



European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

# Working conditions in Portugal

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This report is available in electronic format only.

*This report reviews the main results from the first Portuguese survey on working conditions. It outlines the overall profile of workers and the workplace in Portugal, and covers topics such as working time, job mobility, occupational risk factors, and health and safety in the workplace. Among other perspectives, the report highlights gender differences revealed in the results.*

## **Introduction**

The Portuguese survey on working conditions was conducted for the first time, between 1999 and 2000, by the Statistics Department ([Departamento de Estatística do Trabalho, Emprego e Formação Profissional](#) - DETEFP) of the Ministry for Labour (Ministério do Trabalho e da Solidariedade - MTS). A second survey is currently being prepared, to be launched in 2005.

The main objectives of the first survey were:

- to characterise labour conditions and the factors influencing workers' health and safety;
- to identify the main risk factors that workers are exposed to, as well as the activities, occupations and groups that are vulnerable to risk situations;
- to assess the availability of prevention services and protective equipment against occupational risks in the workplace.

This report presents the main survey results under eight headings:

- worker and workplace profile;
- working time;
- job mobility and job security;
- work autonomy;
- physical effort and risk factors;
- occupational injuries and illnesses;
- safety and hygiene at work;
- social conditions.

## **Worker and workplace profile**

The predominance of the service sector in the Portuguese economy is reflected in the type of work reported by workers. Although there are a significant proportion of workers carrying out skilled manual work (*trabalho manual-artesanal*) (33.2%), or manual work with machines (26.9%), a high proportion of workers carry out tasks generally associated with service sector occupations: for example, work involving contact with the public (43.6%), working with computerised equipment (38.9%), and administrative work (31.6%).

**Table 1 Types of work, by sex (%)\***

	Total	Men	Women
Skilled manual	33.2	37.7	28.1
Unskilled manual	26.9	32.6	20.3
Contact with the public	43.6	40.4	47.3
Computerised equipment	38.9	35.3	43.1
Supervision of machine work	12.0	16.4	7.0
Supervision of manufacturing processes	5.4	7.0	3.6

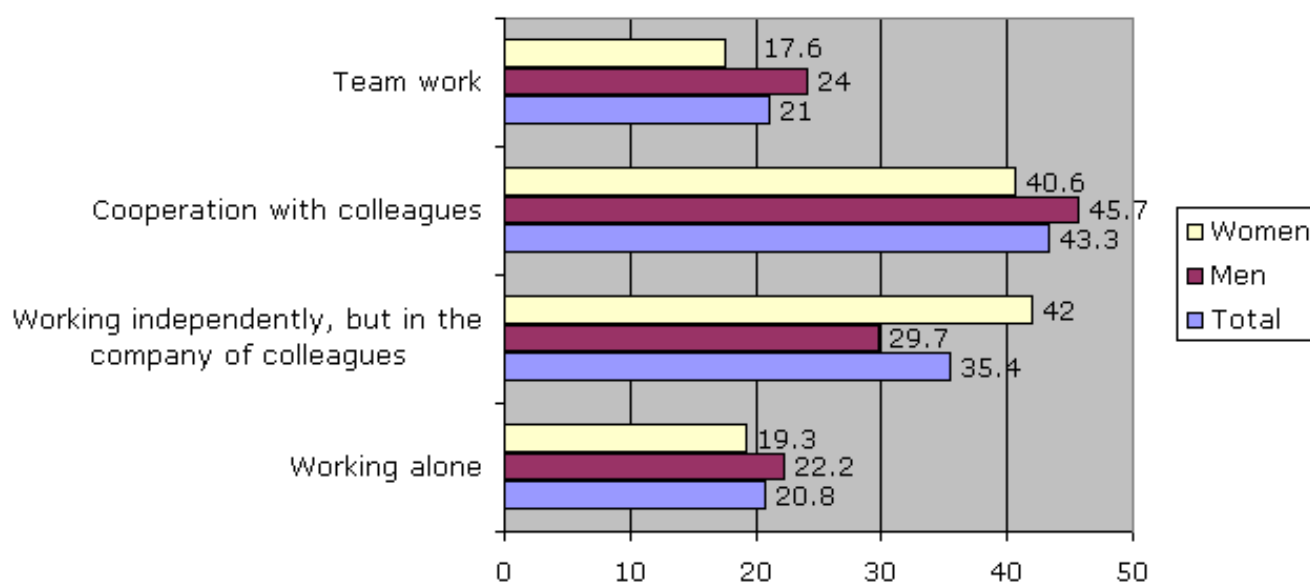
Training of other workers	6.5	8.4	4.2
Administrative work	31.6	27.6	36.3
Supervision of other workers	20.6	28.3	11.7
Driving/manoeuvre of machines/equipment	2.9	5.3	0.1
Driving of vehicles	6.5	11.4	0.8
Work in assembly line production	5.1	4.0	6.3
Other	6.9	5.9	8.1

Source: Working conditions in Portugal, 2000. \* These percentages do not total 100% because the respondents could answer yes to more than one option.

The proportion of manual work is greater among men than among women, while a greater proportion of women than men carry out forms of work associated with the service sector (contact with the public, computerised equipment and administrative work).

Some 43.3% of workers stated that they worked in cooperation with colleagues, while 35.4% reported working independently but in the company of colleagues. One in five (21%) reported involvement in team work, and 20.8% reported working alone. An analysis by sex shows a higher proportion of women (42.0%) than of men (29.7%) working independently but in the company of colleagues.

**Figure 1 Situation in workplace, by sex (%)**



Source: Working conditions in Portugal, 2000

About 44% of workers state that they carry out several different tasks in a normal workday (multi-tasking); the proportion is higher among men (46.5%) than women (40.5%).

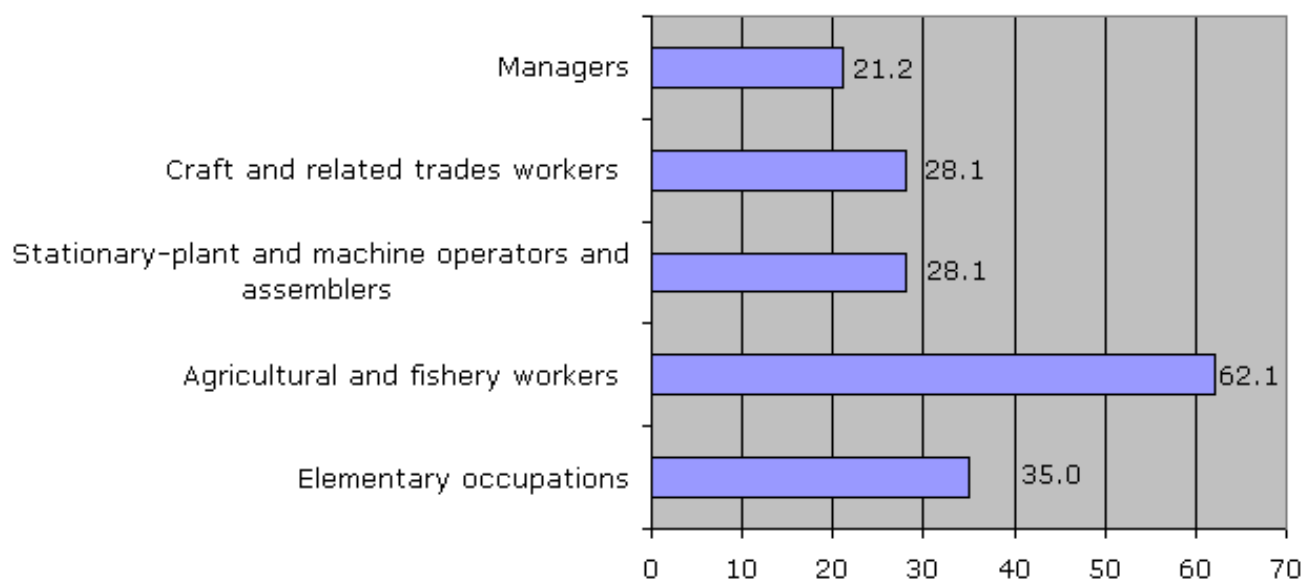
The three main positive aspects of the workplace were job performance (27%), good working environment (12%),

and the quality of personal relationships (7%). Negative aspects referred to most often were fatigue (10%) and a confined working space (8%).

### Job-skills match

More than half of respondents believe that their skills are suitable for their work, in terms of education (52.6%) and qualification (61.4%) levels. However, 19.6% of respondents do not feel that their job matches their education or qualification levels. The job-skills mismatch in both levels was higher in some of the more traditional economic sectors, such as agriculture and fishing (46.1%), textiles, clothing and footwear (33.3%), non-metallic minerals (31.8%), and manufacture of wood and wood products (29.4%). The proportion of workers reporting a job-skills mismatch was higher among non-permanent workers (23.1%), workers in elementary (non-skilled) occupations (35%), workers aged less than 25 years old (29.2%), and those aged over 55 years old (21.2%).

**Figure 2 Job-skills mismatch regarding qualifications (%)**



Source: Working conditions in Portugal, 2000

Figure 2 shows that the highest levels of job-skills mismatch regarding qualifications, as perceived by workers, can be found in the less qualified categories, such as the elementary occupations (35%), and agricultural and fishery workers (62.1%). On the other hand, managers also reported high proportions of job-skills mismatch, at 21.2%.

The results show that 42.5% of the workers participated in training sessions during their professional life. Among those, 67.2% - or 28.7% of the surveyed population - attended training sessions paid for by their employer. The highest levels of participation in this kind of training were found in financial intermediation (89.9%), electricity, gas and water supply (85.0%), post and telecommunications (77.2%), and transportation (49.7%).

### Working time

The weekly working time is 40 hours for the majority of workers (60.2%). However, more than one in five works over 40 hours per week. Long working hours are particularly evident in the hotel and restaurant sector, where 55.5% of workers reported a weekly working time of 41 hours or more, and 33% work 50 hours or more.

One third of the workers stated that they worked overtime, but this proportion reached 52.3% among skilled agricultural and fishery workers, and 44.2% among plant and machine operators and assemblers.

Some 29.1% of workers work weekends. However, this rose to 68.8% among workers in services and in retail and trade, 63.3% among agricultural and fishery workers, 42.3% among managers, and 35.1% among workers in elementary occupations.

The proportion of individuals working part time was 3.5%, of whom 61.5% do so by personal choice. Part-time work is mostly reported by life science and health professionals (66.5%), teachers (38.3%), and teaching associates (24.4%).

Shift work was reported by 7% of the workers, and was mainly connected to occupational groups such as stationary-plant and related operators (61.5%), machine operators and assemblers (22.1%), safety and security staff (16.4%), life science and health professionals (16.2%), and customer service staff (15.2%).

## **Job mobility and job security**

Regarding job mobility, 24% of the workers surveyed had changed job and 7% had tried to change job in the previous five years. Among those, 38.9% were motivated by the possibility of better remuneration, 27.2% by professional fulfilment, 23.8% by job stability, while 15.8% had reached the end of their work contract.

Job mobility was more frequent among younger workers less than 25 years old (41.4%), and among workers with a secondary (30.9%) and third-level (30.3%) education. In terms of occupational category, it was higher among service workers and those in retail and trade (34%), workers in elementary occupations (30.5%), and technicians and associate professionals (26.8%).

Some 3.8% of workers stated that they felt a risk of unemployment. Among these, 79.4% felt that this was due to the precarious situation of their companies or to the ending of their job contracts. Risk of unemployment was predominantly reported by workers aged less than 25 years old (9.7%) and over 55 years old (7.7%). A sectoral analysis reveals that this risk is mostly felt in commerce (16.5%), textiles, clothing and footwear (16.1%), and construction (11.7%).

## **Work autonomy**

Some two thirds of workers (66%) do not have flexible working time; among these workers, significant minorities have further restrictions on their ability to control their working time. Just 19.4% are not able to choose their break periods and 21.9% cannot decide themselves when to take their holidays. This means that autonomy in time management is quite limited for a significant number of workers - more so for women, as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2 Workers without autonomy at work, by sex and occupational group (%)**

	Choice of break time			Choice of holiday period		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Total	19.4	16.0	23.3	21.9	18.6	25.8
Managers	4.9	4.9	5.0	10.6	10.7	10.5
Professionals	7.4	4.2	11.3	10.7	9.9	11.7
Technicians and associate professionals	7.8	6.6	10.1	11.7	8.9	17.2
Administrative staff	8.2	8.2	8.2	11.6	10.2	12.3
Services, and retail and	10.8	8.7	12.0	16.5	10.5	19.9

trade						
Skilled agricultural and fishery	7.2	7.5	6.6	19.6	29.3	-
Craft and related trades	40.0	27.7	66.4	39.1	28.3	62.4
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	35.3	25.6	51.1	43.0	36.7	53.2
Elementary occupations	37.1	36.3	37.7	27.7	21.9	31.7

Source: Working conditions in Portugal, 2000

Table 2 above shows that workers' autonomy concerning their choice of breaks and holiday time is lower when they are female and in less qualified occupations. For example, 66.4% of women in the category of craft and related trades stated that they are unable to choose their break times and 62.4% cannot choose their holiday periods.

The data also reveal that working time flexibility, such as flexible working hours, was more common in the highest qualified occupational groups, such as managers (69.6%), professionals (72.5%), and technicians and associate professionals (46.9%). The only exception was the skilled agricultural and fishery workers group, where more than 55% of workers enjoy flexibility in their working time.

**Table 3 Workers with working time flexibility, by sex and occupational group (%)**

	Total	Men	Women
Total	26.9	33.5	19.4
Managers	69.6	70.3	67.1
Professionals	72.5	77.8	66.2
Technicians and associate professionals	46.9	50.5	40.0
Clerks	20.4	22.7	19.2
Service workers and shop and market sales workers	14.0	23.0	8.9
Skilled agricultural and fishery workers	56.3	58.6	51.6
Craft and related trades workers	15.7	20.7	4.9
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	9.5	12.9	4.0
Elementary occupations	5.9	9.5	3.4

Source: Working conditions in Portugal, 2000

Significant differences emerge between men and women regarding working time flexibility. The proportion of workers with this kind of flexibility is higher for men in every occupational group, and, as Table 3 above shows,

the gender gap is greater in the less qualified occupational groups.

### **Physical effort and risk factors**

The main problems related to physical effort at work are standing for long periods (44.5%), and maintaining an arduous or tiring position for a long time (20.5%). A larger proportion of women cited having to work or stay in a tiring position for a long time, and having to walk for long periods or frequently.

**Table 4 Physical effort, by sex (%)**

	Total	Men	Women
Standing for long periods	44.5	50.0	38.2
Maintaining a tiring position for long periods	20.5	19.7	21.4
Doing repetitive and monotonous tasks	18.9	22.8	14.3
Walking for long periods or frequently	18.9	17.0	21.0
Lifting/Carrying heavy loads	18.4	24.2	11.7
Staying in positions with a risk of falling, drowning or crushing	4.8	8.0	1.1
Being exposed to vibrations	3.1	5.0	0.9
Making other tiring physical efforts	3.1	2.7	3.5
Working in tiring postures	2.5	2.2	2.8

Source: Working conditions in Portugal, 2000

More than a third (38.3%) of workers reported being exposed at least some of the time to very loud or piercing noise in their workplaces. In fact, the exposure to noise is so great for 13.1% of those workers that they are not able to communicate with a person two or three metres away, unless they raise their voices. Other more common occupational risks referred to related to the inhalation of toxic materials (23.8%), as well as injuries on machines (21.1%) and injuries from working tools (17.4%).

**Table 5 Occupational risks, by sex (%)**

	Total	Men	Women
Breathing in toxic or dangerous products	23.8	29.4	17.2
Injury on machines	21.1	27.3	13.9
Injury from working tools	17.4	24.3	9.5
Being hit by a projected or falling object	11.7	17.6	5.0
Exposure to very loud or	10.7	11.2	10.1

piercing noises (all the time)			
Traffic accidents	10.2	16.7	2.6
Being burnt	9.7	11.6	7.6
Falling	8.7	13.4	3.3
Handling toxic or dangerous products	8.2	10.1	5.9
Electrocution	4.4	6.9	1.5
Handling explosive products	2.3	3.0	1.5
Contamination by biological agents	2.2	1.4	3.1
Radiation	1.4	1.6	1.0

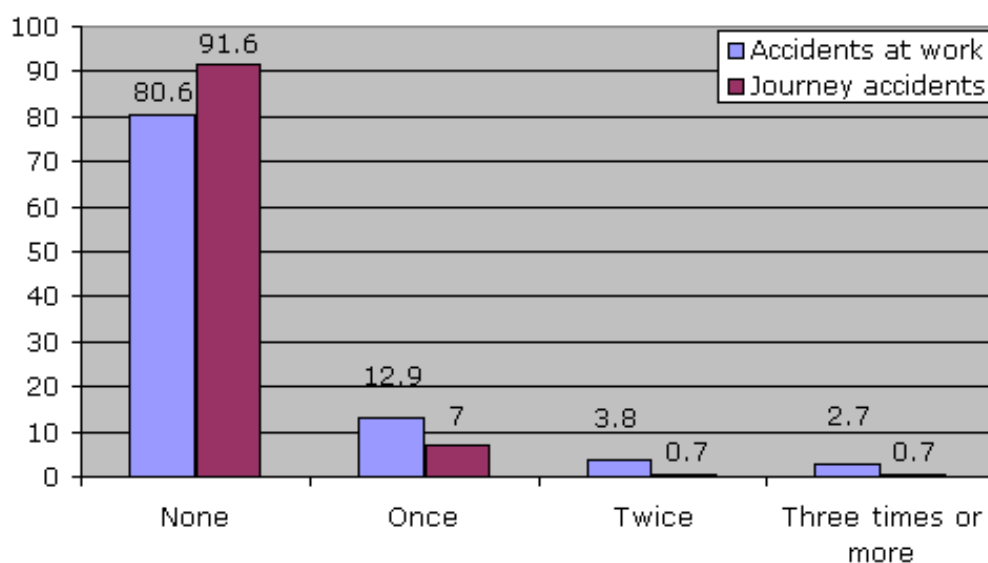
Source: Working conditions in Portugal, 2000

Table 5 above shows that the proportion of men referring to several occupational risks in their workplaces is higher than that of women in all cases, except for contamination by biological agents.

### **Occupational injuries and illnesses**

Approximately 19.4% of the workers suffered accidents at work, and 8.4% suffered accidents on journeys related to work, at least once during their professional life. Both types of accidents were mainly provoked by lack of attention, inadequate safety precautions, and/or technical failure.

**Figure 3 Occupational injuries (%)**



Source: Working conditions in Portugal, 2000



In terms of accidents at work (resulting in inactivity periods of three days or more), the sectors most prone to the occurrence of such accidents are the wood, cork and furniture sector (77.9%), the refineries, chemical products and rubber sector (73.2%), and the non-metallic minerals sector (64.8%).

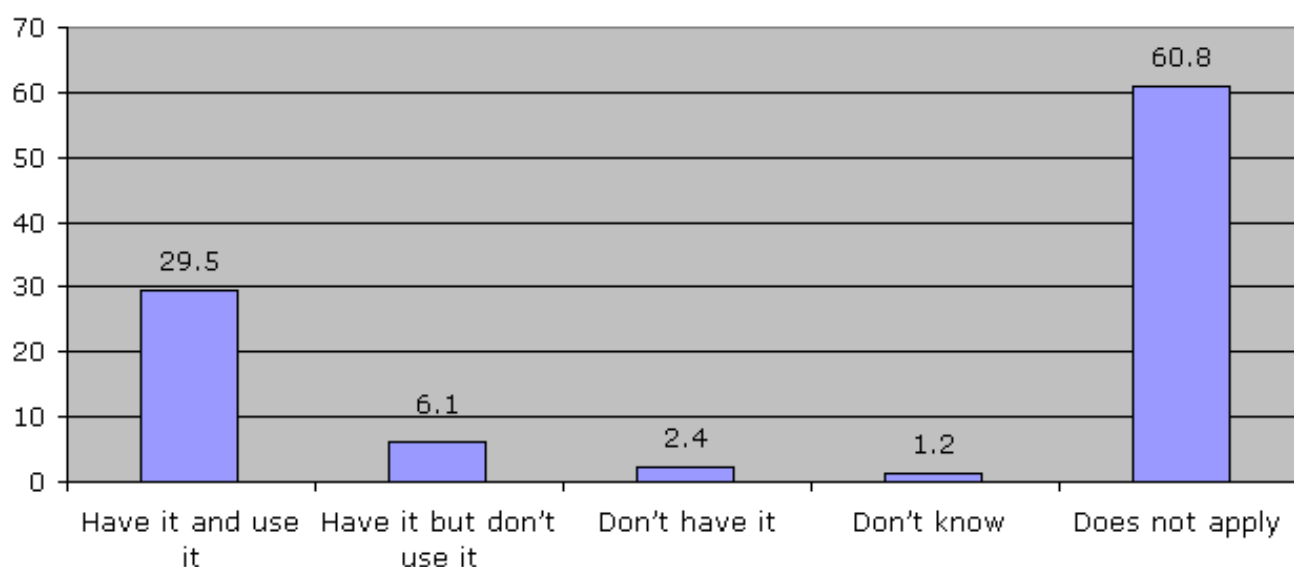
The survey results show that 1.8% of the workers suffered from occupational illnesses. Among these workers, the most commonly reported illnesses were repetitive strain injuries (48.8%), hearing problems (10.1%) and psychological problems (9.8%). The main reasons identified for the illnesses were lack of safety conditions (26.8%), stress (15.7%) and fatigue (13.1%).

### **Safety and hygiene at work**

Most companies provide medical services (64.6%) and safety and hygiene at work services (68.4%), but 41.5% of workers said that their companies do not provide information about occupational risks, and only 9.7% of those attended training sessions on safety and hygiene at work.

The survey results show a predominance of positive responses regarding the provision of collective (84.9%) and individual (67.5%) protective equipment in the activities in which that kind of equipment is required.

**Figure 4 Personal protective equipment (%)**



**Source: Working conditions in Portugal, 2000**

Nevertheless, some workers (6.1%) state that they have personal protective equipment but do not use it, and 2.4% of workers reported that their companies did not have such equipment because 'it was not compulsory', 'it was very expensive', or for other reasons given.

### **Social conditions**

With regard to the bonuses provided by companies, 83.7% of the workers received meal allowances, 24.4% received productivity bonuses and 16.7% received a transport allowance. Only 1.5% of workers receive an allowance for child care or nursery support (those who mainly work in companies with 100 workers or more).

**Table 6 Social services provided, by company size (%)**

		Company size, number of workers						
	Total	1-4	5-9	10-19	20-49	50-99	100-249	> 250
Coffee bar	30.5	7.9	16.9	14.0	27.5	42.5	50.5	55.9
Canteen	42.1	9.3	18.1	25.4	42.7	55.7	68.5	75.6
Transport	23.2	23.4	21.5	22.8	20.8	25.0	21.4	28.2
Leisure room	11.0	2.0	3.1	2.3	5.9	12.9	15.7	34.6
Other	4.0	1.1	2.8	3.9	3.3	3.1	3.9	9.5
None	35.8	63.1	56.6	47.7	35.7	18.8	15.6	11.1

Source: Working Conditions in Portugal, 2000

A canteen and coffee bar are the social services most often provided by Portuguese companies to their workers. Although there are still some companies providing transportation, leisure rooms and/or other social services, a significant proportion of companies does not provide any kind of social service support.

The close link between company size and the social services provided is shown in Table 6. While the proportion of companies providing different types of services increases, to an extent, with company size, the proportion of those not providing any kind of service clearly diminishes with company size.

Data related to work-related commuting show that, for 67.4% of the working population, the distance between home and their working place is under 10km, and the usual duration of travel is under 30 minutes for 77% of workers.

The means of transportation used most frequently by workers are private car (56.3%), followed by public transport (18.5%). Nevertheless, in proportion, more women use public transport (65.4%) and walk to work (52.7%). More men benefit from company transportation (66.5%) than women (33.5%).

## **Commentary**

Although a follow-up survey had originally been planned for 2002, this did not take place, due to lack of human and financial resources. Since 2003, the institution responsible for carrying out the survey on working conditions has attended several meetings promoted by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. In those meetings, the institution collected additional information for developing the new survey, currently planned for 2005.

Meanwhile, the existence of a single official survey on working conditions in Portugal does not allow for the identification of any changes or trends on this issue. However, through the 1999-2000 survey, one can identify a number of significant issues.

- Almost one fifth of workers felt that their work did not match their educational and professional qualifications.
- Almost one third of workers had changed job or tried to do so in the previous five years.
- Autonomy in time management was limited for a significant number of workers, more so for women.
- Working time flexibility was lower for workers from less qualified occupational groups and for women.
- Although the majority of companies provided medical, safety and hygiene services at work, more than one third of the workers stated that their companies did not provide information about occupational risks.
- Although a large majority of companies had invested in collective and personal protective equipment, some workers said that they did not use it.

- A significant number of companies do not provide any kind of social service support. Only 1.5% of workers benefited from a child care or nursery support allowance.

*Heloísa Perista and Jorge Cabrita*

## **Survey methodology**

Survey name (EN): Survey on working conditions for workers.

Survey name (original): Inquérito de Avaliação das Condições de Trabalho dos Trabalhadores

Institution: Departamento de Estatística do Trabalho, Emprego e Formação Profissional (DETEFP) of Ministério do Trabalho e da Solidariedade (MTS). Currently known as the [Direcção-Geral de Estudos, Estatística e Planeamento](#) (DGEEP) of the [Ministério da Segurança Social, da Família e da Criança](#) (MSSFC)

Type of organisation: Governmental

Editions: Dec 99-Jan 00

Next forecast edition: 2005

Territorial scope: National (except the autonomous regions of the Azores and Madeira)

Population:

- Workers of all economic activities except sections L, P and Q of NACE: public administration and defence; compulsory social security; other services.
- Population size: 2,346,031.
- Classif. Economic Activities: Portugal's national activities classification was used (CAE-REV2, 1994).

Sample:

- Sampling strategy: The sample was selected in two steps: 1. sample of establishments - stratified random sampling was used; 2. sample of workers - workers were selected based on the size (no. of workers) of the establishments selected.
- Register used for the sample: Department file of establishments covered in an annual statistical operation called 'Quadros de Pessoal' (1997), referring to the population of establishments at national level.

Sample size: 5,000 workers; 4,252 employees included in the data (85% response rate).

Interviews:

- Type of interviews: face to face;
- Location of interviews: workplace.

Subjects considered in the questionnaire: Occupational safety and health (OSH) management, exposure to physical agents (noise, radiation, vibration, etc.), exposure to chemical agents, exposure to biological agents, safety at the workplace, occupational and health outcomes. Among others: ergonomic conditions, working time, commuting time, social conditions (distance between home and workplace, means of transportation used, holidays given, subsidies earned), accidents at work and occupational illnesses.

Bibliographical references: Condições de Trabalho em Portugal - Continente, 2000

Web link: <http://www.deep.msst.gov.pt/estatistica/condicoes/ct.pdf> (750Kb pdf)

Survey questionnaire: The [survey questionnaire \(240Kb pdf\)](#) is available in Portuguese.

Further [background information on the survey](#) is available.

## **References**

DETEFP, Condições de Trabalho em Portugal, Continente, 2000, (*Working conditions in Portugal (Mainland) 2000*) , DETEFP, 2000, <http://www.deep.msst.gov.pt/estatistica/condicoes/ct.pdf>

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Working conditions surveys: A comparative analysis* , Dublin, 2003, <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/working/surveys/national/>

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