



# Fifth European Working Conditions Survey

## Executive summary

### Introduction

Work plays a significant role in the lives of people, companies and society at large. Since its inception, the European Union has paid considerable attention to work, and improving working conditions is one of its key policy goals. As stipulated in Article 136 of the EC Treaty, Member States should actively work towards ‘the promotion of employment’ and ‘improved living and working conditions’, so as to ‘make possible their harmonisation while the improvement is being maintained’.

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. This summary presents the main findings of the fifth EWCS, which was conducted in 2010 across 34 European countries, involving a total of 44,000 workers.

### Policy context

The policy thrust of the Europe 2020 strategy towards ‘smart, inclusive and cohesive growth’ requires attention to be given to work and working conditions, especially the impact of growth on the quality of work, the employment of workers and companies’ performance. Findings from the EWCS series feed into various strands of the Europe 2020 strategy, such as the ‘agenda for new skills for new jobs’ and the ‘innovation union’.

Work is an important dimension in many long-standing European policies and norms covering aspects such as equal opportunities for men and women, active ageing, working time, lifelong learning, work organisation, work–life balance, health and safety, labour standards and the prevention of discrimination, work-related stress, and in-work poverty. The EWCS can contribute to discussions

on the importance of work in relation to well-being at individual and societal level.

By providing analysis and comparable information on working conditions in Europe, the EWCS is a useful tool for policy actors including employers, trade unions and governments and can underpin debate on quality of work and employment issues.

### Key findings

- Reported levels of exposure to physical risks in the workplace have not diminished greatly since the first survey in 1991.
- Psychosocial risks that impact negatively on workers’ health and well-being include high demands and work intensity, emotional demands, lack of autonomy, ethical conflicts, and poor social relationships, as well as job and work insecurity.
- Exposure to psychosocial risks tends to go hand in hand with exposure to physical risks.
- The majority of workers live in a household where both partners work, either both working full time (40%) or with one of the partners working part time (29%).
- Only a small proportion of workers (22% of women and 17% of men) work in gender-mixed occupations.
- Plant and machine operators, craft and trades workers, workers in elementary occupations and clerical support workers report higher than average levels of work intensity as well as lower than average levels of autonomy.

- Education, health and financial services report above-average levels of workplace innovation practices.
- Most workers in the EU27 have a job which involves a degree of creativity: 82% report the ability to solve unforeseen problems and 75% can apply their own ideas at work.
- 55% of workers say that their present skills correspond well with their duties, 13% of workers report needing more training, and 32% say they have the skills to cope with more demanding duties.
- 43% of the self-employed and 29% of employees say they would like to reduce their working hours; conversely, 11% of the self-employed and 14% of employees would like to increase them.
- Long working hours are associated with high levels of work intensity.
- 52% of workers report having an employee representative at the workplace.
- 18% of workers report having a poor work–life balance. Factors associated with a good work–life balance include part-time working, no long working hours, flexitime and having access to emergency leave at short notice, as well as having regular working hours.
- 20% of workers report poor mental well-being.
- Unfavourable working conditions tend to cluster disproportionately in some groups. Therefore policy solutions should be multidimensional, incorporating lifelong learning, working time and work–life balance, health and safety, pay and work organisation practices.
- The extent of differences between men and women reinforces the need to develop gendered analyses and policies in relation to working lives.
- Consultation and employee representation are central to the effectiveness of policies to improve working conditions.
- Win–win arrangements should be promoted: working conditions likely to be associated with higher well-being of workers are also associated with high motivation, commitment, and sustainable work.
- Current employment policy priorities to raise employment levels, prolong working life, increase the participation of women, and increase flexibility and productivity depend for their success not just on changes in the external labour market but also on the successful management of life at work and at home, by all parties concerned, as well as on appropriate social support.
- Good quality work may well be one of the keys for smart, inclusive and sustainable growth.

## Policy pointers

- Policy attention to transforming employment status over time as well as the structural changes to jobs in the economy may have eclipsed attention from transforming the nature of work.
- In general, changes in working conditions over the last 20 years have been limited, but this masks changes in several respects for some groups of workers.
- Action to address social inequalities needs to address inequalities at the place of work.

## Methodology

Every five years, Eurofound carries out the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), interviewing both employees and self-employed people on key issues related to their work and employment. Over time, the number of topics surveyed has been extended.

Fieldwork for the fifth EWCS took place from January to June 2010, with almost 44,000 workers interviewed in their homes in the EU27, Norway, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo. Figures from the EWCS are estimates, based on a representative sample of European workers and not on the whole population. Differences over time and between countries need to be interpreted with caution. The report discusses only those differences that are likely to reflect true differences rather than being the result of sampling.

## Further information

More information on the *European Working Conditions Survey* is available at: [www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/ewcs/index.htm](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/ewcs/index.htm)

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