



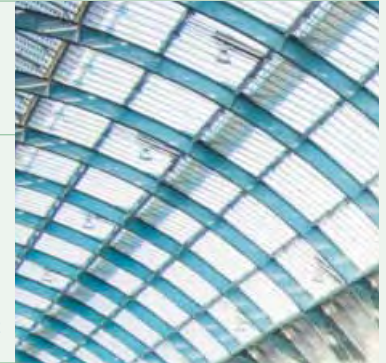
European Foundation for the
Improvement of Living and
Working Conditions



Administrative and support services: 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 administrative and support services activities (NACE 78–82).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 report compares aspects of work in the sector with the EU28 as a whole, and examines differences across the subsectors within the sector:

- employment activities (NACE 78): 143 cases;
- travel agencies (NACE 79): 138 cases;
- security services (NACE 80): 207 cases;
- services to buildings and landscape (NACE 81): 562 cases.
- business support (NACE 82): 212 cases).

Structural characteristics

In 2010, some 8,406,200 European workers worked in administrative and support service activities, 3.9% of the EU28 workforce, covering the following subsectors: employment activities, with 1,061,700 workers; travel agencies, 606,100 workers; security services, 1,289,600 workers; services to buildings and landscape, 3,648,200 workers; business support, 1,364,200 workers (Eurostat, 2013).

The impact of the crisis has differed across the subsectors. Between 2008 and 2010 employment increased in employment activities (3.0%), security

activities (4.8%) and services to buildings and landscape (8.7%), but slightly decreased in travel agencies (-0.7%) and business support (-0.7%).

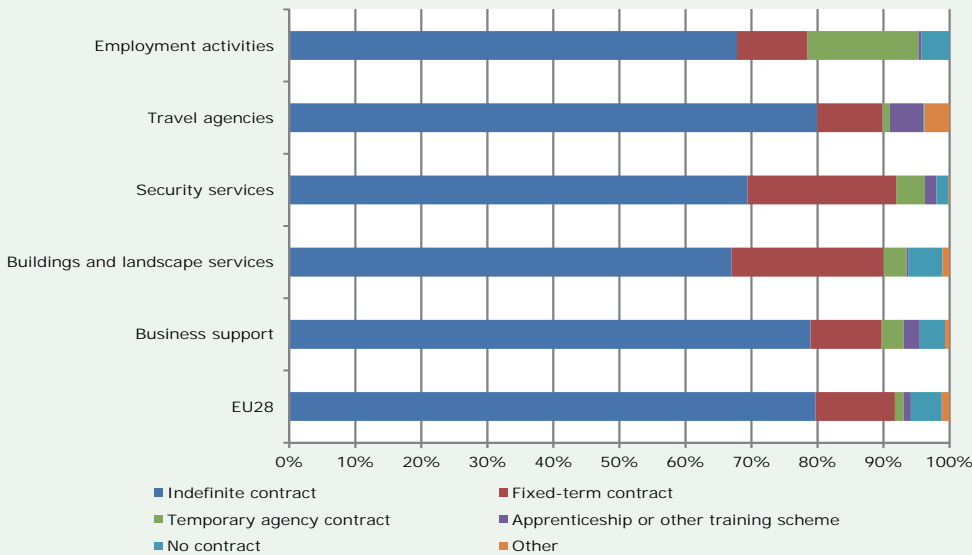
A relatively large proportion of workers in administrative and support service activities (47%) work in micro-workplaces (1–9 employees), compared to 42% of workers in the EU28 as a whole. The difference is most pronounced for workers in travel agencies (where 61% work in micro-workplaces) and business support (53%), while in security services the percentage of workers in micro-workplaces (30%) is below the EU28 average. Security services are male-dominated, men comprising 80% of their respective workforces. In contrast, travel agencies (with women comprising 65% of the workforce), services to buildings and landscape (55%) and business support (66%) are female-dominated.

Administrative and support services in a nutshell

- The sector is dominated by micro-workplaces, with the exception of the security services subsector
- Working hours tend to be typical and regular, except for workers in security services, but there are marked gender differences within subsectors
- Workers in the sector are more likely than the EU28 average to express a preference for working more hours than currently
- Levels of employer-paid training are low, especially for women
- Levels of work intensity are above the EU28 average for all sectors, except for workers in security services
- Health and sustainability outcomes are problematic in the services to buildings and landscape subsector, and presenteeism is an issue in all subsectors

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

Figure 1: Employment status by subsector



Workers in administrative and support service activities tend to follow the EU28 pattern in terms of age composition. Some subsectors have a relatively large proportion of workers under 25 when compared to the EU28 average of 9% – for instance, employment activities (14%) and business support (14%). Other subsectors have a greater proportion of older workers (aged 50+) than the EU28 average of 27%, such as security activities (29%) and services to buildings and landscape (30%) (Eurostat, 2013).

Self-employment is relatively prevalent only in business support where 4% are self-employed with employees and 18% are self-employed without employees, compared to the respective EU28 averages of 4% and 11%. Self-employment is fairly rare in subsectors such as security services (1% with employees and 1% without), employment activities (6% with and 2% without), or services to buildings and landscape (3% with and 9% without). The extent of self-employment is close to the EU28 average in travel agencies (7% with and 8% without employees).

Figure 1 shows that among employees, compared to the EU28 average, indefinite contracts are less prevalent in employment activities, security services, and services to buildings and landscape and as prevalent as in the EU28 in travel agencies and business support.

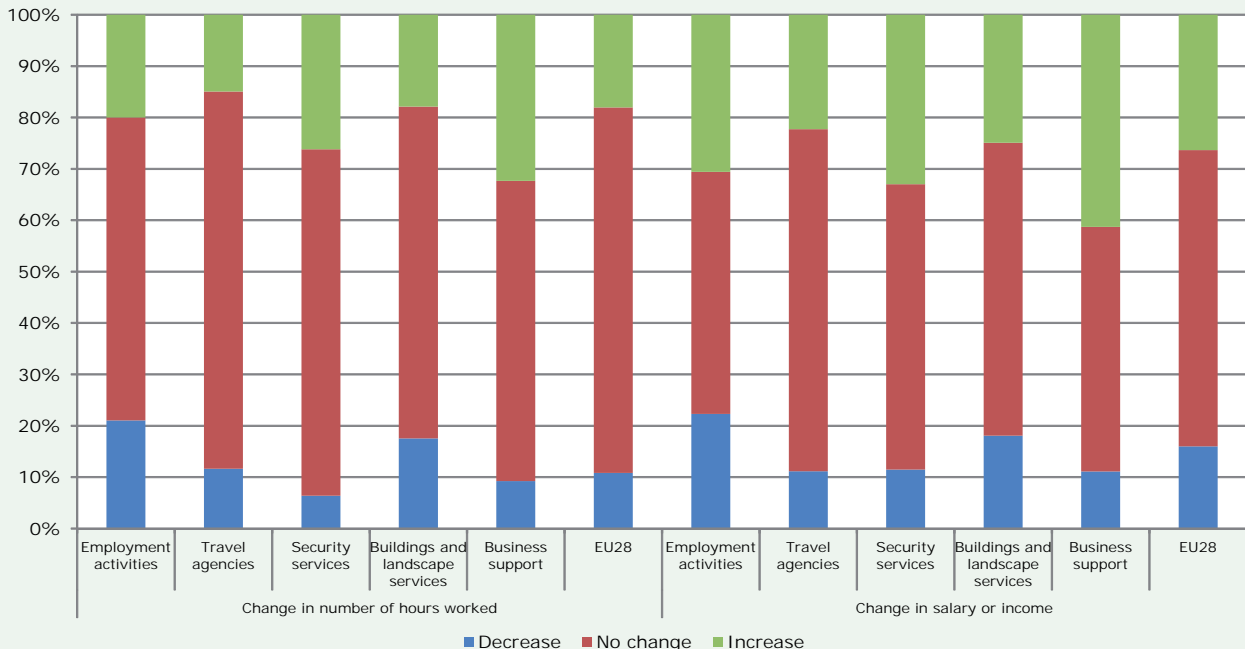
Compared to the EU28 average (24%), part-time work is less prevalent only in security services (where 12% work part time). Part-time work is more prevalent in employment activities (34%), business support (44%), and services to buildings and landscape (47%). For the travel agencies subsector, the proportion of workers working 34 hours or fewer per week is similar to the EU28 average.

Working conditions

Changes since the crisis

Figure 2 shows that workers in employment activities, security services, and business support were more likely to have experienced an increase in working

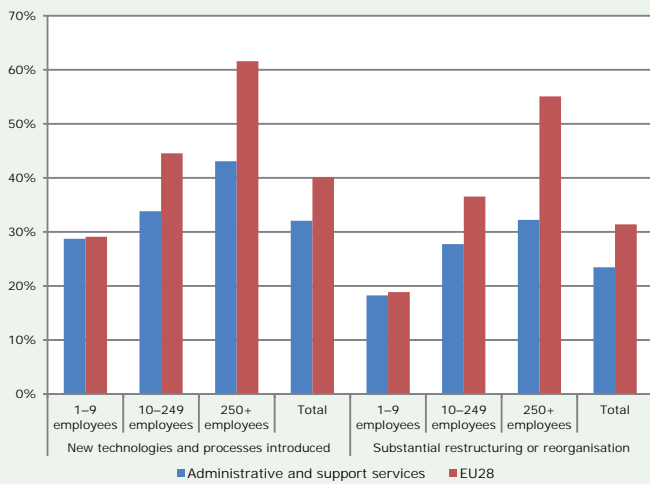
Figure 2: Percentage of employees reporting changes in number of hours worked and salary or income in past year, by subsector



hours than workers in the EU28 as a whole. The hours of workers in travel agencies, on the other hand, were less likely to have increased. At the same time, a decrease in hours was more common than the EU28 average for the subsectors of employment activities and services to buildings and landscape.

Both in administrative and support service activities and in the EU28 in general, workers more frequently reported changes in salary than changes in hours worked in the year prior to the survey. The subsectors in administrative and support service activities did not differ much from each other or from the EU28. The exceptions to this are business support, where a large percentage of workers reported a salary increase, and employment activities, where salary decreases were more common.

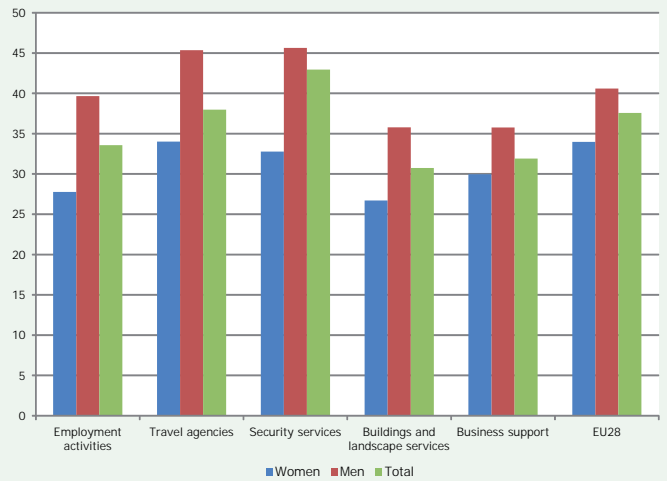
Figure 3: Restructuring and introduction of new technologies in past three years, by workplace size



Workers in administrative and support service activities were somewhat less affected by restructuring

or the introduction of new technologies than the EU28 average. The administrative and support service activities sector follows the same pattern as the EU28 in that the proportion of employees reporting restructuring or reorganisation, or the introduction of new production processes and technologies, increases with workplace size. However, administrative and support service activities show similar or lower levels of reported changes across all workplace sizes, with the gap between the sector and the EU28 being greater in larger workplaces.

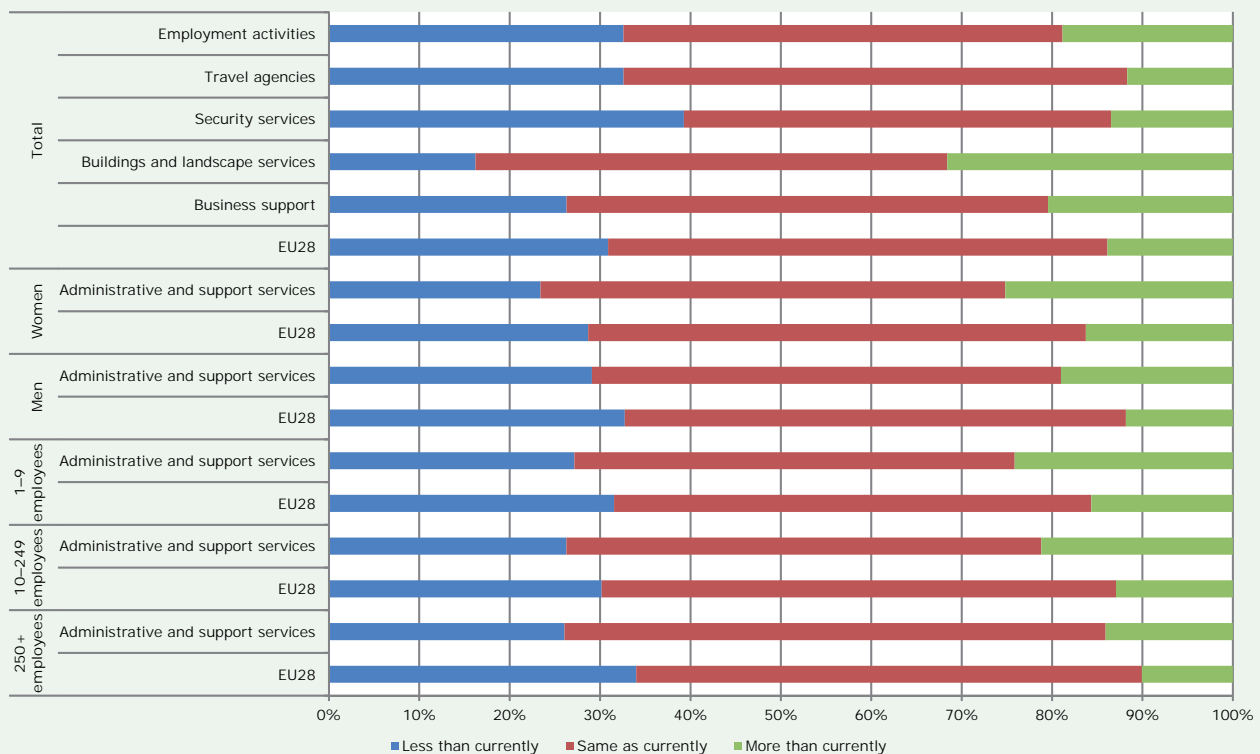
Figure 4: Average working hours, by subsector and gender



Working time and work-life balance

Workers in administrative and support service activities work on average 34 hours per week, less than the EU28 average of 38 hours. Women in all subsectors except travel agency services tend to work fewer hours than the EU28 average for women (Figure 4). Among men, workers in travel agencies

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



and security services tend to work more hours than the EU28 average for men, while those in services to buildings and landscape, and business support, tend to work fewer hours than the average. As in the EU28 as a whole, men in administrative and support service activities tend to work more hours than women, independent of subsector.

Workers in administrative and support service activities more frequently say they would prefer to work more hours than they do currently than workers in the EU28 as a whole (Figure 5). They are less likely to say that they would like to work fewer hours. This trends hold for different workplace sizes and for both men and women. There are differences across subsectors, however: workers in travel agencies less frequently say they would prefer to work more hours than the average EU28 worker, and those in services to buildings, and landscape and business support, less frequently say they would prefer to work fewer hours than the average EU28 worker.

As with the EU28 average, women are more likely than men to want to work more hours and less likely to want to work fewer.

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

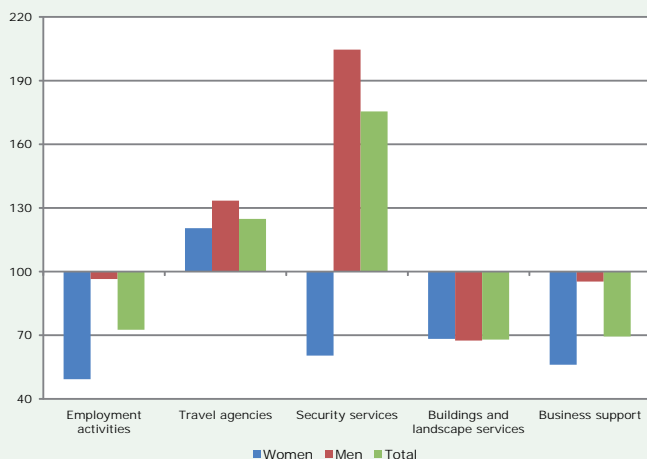
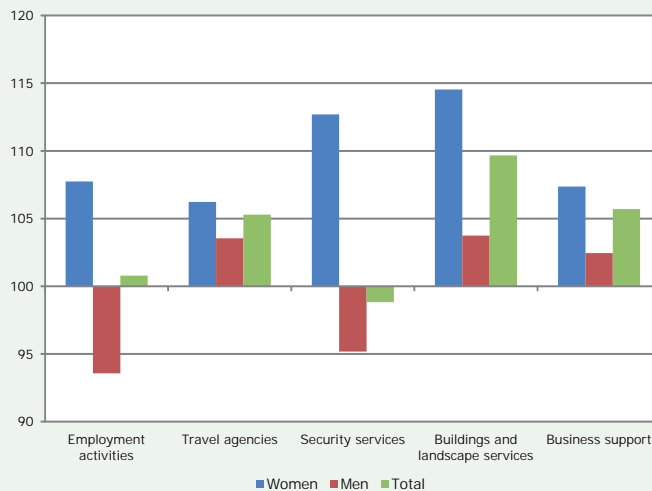


Figure 6 shows that the likelihood of working atypical hours (weekends, evenings and/or nights) in administrative and support service activities depends very much on gender and the subsector. In employment activities and in business support, working atypical hours is not very common for women, but for men it is almost as common as in the EU28 as a whole. In travel agencies, both men and women report higher-than-average levels of atypical working hours. In the services to buildings and landscape subsector the reverse is true: both men and women say they work fewer atypical hours than the average EU28 worker. Finally, security services workers report very high levels of atypical working hours for men and very low levels for women. Generally, across all sectors (with the exception of services to buildings and landscape) women are less likely to report atypical hours than men.

Women in all subsectors tend to report more regular working times (working the same hours every day, the same days every week) than their male counterparts and also more regular working times than the average EU28 worker (Figure 7). Men in employment activities

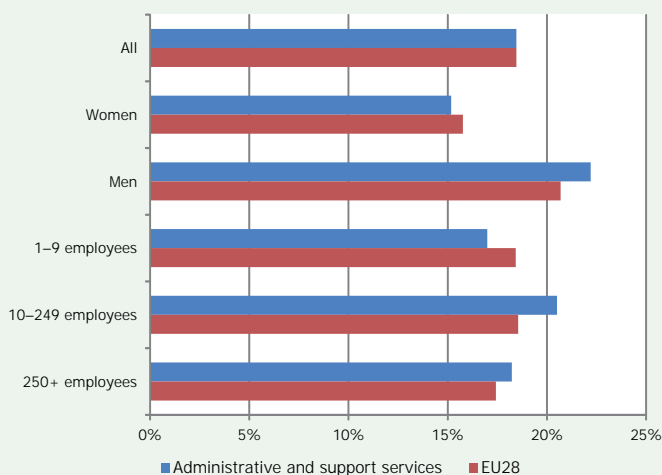
and security activities tend to report less regular working times than the average EU28 worker, while men in travel agencies, services to buildings and landscape, and business support tend to report more regular working times.

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



Reported levels of work–life balance (the fit between working hours and family or social commitments) are very similar to the EU28 average for administrative and support service activities, and the differences for men and women in the sector compared to their EU28 peers is small (Figure 8). Workers in micro-workplaces in administrative and support service activities report poor work–life balance less frequently than similar workers in the EU28 as a whole, while workers in SMEs and large workplaces tend to report poor work–life balance more frequently than their EU28 counterparts. However, these differences are very small.

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



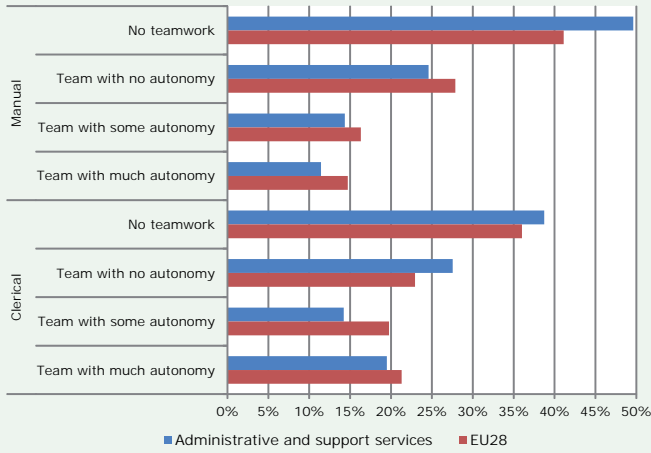
Work organisation

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. Teamwork is slightly less prevalent in administrative and support service activities (56%) than in the EU28 (62% – Figure 9), especially for manual workers.

Figure 9: Teamwork and team autonomy, by occupation category



As a consequence of teamwork being less prevalent for manual workers in administrative and support service activities, all forms of teamwork are less frequent for them than for manual workers in the EU28 as a whole. Clerical workers in the sector, on the other hand, report ‘team with no autonomy’ more frequently than clerical workers in the EU28, while ‘team with some autonomy’ and ‘team with much autonomy’ are less common for clerical workers in the sector than for those in the EU28 as a whole.

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 administrative and support service activities working in a task rotation system (45%) is slightly lower than in the EU28 (47%, Figure 10). ‘Management-controlled fixed task rotation’ is more common than in the EU28, but ‘autonomous multiskilling’ is less frequent in the sector than in the EU28. These trends seem to apply to all workplace sizes.

Female bosses

Gender roles represent another dimension of task division. The percentage of workers reporting that they have a female boss is 50% in employment activities, 44% in travel agencies, 33% in services to buildings and landscape, 29% in business support and only 6% in security services. It should be noted that the security services subsector is strongly male-dominated (84% of the workforce being men). However, the proportion of women in the subsector (16%) is still higher than the percentage of workers reporting having a female boss.

Skills and training

Skills mismatch is as prevalent in administrative and support service activities as in the EU28 workforce as a whole (Figure 11).

In administrative and support service activities, workers are as likely to be ‘over-skilled’ and ‘under-skilled’ as in the EU28 as a whole. When observing skills mismatch by age groups, there are no large

Figure 10: Prevalence of task rotation, by workplace size

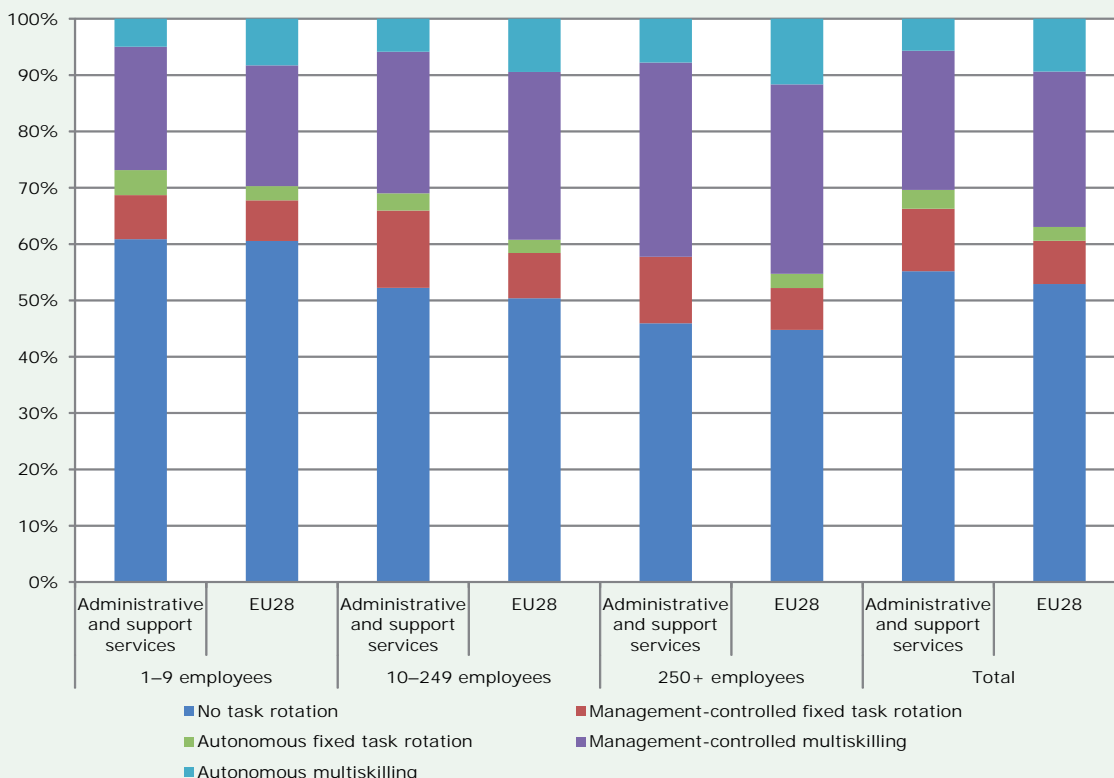
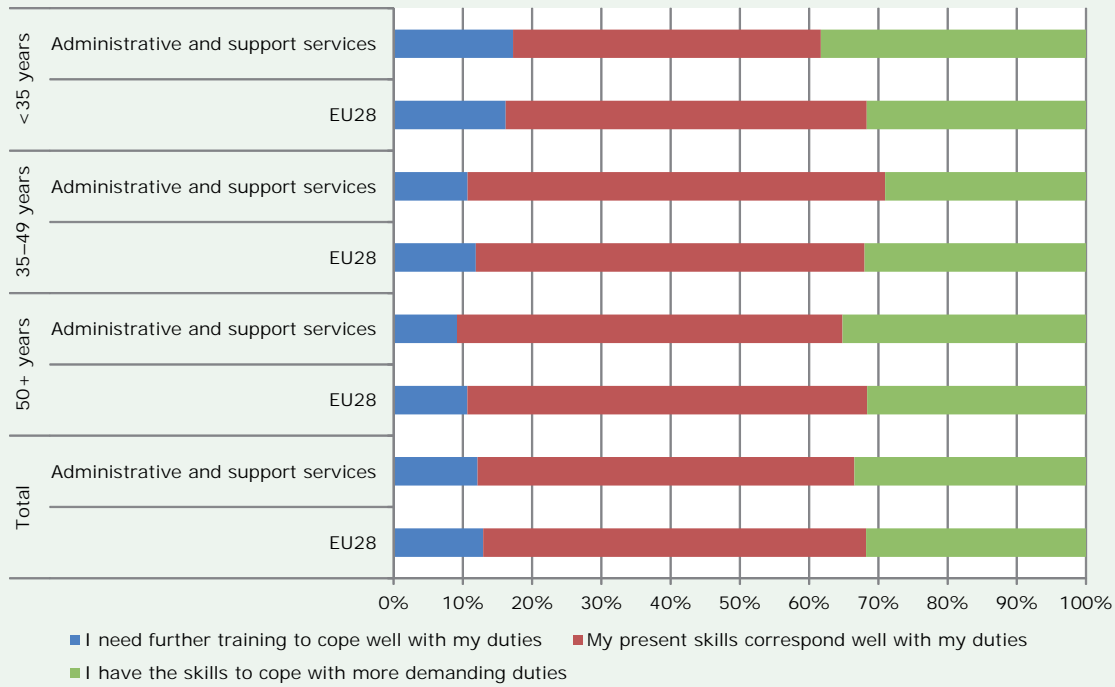


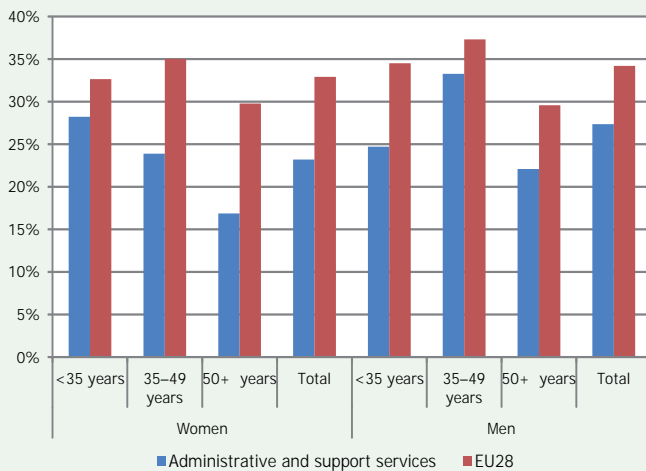
Figure 11: Match between skills and tasks, by age



differences between the sector and the EU28, with the exception of workers in the sector under 35 and aged 50 or older describing themselves as 'over-skilled' more frequently than similar workers in the EU28.

Overall, the percentage of workers in administrative and support service activities who say they have received training paid for by their employer (25%) is markedly lower than the EU28 average (34%). This is true for both genders and all age categories. The difference is even more pronounced for women (Figure 12): a much lower proportion of women in the sector (23%) reported having received training than women in the EU28 as a whole (33%). It is also interesting to note that this difference is smaller when looking at female workers under 35, but very large when analysing older female workers.

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

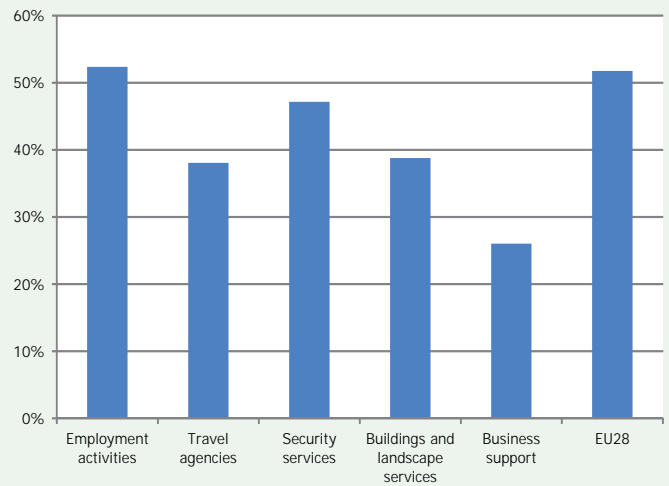


Employee representation

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 were present at the workplace or when an issue was raised).

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



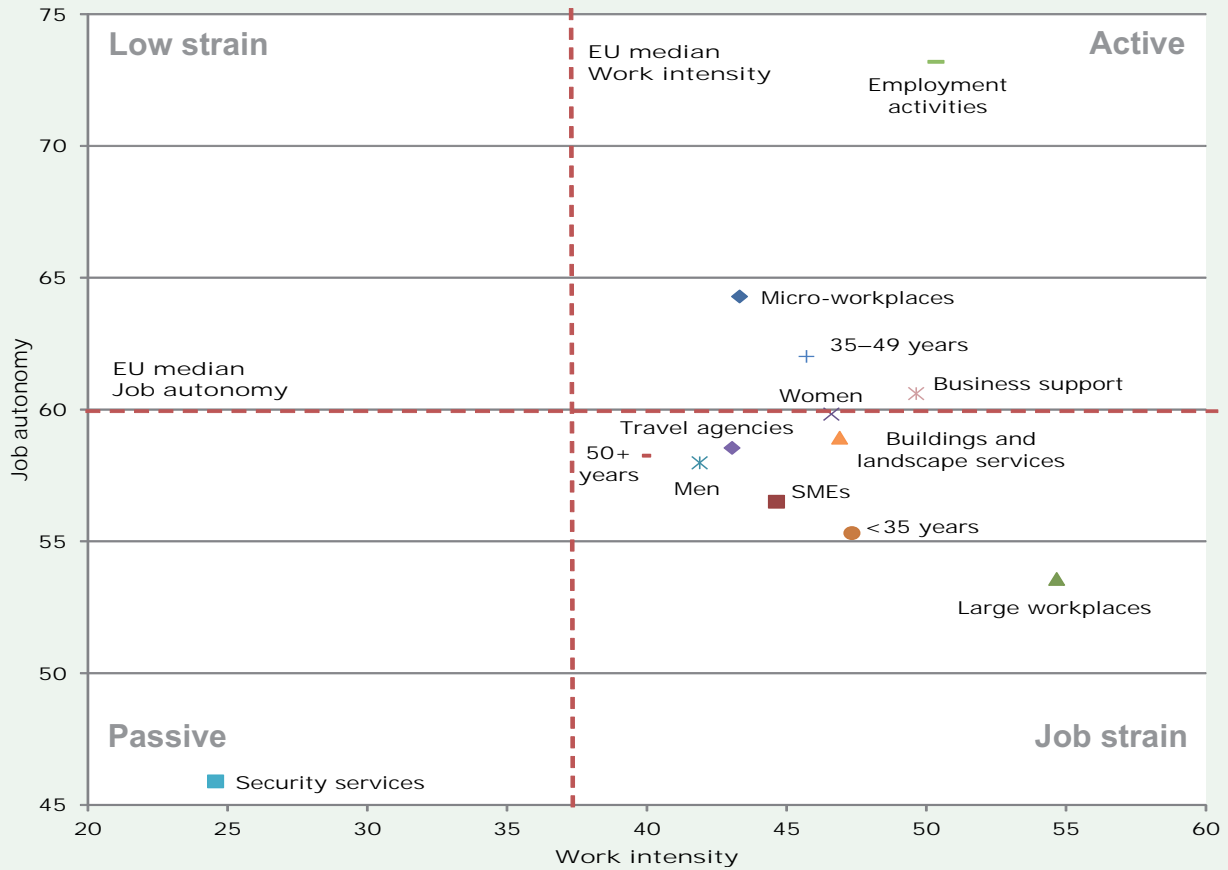
The prevalence of employee representation is just under the EU28 average of 52% in the administrative and support service activities sector as a whole (39%). Looking at differences between subsectors, only employment activities (52%) has a similar level of employee representative availability as the EU28 average. The other subsectors all fall below this average: travel agencies (38%), security services (47%), services to buildings and landscape (39%), and business support (26%).

Psychosocial and physical environment

Job autonomy and work intensity

The psychosocial and physical environment impacts heavily on workers' well-being. According to the job

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



demand and control model of the American sociologist Karate (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.

In administrative and support service activities most of the subsectors averages fall either in the ‘active’ or ‘job strain’ categories. Workers in ‘active’ jobs, such as the average worker in employment activities or business support, tend to have high levels of work intensity and high levels of job autonomy. Although their jobs can be very demanding, they have enough control over the way they do their job and can develop coping strategies through active learning.

On the other hand, workers in the ‘job strain’ category, such as the average worker in services to buildings and landscape or travel agencies, have jobs that are characterised by high levels of intensity and low levels of autonomy, posing the risk of unhealthy levels of stress and consequently a range of stress-related illnesses such as cardiovascular disease and mental health problems.

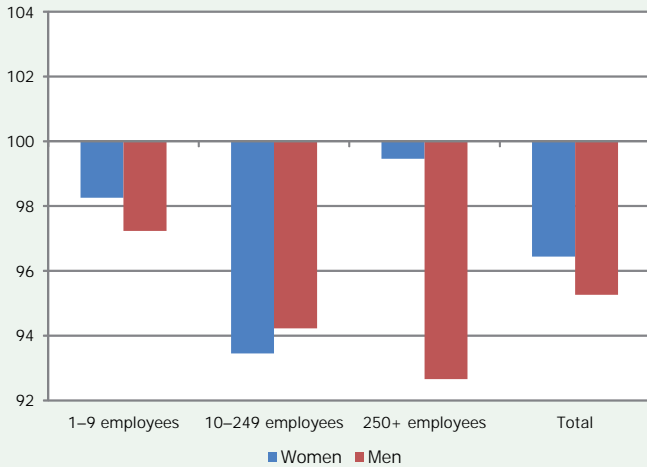
As levels of work intensity are very high in administrative and support service activities, not many workers are likely to be in the bottom-left quadrant, which indicates ‘passive’ jobs. The exception to this is the average worker in the security services subsector. ‘Passive’ jobs are characterised by low levels of intensity and low levels of autonomy, with a low risk of stress, but a high risk of frustration and of low motivation.

Lastly, workers in administrative and support service activities are not likely to be in the top-left quadrant where ‘low strain’ jobs are characterised by low levels of work intensity and high levels of job autonomy. These 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.

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. Workers in administrative and support service activities are slightly below the EU28 average on this indicator (Figure 15). Differences between men and women are small, with the exception of large workplaces, where men report a worse social environment than women.

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

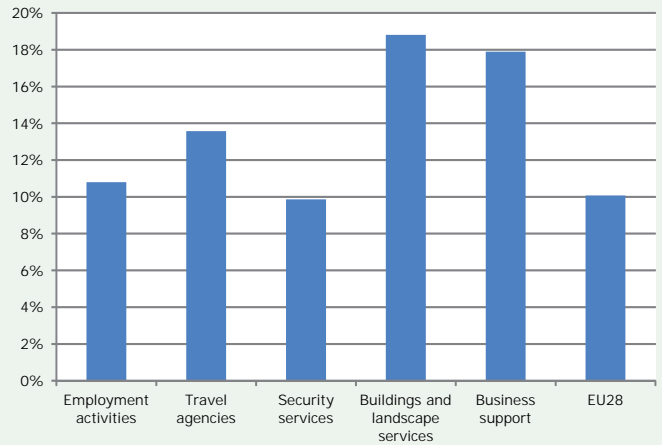


Risk

Exposure to physical risks in administrative and support service activities very much depends on the subsector (Figure 16). In subsectors such as travel agencies, security services, and employment activities, all forms of risk are lower than the EU28 average, for both men and women. Risk exposure higher than the EU28 average is reported in services to buildings and landscape. In business services, the indices for posture and movement-related risks and ambient risks are below average, while the index for biological and chemical risks is close to the EU28 average. Men in this subsector, however, report high exposure to ambient risks.

Despite reporting the highest levels of risk exposure, workers in services to buildings and landscape most frequently report not being very well or not at all well informed about workplace risks (19%; Figure 17).

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



The percentage of workers reporting insufficient information in business support (18%) and travel agencies (14%) is also above the EU28 average of 10%. Workers in employment activities (11%) and security services (10%) less often feel they require more information on workplace health and safety risks when compared with the other subsectors.

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

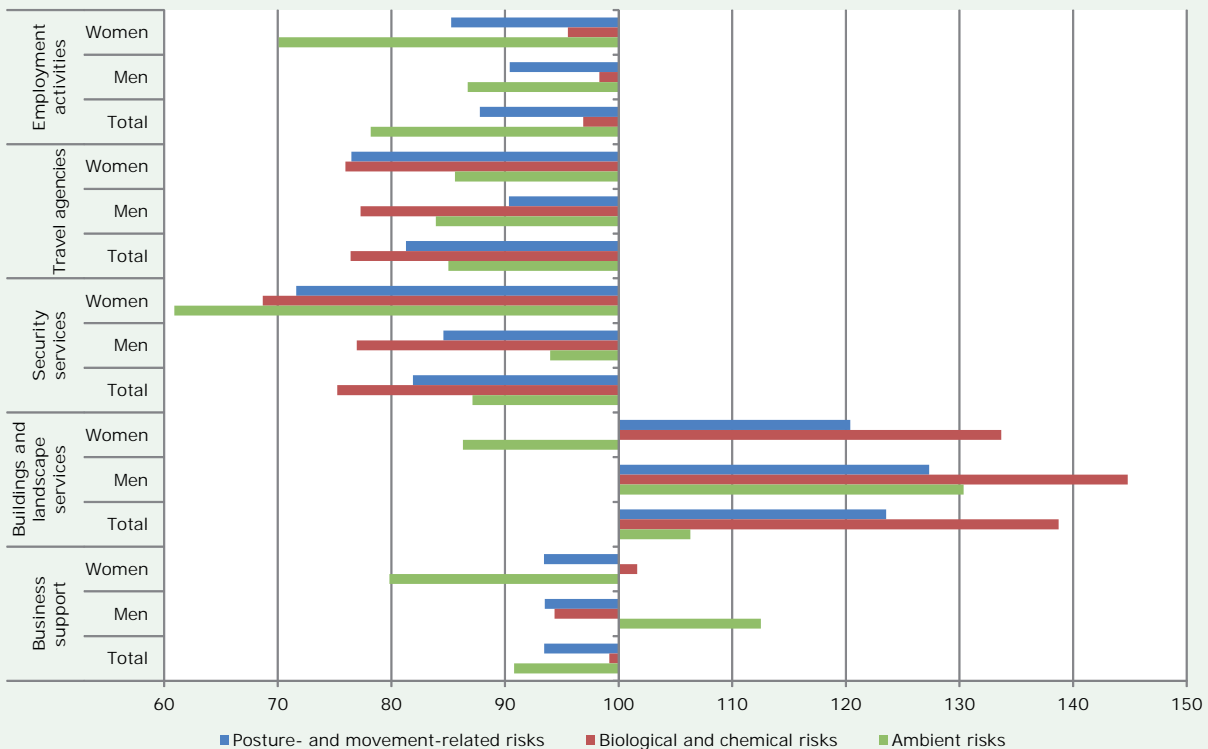
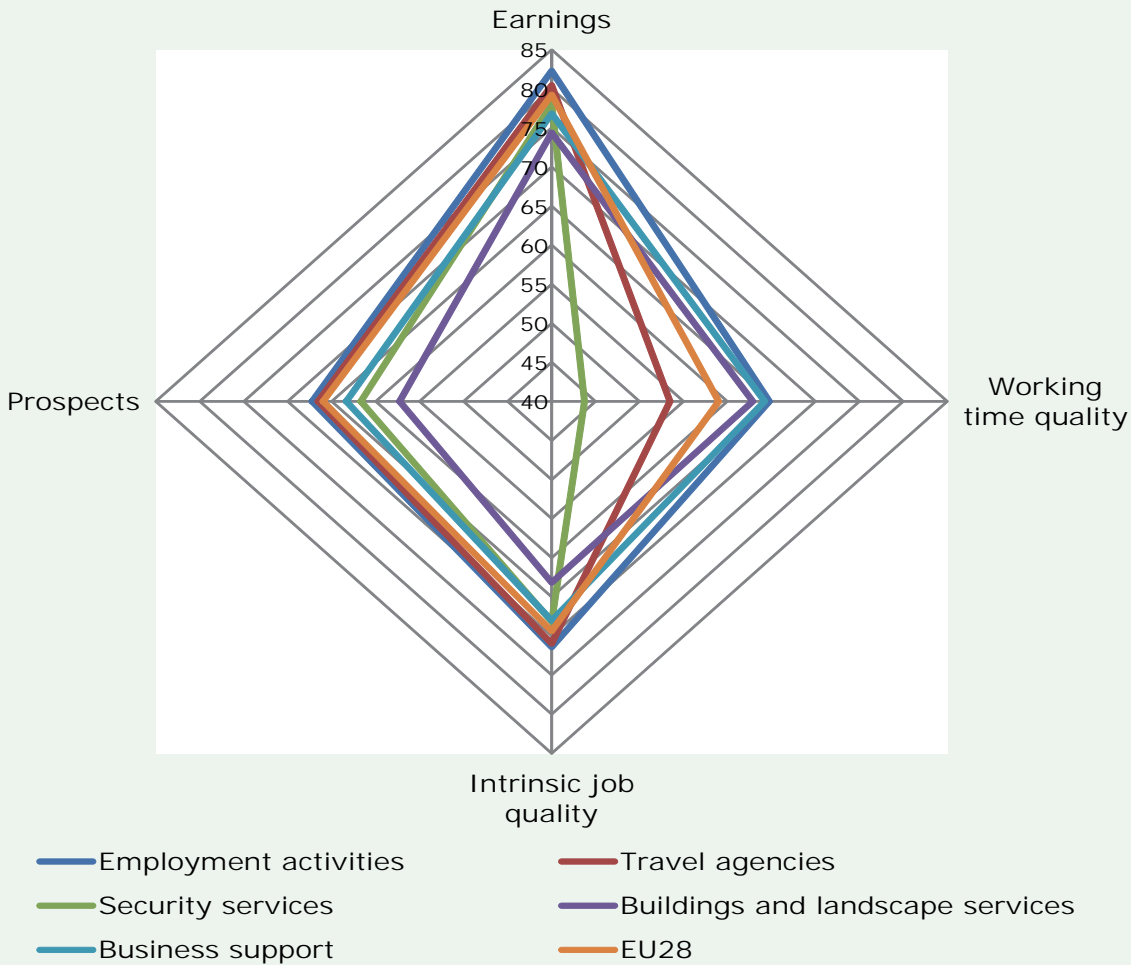


Figure 18: Job quality, by subsector



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

Job quality

In the Eurofound 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 and subsectors on each of the indicators, and for the EU28 on average.

Figure 18 shows that job quality in the administrative and support activities again depends very much on the subsector.

For the earnings indicator, the employment activities and travel agencies subsectors are close to the EU28 average or marginally higher. Security services, services to buildings and landscape, and business support, however, score below the EU28 average, even after taking into account the structural characteristics of the subsectors (age, gender, workplace size, educational level and country).

For working time quality, the employment activities and services to buildings and landscape subsectors score above the EU28 average. Travel agencies and security services, on the other hand, score below the EU28 average, while business support scores around the average only after controlling for age, gender,

workplace size, education level and country distribution.

Intrinsic job quality is worse than in the EU28 as a whole in buildings and landscape services and travel agencies only when the structural factors are taken into account. Security services and employment activities report around the EU28 average, when taking structural characteristics into account. For business support, the score is lower than the EU28 average before controlling for the subsector characteristics, but higher afterwards.

Workers in security services, and buildings and landscape services tend to report a lower score in terms of their prospects than the EU28 average. Employment activities and travel agencies score around the EU28 average for this indicator before the structural characteristics of these subsectors are controlled for; after controlling for structural characteristics, their score falls well below the EU28 average. Business support, on the other hand, scores below the EU28 average and slightly above after controlling for age, gender, workplace size, education level and country distribution.

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: Health and sustainability of work, by subsector

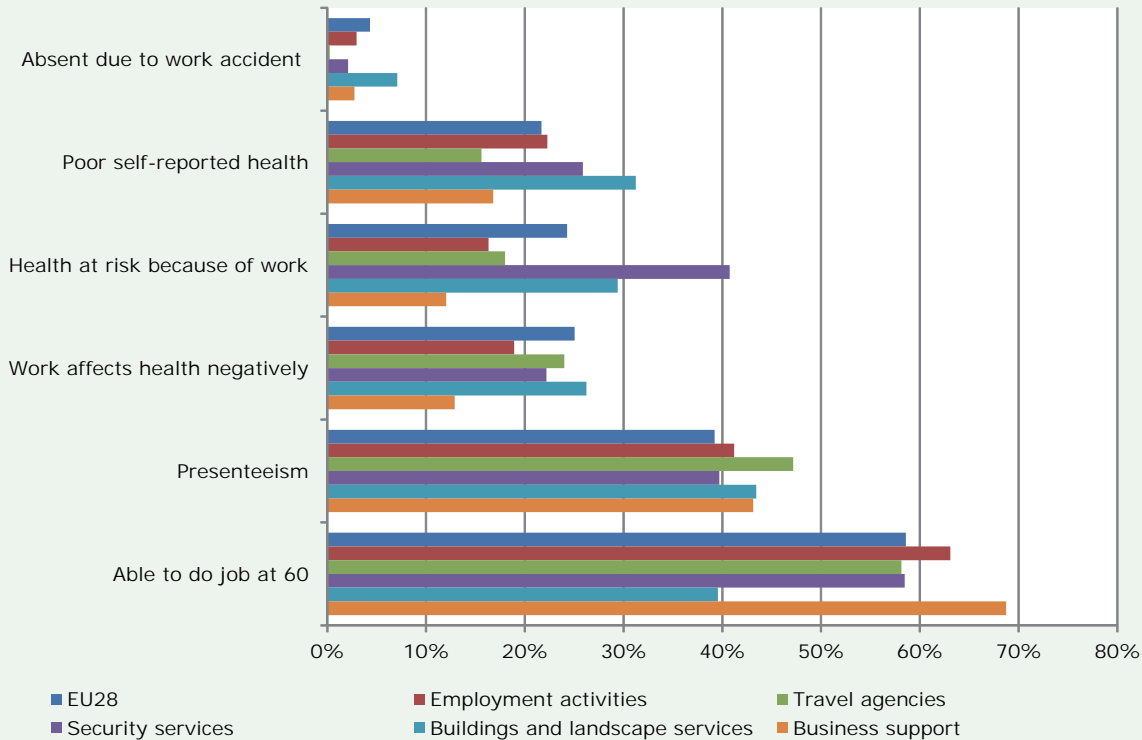


Figure 19 shows slightly different patterns for the subsectors in administrative and support service activities. Just as in the previous section, multivariate analyses have been carried out to check whether differences between the subsectors and the EU28 change after controlling for structural background characteristics (age, gender, workplace size, education level and country).

For absenteeism due to an accident at work, workers in all subsectors tend to score lower than the EU28 average, with the exception of services to buildings and landscape, where the proportion of workers reporting absenteeism due to an accident at work is nearly twice as large as that in the EU28. The difference between the services to buildings and landscape subsector and the EU28 average for the likelihood of reporting absences due to work accidents remains significant even after taking into account the structural particularities of the sector.

For poor self-reported health, workers in some subsectors such as security services, and services to buildings and landscape report this more often than workers in the EU28 as a whole. After controlling for the structural variables, however, only workers in services to buildings and landscape seem to be more likely to report poor health than the EU28 average. Subsectors such as travel agencies and business support fall below the EU28 average for poor self-reported health.

Security services, and services to buildings and landscape, also have a large proportion of workers reporting that their health is at risk because of work. However, the differences between the proportion in

security services and the EU28 average is not statistically significant when controlling for age, gender, workplace size, education level and country distribution. The percentage of workers reporting that their health is at risk because of work falls below the EU28 average in the other three subsectors. Only workers in services to buildings and landscape report that work affects their health negatively in a relatively high proportion. The difference between this subsector and the EU28 average, however, is small and is not statistically significant once the particularities of the sector are taken into account. Lower proportions of workers in travel agencies, security services, employment activities, and business support tend to report that work affects their health negatively than in the EU28 as a whole.

The percentage of workers who report having worked when sick (presenteeism) is larger in all the subsectors than in the EU28 as a whole. It is particularly high in travel agencies, where almost half the workers report having worked when sick, compared to one in four workers in the EU28 as a whole. This difference is still significant even after taking into account the particularities of the subsector.

The proportion of workers who believe they will be able to do their jobs at the age of 60 is well below the EU28 average of 59% in services to buildings and landscape (where it is 40%). This difference is statistically significant even after controlling for the structural variables. Higher proportions of workers in business support (69%) and employment activities (63%) think they will be able to do their job at the age of 60.

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

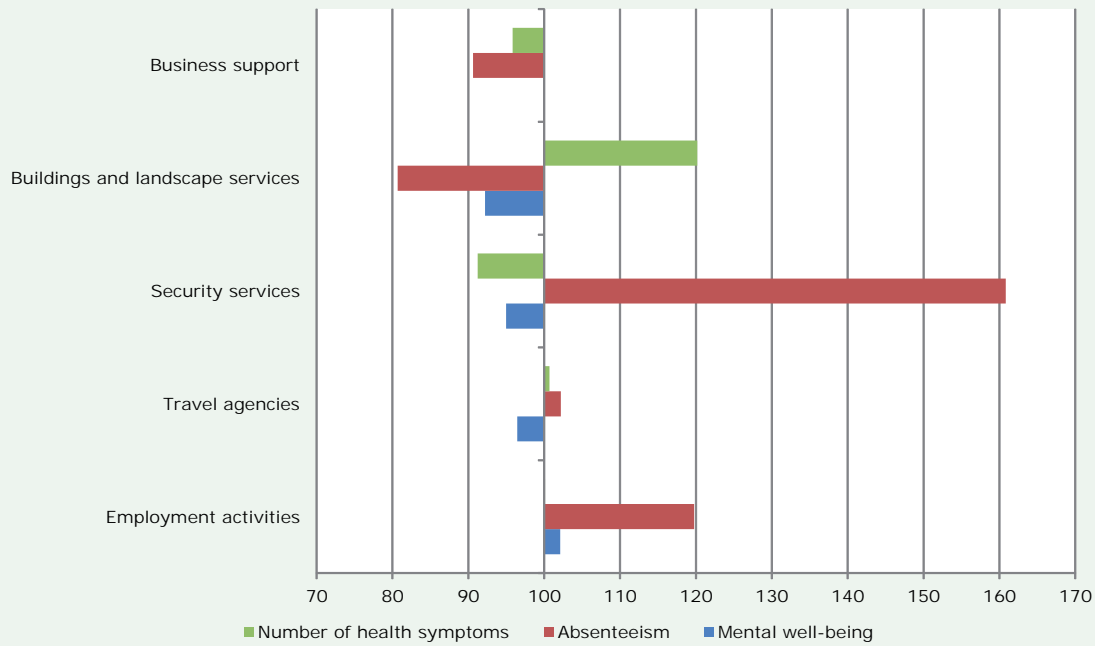


Figure 20 shows another picture of health outcomes in administrative and support service activities, with mental well-being scores close to the EU28 average for all subsectors except services to buildings and landscape, which falls slightly below; this difference remains statistically significant even after controlling for the structural variables of age, gender, workplace size, education level and country distribution.

The subsectors of services to buildings and landscapes, and business support, score below the EU28 for absenteeism, meaning that it is less common than the EU28 average. Employment activities and security services, on the other hand, score above the EU28 average on the absenteeism index although, after controlling for the structural characteristics, the differences do not remain statistically significant.

For the number of health problems, the results vary across subsectors. Employment activities, travel agencies and business support are close to the EU28 average, but security services scores below it and services to buildings and landscape above. When controlling for the structural variables, only the difference between services to buildings and landscape and the EU28 average is statistically significant.

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.

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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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