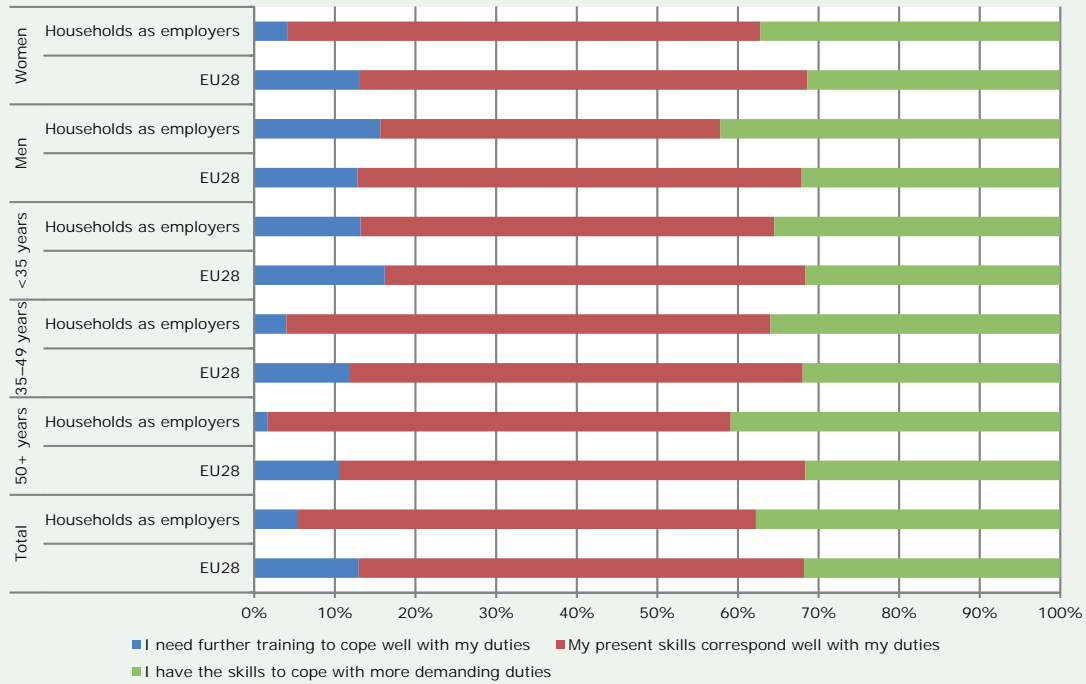


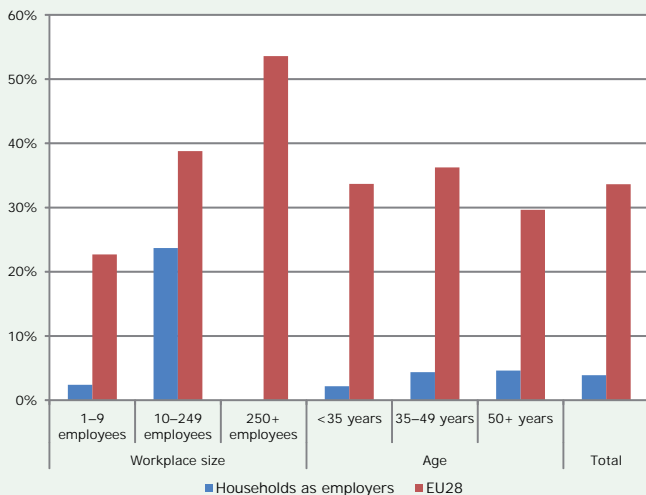
Figure 11: Match between skills and tasks, by age and gender



themselves 'over-skilled', and less likely to consider themselves 'under-skilled'. Workers under 35 are most likely to report being 'under-skilled', while workers aged 50 and older are most likely to describe themselves as 'over-skilled'. The average for men in the sector is an exception to this trend: they are more likely to declare themselves 'under-skilled' for their current duties than the EU28 average.

The percentage of workers in the households as employers sector who say they have received training from their employer is markedly lower than the EU28 average for all groups of workers (Figure 12). The share of workers who report having received training is considerably higher in SMEs in the sector than in micro-workplaces, despite remaining below the EU28 average.

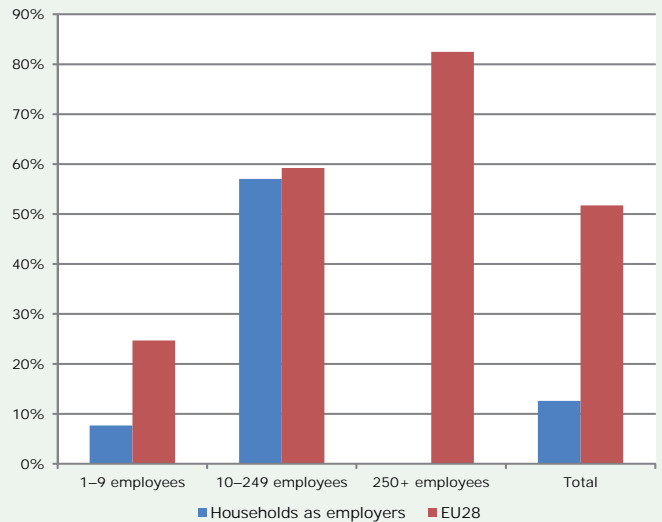
Figure 12: Employer-paid training, by workplace size and age



Employee representation

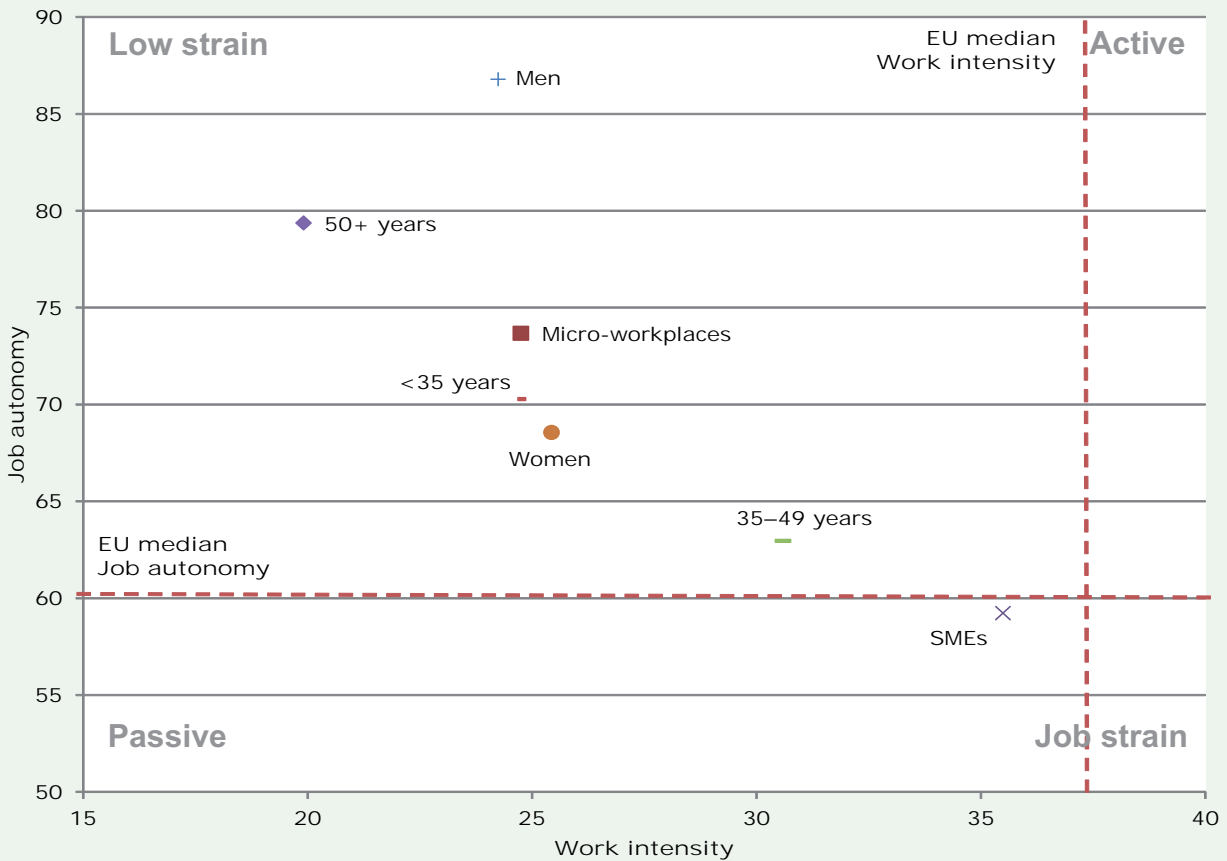
The EWCS contains fairly limited information on formal employee representation. It asks whether an employee representative is present at the workplace and whether workers have raised an issue with an employee representative in the past year. Figure 13 shows the combined results of these questions (an employee representative has been considered to be 'available' if they were 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 13% of employees in the households as employers sector reported that an employee representative was available, compared to 52% of workers in the EU28. As is the case in the EU28, the more workers employed in the workplace, the higher the probability of an employee representative being available – although for both micro-workplaces and

Figure 14: Distribution of groups of workers by average levels of job autonomy and work intensity



SMEs in the sector, the level of availability is lower than for the corresponding workplaces in the EU28.

Psycho-social 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 shows the likelihood of workers in the sector suffering from work-related stress. Groups of workers are plotted along two axes: job autonomy and work intensity.

Overall, the households as employers sector is characterised by below average levels of work intensity, as the vast majority of workers tend to fall in the quadrants below the EU28 median for work intensity. The bottom-left quadrant in Figure 14 contains the average for workers in SMEs in the sector. 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 and how they do it.

All other averages for groups of workers in the sector (men, women, workers in all three age groups and workers in micro-workplaces) are found in the 'low strain' jobs category, 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 over how they carry out their tasks. They may, 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. 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.

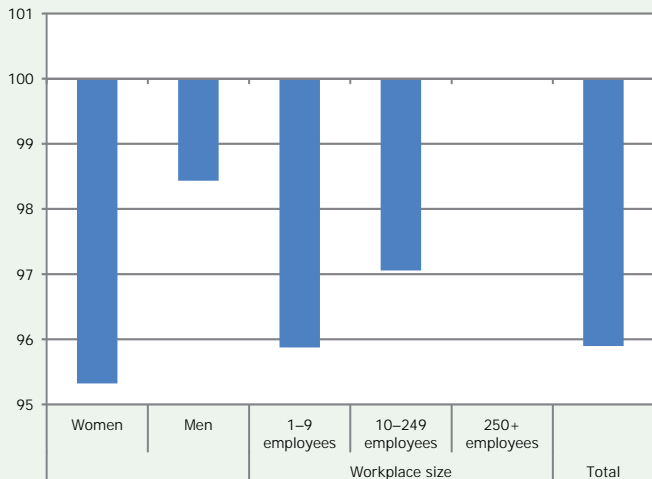
Finally, the most problematic category is 'job strain' in the bottom-right quadrant, which is again empty in the sector. The jobs of workers falling in this category are characterised by high levels of intensity and low levels of autonomy, posing the risk of unhealthy stress levels and unresolved strain, and consequently a range of stress-related illnesses such as cardiovascular disease and mental health problems.

Social environment

A good social environment is characterised by the existence of social support and the absence of abuse at work. Social support can help workers deal with

high levels of work intensity. Scores regarding social environment in the sector are slightly below the EU28 average for women and for both workplace sizes. Men do not differ much from the EU28 on the social environment index.

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



Physical risks

Exposure to posture and movement-related risk is the most prevalent physical risk in the sector as a whole, followed by biological and chemical risks (Figure 16). While levels of exposure to these two types of physical risks are above or in line with the EU28 average, exposure to ambient risk is considerably below average.

Differences between genders and occupations within the sector, however, emerge. While both women and men in manual occupations report above average levels of exposure to posture and movement-related and biological and chemical risks, the risk of exposure

is much higher for men than for women, and men's risk of exposure to ambient risk is also considerably above the EU28 average. Women in clerical occupations, on the other hand, had below-average levels of exposure to all three types of risks. (Due to the small number of male respondents in the sample working in clerical occupations in this sector, there are no estimates for this category.)

In the sector as a whole, 30% of workers report they were not very well or not at all well informed about workplace risks, compared to 10% in the EU28 (Figure 17). The percentage of workers who are not sufficiently informed is smaller for SMEs than for micro-workplaces in the sector, but both remain above the corresponding EU28 averages.

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

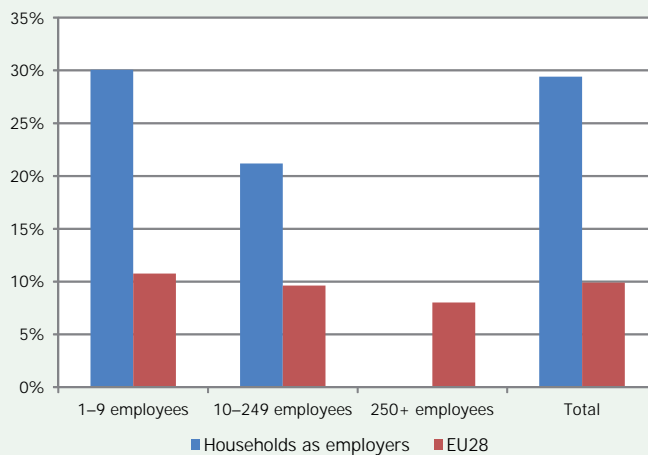


Figure 16: Indices of exposure to physical risks (EU28 = 100), by gender and occupation

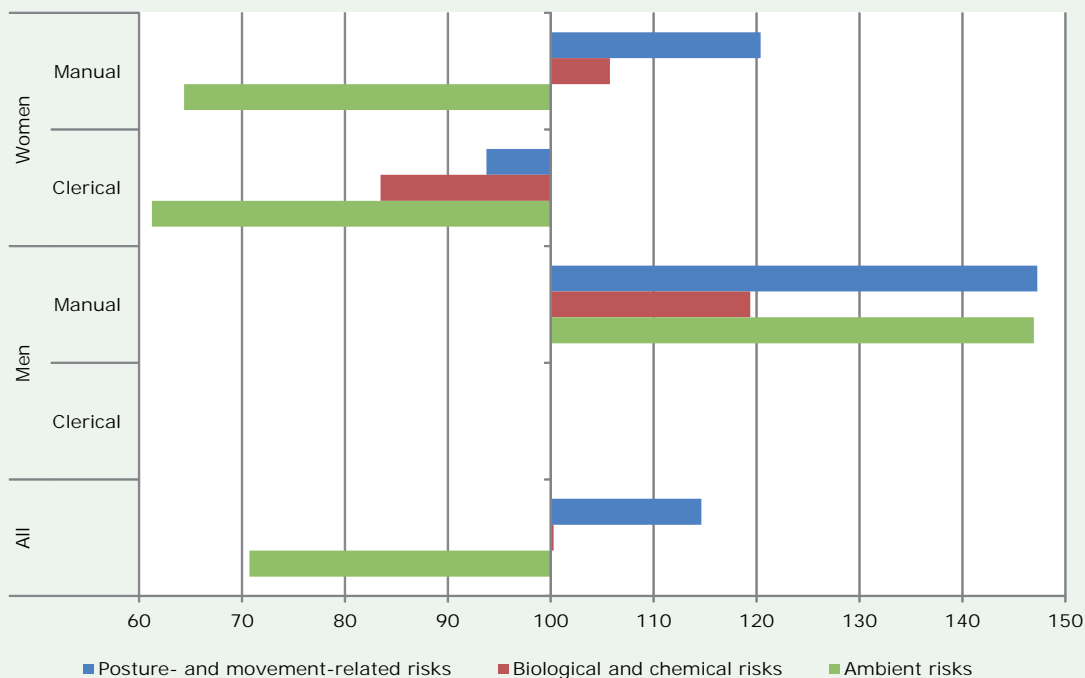
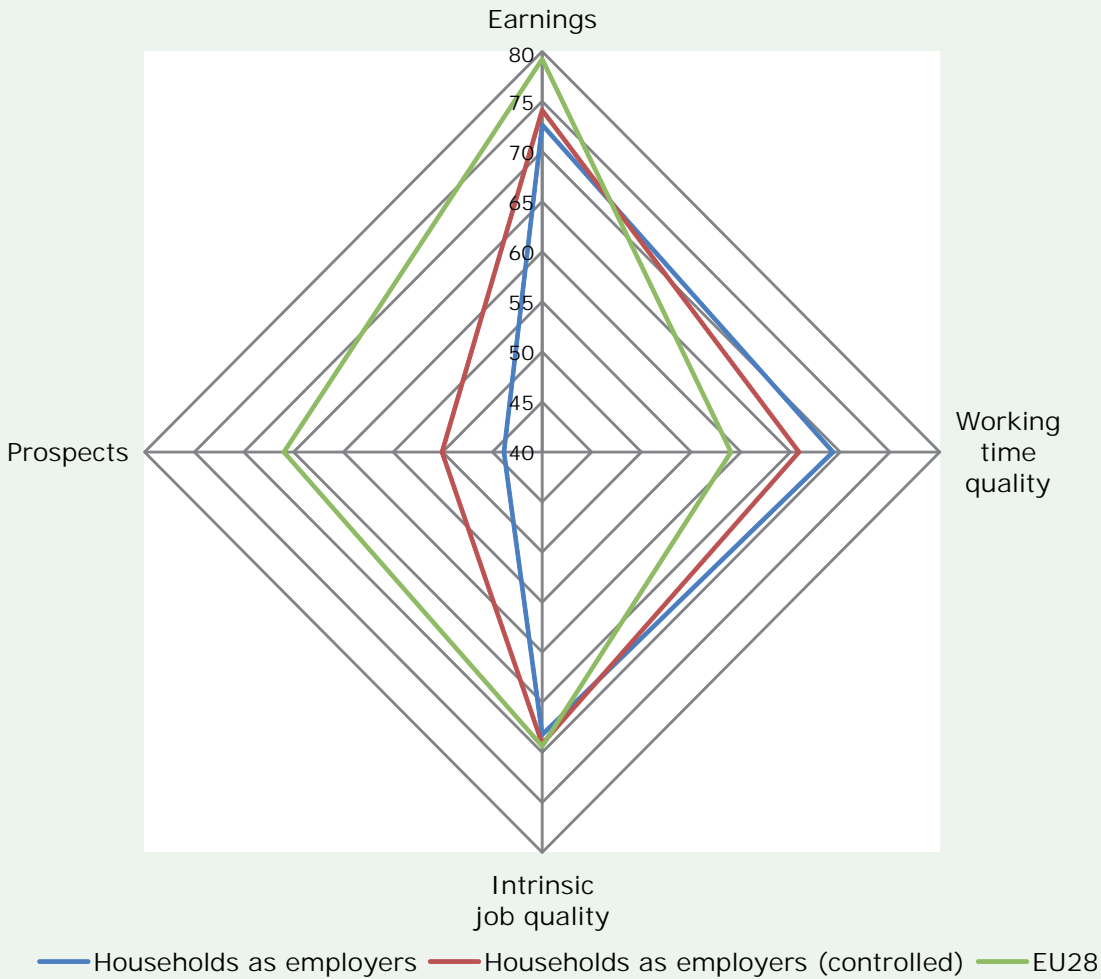


Figure 18: Job quality in the households as employer sector compared with the EU28



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

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 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.

The picture of job quality in the households as employers sector is mixed. Workers in the sector tend to have higher working time quality than the EU28 average. On the other hand, scores for earnings and prospects for workers in the sector are lower than the EU28 average, while no significant difference emerges for intrinsic job quality. When controlling for the structural characteristics of the workforce, the differences for earnings, prospects and working time quality between the sector and the EU28 are reduced but still remain significant. This suggests that workers in the sector have above average scores of working time quality than workers with similar characteristics and backgrounds working in other sectors, but worse earnings and prospects.

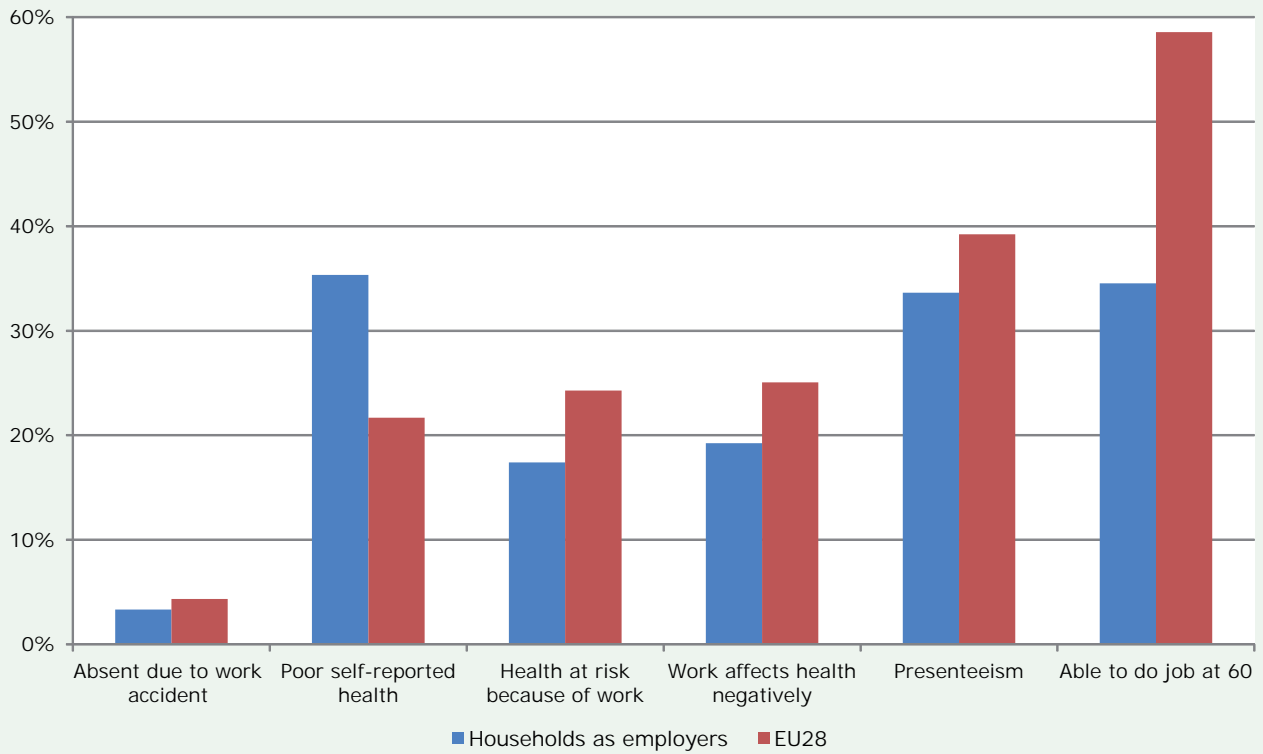
Health and sustainability of work

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

Figure 19 shows that the household as employers sector compares favourably to the EU28 for health and sustainability outcomes. The proportion of workers who report that their health is at risk because of work, that work affects their health negatively, that they have worked when sick (presenteeism) and that they have been absent due to work accident is lower in the households as employers sector than in the EU28. The proportion of workers who think they will be able to do their job at 60 is, however, lower than in the EU28, while the proportion of workers with poor self-reported health is higher than the EU28 average.

When controlling for the structural characteristics of the workforce in the sector (age, gender, establishment size, education and country distribution), the differences between the sector and the EU28 are still statistically significant for poor self-reported health, the low proportion of workers who think they will be able to do their job at 60, low levels of presenteeism and the low proportion of workers who declare that their health is at risk because of work, while the remaining indicators are not. This suggests that the households as employers sector is characterised by a positive performance in relation to

Figure 19: Health and sustainability of work



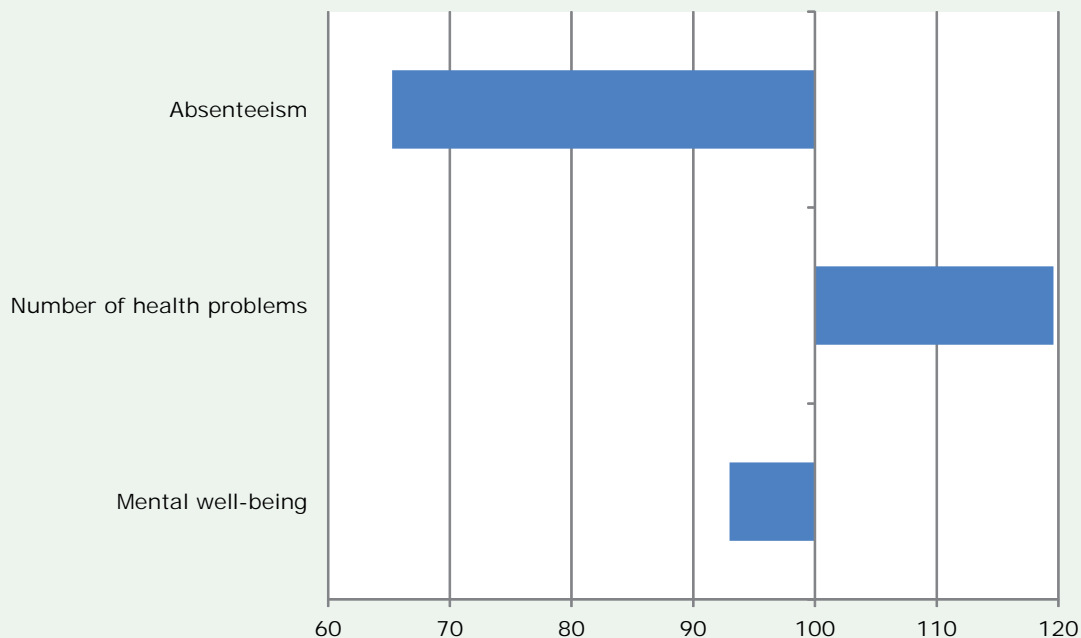
some health outcomes, but that the sustainability of work is potentially problematic, since workers in the sector are considerably less likely than workers in other sectors to say that they think they will be able to do their job at age 60.

Figure 20 again shows a mixed picture of the households as employers sector, with mental well-being scores slightly below the EU28 average, the number of health problems higher than the EU28 but levels of absenteeism significantly lower. The difference in the higher number of reported health symptoms and lower levels of absenteeism do not appear statistically significant after controlling for the structural characteristics of the workforce in the

sector, but workers in the sector appear to be significantly more likely to have lower mental well-being scores than workers in the EU28 as a whole. These results could partly be explained by the age profile of the workforce in the sector, as higher age is associated with a higher number of health problems and lower mental well-being scores.

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://eurofound.europa.eu/european-working-conditions-surveys-ewcs>

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://eurofound.europa.eu/comparing-working-conditions-across-sectors-in-europe>

Further information

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